Understanding Unrecognized Chicana Leadership: Adversity, Resilience, Healing, and Liberation

Blanca Tavera
San Jose State University

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UNRECOGNIZED CHICANA LEADERSHIP: ADVERSITY, RESILIENCE, HEALING, AND LIBERATION

A Dissertation

Presented to

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Doctor of Education

by

Blanca Tavera

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The Designated Dissertation Committee Approves the Dissertation Titled

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ADVERSITY, RESILIENCE, HEALING, AND LIBERATION

by

Blanca Tavera

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Rebeca Burciaga, Ph.D. Department of Educational Leadership
Peter Allen Lee, Ph.D. School of Social Work
Bettina Aptheker, Ph.D. Feminist Studies, UCSC
ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING UNRECOGNIZED CHICANA LEADERSHIP: ADVERSITY, RESILIENCE, HEALING, AND LIBERATION

by Blanca Tavera

The path to Chicana leadership is laced with struggle, adversity, and intergenerational trauma—but strengthened by resilience. This research focused on unrecognized Chicana leadership generated by adversity and in response to years, decades, and centuries of social injustices, inequities, and systematic oppression. Interviews and focus groups were conducted using a Chicana feminist epistemology lens and testimonio methodology. Culture, language, spirituality, and intuition were dominant factors in the research. From an intuitive knowing, the women of the study redefined notions of sacrifice, healing, resilience, leadership, and liberation. In modeling what their mothers and the women before them had done, they understood the embodiment of sacrifice as a conscious and deliberate choice. They debunked myths and stereotypes that Chicana / Mexican women are weak and submissive and asserted that Chicanas are tenacious, resilient, and persevere! They encouraged finding and creating “home” as a place of belonging where leadership is nurtured and thrives. The women of the study advocated for honoring and respecting all relations, including the ancestors and spirit guides, and remembering those who came before us and the seven generations that are yet to come.
DEDICATION

Unconditional love and healing allow the seeds of resiliency to take root during adversity.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Maria Julia Carrillo Tavea, my sister Maria Angelina Tavera, may they rest in peace, and the women who came before me. I recognize your leadership. Thank you for loving me unconditionally!
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Chapter One: Introduction

Chicanas are leaders in their respective communities and families (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Some are leaders in community-based organizations, political arenas, academia, business, and other institutions. Other Chicanas have not had the opportunity to have formal education or lead in traditional settings like business or academia, but are nevertheless leaders. However, both groups have significant unrecognized leadership. Every day, Chicanas perform leadership activities and display leadership characteristics (Jiménez, 2012), including motivating, supporting, and guiding their families and communities, and every day their efforts are devalued and remain unrecognized (Méndez-Negrete, 1999); in essence, their leadership is unrecognized. Yet the motivation, support, and guidance that Chicanas provide are foundational contributions to nurturing and sustaining families and communities. This research is inspired by the desire to encourage and support leadership in the Chicana community and reveal the unrecognized leadership that takes place on a daily basis in homes, schools, and communities.

This research does not focus on “women’s leadership” and the ways that women are excluded, marginalized, and dismissed in leadership—those arguments are well-documented by the Feminist Movement. Furthermore, those arguments were created from a White middle-class perspective. This research calls for putting Chicanas and their experience front and center (Aptheker, 1982; Gutiérrez et al., 2007) and not in response to gender or race exclusively. This study examines the Chicana leadership experience, including the nuances of identity and culture, the intersections of race, class, and gender, and the impact these factors have on leadership emergence. I explored obstacles to leadership caused by collective
and individual trauma as a result of social-political-historical events and experiences (Anzaldúa, 1987). I analyzed the continuum from awareness of oppression to critical consciousness (Freire, 1972) and the nuances that separate or overlap the two. I also investigated how Chicanas strategize and “draw on their everyday experiences” to practice leadership in their community (Jiménez, 2012, p. 84). Finally, I conclude with an analysis of the conditions that nurture Chicana leadership.

Critical race theory (CRT) and Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) guided this research. CRT allowed me to examine the intersections of oppression based on race, class, gender, and other areas of oppression (Crenshaw, 2016). The overarching framework in this research, giving voice to the Chicana experience, is a CFE framework. CFE allows for theorizing and storytelling (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Martínez, 1996) as a familiar way for Chicanas to discuss their lived experience, including race, gender, and class intersections (Delgado Bernal, 1998), and to claim a space in and outside of academia on their terms (Calderón et al., 2012; Cordova & Knecht, 2019).

This chapter includes the following: (a) statement of the problem; (b) purpose of the study; (c) research questions and methodology; (d) definition of terms; (e) site selection and sample; (f) significance of the study; and finally (g) assumptions, background, and role of the researcher in the study.

**Statement of the Problem**

Chicana leadership develops out of need and responds to years, decades, and centuries of social injustices and systematic oppression. Authentic leaders are “forged in crisis,” inspiring and supporting those around them during challenging times (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011;
Koehn, 2020). Leadership nestled in wisdom has been passed along for generations: Karen Davalos (2008) quotes Eden Torres as she “confesses that she draws on ‘the knowledge left to me by grandmothers and great aunts . . . and several wise Chicana mentors’” (p. 153). It originates from struggle and resistance, and it showcases individual and collective resiliency. The path to Chicana leadership is laced with struggle, wounds, and trauma built up over the years (Anzaldúa, 1987).

The following discussion (a) outlines the structural forces that create challenges in the Chicana community and impede the emergence of Chicana leadership, (b) addresses leadership in the Chicana community, (c) highlights and calls out why Chicana leadership goes unrecognized, and (d) concludes with a hypothesis regarding the rise of Chicana leadership.

**Structural Challenges**

Structural forces such as racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression often create dire conditions in the Chicana community. For example, Latino\(^1\) students are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States, but the most poorly educated (Gándara, 2010). The educational system holds double standards that sanction youth of color more harshly than their White counterparts, creating a hostile environment for Latino youth that feeds the school-to-prison pipeline (J. Castillo, 2014). Outside of the educational system, poverty is an additional threat to Latino students. Latinos disproportionately represent the poor; they make up “51% of poor Californians but only 39.6% of the state population” (Sarah

\(^1\) Chicanas are Latinas. The term Latino is a male gender-based term used in general in research and news reporting.
et al., 2021, p. 1). Another threat in some communities is immigration status, where there is a constant fear of deportation for people who are undocumented (Brabeck et al., 2014). Latino children are separated at the border from their families (Varela, 2021), and Dreamers watch as their hopes are repeatedly put on hold (Wang & Sacchetti, 2021). These conditions are exacerbated as they interact with other systems such as education, government bureaucracy, law enforcement, and social services (Chibnall et al., 2003).

**Leadership in the Chicana Community**

Long before my birth, the battle for the opportunities I have received was waged. (Gutiérrez et al., 2007, p. 8)

Chicanas have a “leadership legacy” to tap into, provided to them by other Latinas that came before them (Méndez-Morse, 2000). Generally, the motives behind leadership and the impetus for action are similar across cultures. For example, the reason to practice leadership may be to coach and support individuals, guide a group, respond to a crisis, or manage challenging times (Drucker, 2004; Koehn, 2020). Chicanas are constantly leading in their communities. However, there are critical differences and nuances to examine to understand the Chicana leadership trajectory. Authentic leadership is evident throughout the Chicana community; it is practiced in their respective communities and families in “their everyday experiences” (Jiménez, 2012, p. 84). The essence and characteristics of leadership to motivate, support, and guide are displayed daily in how Chicanas support their children, family, and community (Bordas, 2007), whether it is by helping children to address their fears or instilling confidence as they walk them to school, or supporting a family or community member as they approach authority figures in institutions, working actively and
behind the scenes (Jiménez, 2012) at community events, social events, and grassroots movements seeking social justice.

Characteristically, Chicanas are described as reliable, determined visionaries that take action (Acevedo et al., 2001). The collective resiliency that allows Chicanas to persevere in the face of adversity is also evident in the Latino community. For instance, in 2020, in California, Latinos for the first time represented the largest group admitted to the UC system (Watanabe, 2020). Some Chicanas have made great strides through established and mainstream avenues in different roles such as elected officials, educational administrators, executive directors, doctors, and lawyers. In their own words, the authors of Telling to Live write, “We are chairs of departments, deans, directors of research centers, pioneers of feminist research in women of color sites, and accomplished writers and scholars” (Acevedo et al., 2001, p. 7). And the authors of this powerful collection of stories overwhelmingly acknowledge the women in their lives who have supported them, such as their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters, offering examples of the natural and unrecognized Chicana leaders in their families and communities. While acknowledging their relative privilege, the authors also describe being marginalized, specifically in academia.

**Unrecognized Leadership**

Chicanas tap into generational wisdom and display leadership characteristics. Yet, as vital as their contributions are, their efforts go unrecognized (Méndez-Negrete, 1999); most significantly, their leadership is unrecognized in educational institutions and the community. The difficulty in recognizing Chicana leadership may correlate with the failure to acknowledge and value the Chicana experience; they are often stereotyped as submissive,
their experiences marginalized and dismissed (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Often, Chicanas do not recognize their leadership for multiple reasons: a lack of awareness of leadership (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011) and “space and language” (Gonzalez, 1998); gender socialization that discourages female leadership; or internalized oppression which results in believing misinformation, lies, and limitations (Sherover-Marcuse, personal communication, 1985-1987). Additionally, emotional wounds and trauma make it difficult to recognize leadership.

Chicanas are injured in and out of the academy (Méndez-Negrete, 1999). Through their authentic writing, Chicanas tell stories of struggle, disappointment, trauma, exhaustion, and they also write about their gratitude and resiliency in academia (Acevedo et al., 2001). Furthermore, Chicana voices are silenced in academia when Chicanas are directed to write objectively and reject the autobiographical voice (Davalos, 2008). Silencing also occurs through the appropriation of Chicana writings with no recognition (Davalos, 2008). Scholars have not been able to fully recognize nor articulate the nuances of Chicana leadership. They cannot do so because they do not understand how leadership manifests in the Chicana community, and they hold steadfast to a definition of leadership from mainstream values and perspective (Bordas, 2007). However, who does the research and how they do it matters.

Recognition occurs when Latina scholars write about Latina leadership, which draws parallels to Chicana leadership (Méndez-Morse, 2000).

The experiences of unrecognized Chicana leadership in academia parallel the unrecognized Chicana leaders’ experiences outside of academia—where she too has stories to tell, and she too has skills and talents. She demonstrates courage and ánimo [encouragement and motivation] to navigate the dynamics of being marginalized, dismissed,
and mistreated. Where she has supported the success of other Chicanas, her actions foster current and future leadership but go unrecognized as leadership itself even though they demonstrate coaching and supporting—key leadership characteristics (Covey, 1992).

Historically, male leadership has overshadowed women’s leadership (Gutiérrez et al., 2007; Jiménez, 2012; Méndez-Negrete, 1999). This is also the case for Chicanas; however, race and class intensify the overshadowing of Chicana leadership (Jiménez, 2012). The inability to honor and recognize women’s leadership is nuanced. Professionally, I sat on panels, having interviewed a hundred or so leaders and emerging leaders for a leadership institute that I co-facilitated for about 10 years, asking, “Who influenced your leadership?” A significant number of applicants indicated that women in their lives influenced their leadership through their actions and support. Once again, however, these are not women that we call leaders or recognize for their leadership.

**Rising to Leadership**

Underpinning this research is the hypothesis that when Chicanas recognize their leadership, they rise to it. Furthermore, when the community and others recognize and support it, the benefits grow exponentially. I argue that Chicanas are aware of oppressive conditions (Gonzalez, 1998) and, in their collective struggles, resist them to the best of their ability. Therefore, I hypothesize that when Chicanas have language, frameworks, and awareness of their leadership, it leads to a critical consciousness that supports taking action and rising to further and stronger leadership. Likewise, when their community recognizes and supports their leadership, Chicana leadership thrives.
Purpose of the Study

This study proposed to critically research unrecognized leadership that is in place in the Chicana family and community. This research explored how Chicanas define leadership, describe their pathway to leadership, identify the conditions that nurture their leadership, and recognize the obstacles that impede it. In this study, I also examined the cultural elements that help sustain individual and collective resiliency and how leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community. Finally, I explored how Chicanas work toward their liberation: to be free, present, deliberate, direct, and lead their own lives.

Research Questions

This study focused on Chicanas’ experiences of the environments that nurture awareness and critical consciousness, the conditions that support the emergence and development of leadership, and how these experiences intersect with culture, oppression, healing, and liberation. Through face-to-face interviews and focus groups, this research sought to answer the following broadly defined questions:

1. How do participants define leadership?
2. What are the conditions that participants say nurture Chicana leadership?
3. How do participants say leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community?

Research Methodology

Testimonio was the methodology used in this research to help understand how knowledge is produced in the Chicana community (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Testimonio helps capture the Chicana voice as authentically as possible by creating the space for participants to
tell their stories, strategically posing questions and allowing time and space for responses. Paying attention to nuances and cues in verbal and non-verbal communication and being mindful of cultural relevance is essential (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Espinoza-Herold, 2007).

This study used CRT to understand how the intersections of race, class, and gender exacerbate oppression (Crenshaw, 2016), and paired it with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model, which asserts that people are products of their environment and that both the person and the environment are constantly changing.

The study also drew from the works of Tara J. Yosso, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Paulo Freire. Community cultural wealth is present in the everyday lives of Chicanas (Yosso, 2005) and epitomizes the spirit and strength of a community that encourages and sustains leadership. To capture and center the Chicana experience, it is essential to construct new narratives and paradigms (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002), including new theories. Gloria Anzaldúa asserted that theorizing to highlight deficits colludes with the oppression of marginalized groups. However, theorizing can also be used to liberate the same groups (Yosso, 2005). Paulo Freire (1972) has laid out a roadmap for Chicana liberation when he delineates critical consciousness as an awareness of social, political, and economic conditions leading to taking action to challenge oppressive conditions.

**Definition of Terms**

*Chicana*

Throughout this research, the term Chicana is used distinct from Latina. Latina is the umbrella term that includes Chicanas; however, not all Latinas are Chicanas. As a subset of
the Latina identity, Chicana embraces unique nuances such as an identity rooted in occupied 
Mexico (Acuña, 1981; Gutiérrez et al., 2007). A social-political-cultural term, Chicana was 
popularized and used since the early 1970s to describe Mexicans and Mexican Americans 
(Niemann, 2002) and mainly in the male gender form of Chicano. For some Chicanas, 
identifying as such means prioritizing family and community (García, 2014; Niemann, 2002). 
Chicana identity acknowledges Indigenous, Spanish, and Mestizo heritage (A. D. Castillo, 
1977) and includes constantly navigating borders based on race, class, gender, and sexuality 
(Anzaldúa, 1987; García, 2014).

**Liberation**

For this research, liberation is defined as feeling free, present, deliberate, and direct in 
leading one’s own life. Or, as Anzaldúa (1987) stated, “May we seize the arrogance to create 
outrageously” (p. 575). It means having a “freedom of choice” (García, 2014, p. 222). 
Liberation also takes the form of awareness of and resistance to societal inequities, albeit 
“subtle or even silent” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 115) and unnoticed.

**Healing**

The lens that guides the healing focus of this study is a peer-counseling model that 
references the nature of human beings. The spirit of the model is that human beings are born 
intelligent, zestful, and cooperative; they get hurt but are resilient. They can keep in touch 
with their resilient nature by tapping into their natural healing mechanisms (e.g., laughing, 
crying, shaking, sweating, yawning, and talking) (Jackins, 1965). For this study, how healing 
takes place in a culturally relevant manner was examined.
Leadership

Leadership is defined as taking action, small or big, to improve the lives of others, influencing and inspiring others, and managing during adverse times and circumstances (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011).

Trauma

In this study, I examined intergenerational individual and collective trauma. Trauma is both externally caused by social-political-historical events and experiences underpinned by wounds, builds up over years, decades, and centuries (Anzaldúa, 1987), and trauma is experienced internally in the home and in the community.

Oppression

Oppression is based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or other axes of identification, including an imbalance of economic, social, and political power. Oppression is systematic when it is cyclical, institutionalized, and in the public consciousness (Sherover-Marcuse, personal communication, 1985-1987).

Unrecognized Leadership

Unrecognized leadership includes general characteristics of leadership and culturally specific actions and practices that motivate, support, and guide family and community that go unnoticed and unrecognized.

Site Selection and Sample

In this study, I focused on Chicanas residing in Northern California. Interviewees were drawn from a convenience sample of available participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) from the researcher’s network of acquaintances. Participants were selected from a pool of Chicanas that represent a range of age, income, sexuality, education, and career. The sample
was limited to Chicanas, focused on leaders who grew up in or resided in the Southwest. I interviewed five Chicanas twice and facilitated two focus groups. There was no overlap between interview and focus group participants.

**Scope and Anticipated Limitations of the Study**

My extensive experience in participant engagement and group facilitation enhanced my research skills and provided a wealth of experiential knowledge. However, it may have also been a limitation to the study because my previous experience required me to consistently monitor my positionality and track any impending biases. In addition, the site selection and size of the study may have created a limitation by not allowing the applicability of the findings to Chicanas in other areas such as larger metropolitan communities.

**Significance of the Study**

The study exemplifies that the oppression that causes chronic issues plaguing the community also impedes Chicana leadership and hinders leadership recognition to a greater degree. This study can be instrumental in bringing light to the unrecognized leadership in the Chicana community, further encouraging the emergence of Chicana leadership. In addition, it allows the opportunity to redefine evidence-based leadership practices from the Chicana experience and shift the center from mainstream to Chicana-focused. It is committed to accessibility; if this research is about Chicana leadership, it should most certainly be accessible and available to all Chicanas who wish to explore the pathway to leadership and liberation.

Finally, Chicana leadership can make a difference in educational systems and with collaborators, such as teachers, principals, and school boards. Therefore, it is critical to
investigate how Chicanas’ role as active leaders can be supported and tapped into; doing so can help exemplify the areas working and not working, making a difference and improving outcomes in these systems.

Assumptions, Background, and Role of the Researcher in the Study

The impetus for my research lies in the richness and challenges of growing up Mexican American-Chicana, working-class, and female; these challenges set a strong foundation for my leadership trajectory. Identifying as Chicana means a connection to my Mexican heritage and an awareness of the political and historical oppression experienced by Mexicans and Mexican Americans and the resistance to dominance and assimilation. My identity is rooted in a multigenerational and collective experience intersecting race, class, and gender.

Engaging in this doctoral research itself takes courage and leadership—it is a journey to liberation! It is with this spirit and intention that I approached my research. Through this research, I was driven to examine other Chicanas’ experiences to identify the thoughts and perceptions, experiences, conditions, and turning points that influenced their leadership.

In writing this dissertation, I must prove that I can conduct research in a sanitized manner. This manner is foreign to how I experience the world. Whether it is mainstream theories and frameworks, or standpoint or CRT, or even a CFE lens, it appears that the blueprint—the center—is always dictated by how things have historically and traditionally been done in academia. I accepted that I must demonstrate that I can conduct this research and meet the expectations of academia before I officially document the voices of unrecognized Chicana leaders. However, I was also aware that I must protect my own voice lest it is silenced.
However, because the Chicana experience is multidimensional, especially for working-class Chicanas, I followed my intuition and pushed the boundaries. I know how to do this! We Chicanas have been doing it our whole lives—we have been pushing back in our own way. Unfortunately, we have been misled to believe that the only knowledge / learning that counts is the learning that took place in school. The reality is that much of what we learned happened outside of school. That learning must be honored and recognized in the same way that Chicana leadership must be revealed and recognized.

Furthermore, the catalyst for this research is the work that I have done professionally over the last three decades as a community activist and leader in different contexts and roles: in the violence against women movement with a focus on Latinas; as a consultant focusing on leadership, diversity, and equity issues; and as a social worker. While I approached this work as a researcher, in this study I sometimes tapped into my own experiences. This provided me with an experiential base as a participant-observer.

Finally, this research is grounded in my lived experience, the type which traditional research has silenced. My lived experience allowed me to perform this research with a more accurate lens and a commitment to integrity because I am an essential part of the community I researched. In addition, lived experience allowed me to unpack and understand the nuances that other researchers might not fully appreciate.
Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Chicanas “draw on their everyday experiences” (Jiménez, 2012, p. 84), taking on leadership in their homes and community. In this study, I examined the Chicana leadership experience, including the nuances of identity and culture and the intersections of race, class, and gender and its impact on leadership emergence, focusing on unrecognized leadership. Through economic-social-political-historical contexts that create obstacles to leadership, the study explored strategies that nurture and support leadership, focusing on healing as the basis for liberation. Part of the impetus for this research is the disturbing statistics created by structural forces such as racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression in the Chicana community that are a call to action. Some of those statistics include Latino students as the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States, yet the most poorly educated (Gándara, 2010); the educational system feeds the school-to-prison pipeline (J. Castillo, 2014); Latinos disproportionately represent the poor—they make up “51% of poor Californians but only 39.6% of the state population” (Sarah et al., 2021, p. 1).

I begin this literature review by introducing the idea that Chicanas exercise leadership that goes unrecognized. Then, I offer a connection to systematic oppression. Next, I examine a historical backdrop to help understand Chicana experiences, including identity and voice. I explore the relationship between Chicana leadership and the Women’s and Chicano Movements. I include a discussion of the theoretical frameworks, methods, and approaches used, and I discuss oppression, internalized oppression, and the connection to Chicana leadership and liberation. I recognize healing, including cultural healing, as a way to liberation. I conclude with a summary and identify gaps found in the literature.
Systematic Oppression in Action

Systematic oppression, including racism, has undoubtedly been an issue for Chicanas as have class and gender issues (Espino et al., 2012; Niemann, 2002). Denial, politics, and ignoring the issue (Lopez, 2003) as well as a veneer of niceness (Aptheker, 1981) are common practices and strategies intended to keep charges of racism at bay. Over a hundred years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois (2019) boldly asserted, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line” (p. 3). Subsequently, scholars of color have confirmed Du Bois’s assertion as they write about the oppression of people of color. Specifically, law enforcement’s disproportionate targeting of men of color leads to mass incarceration (Alexander, 2011). Furthermore, Alexander and other scholars explain how centuries of oppression not only survive but thrive to the detriment of marginalized groups (Alexander, 2011; Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Hayes-Bautista, 1980). Alexander (2011) eloquently calls out a system still in place today but one that is always referred to as something in the past. Her explanation addresses how White supremacy underpins both policing and the judicial system, and is embedded in socially sanctioned attitudes. Patterns of systematic and systemic racism for Black Americans over the centuries (Alexander, 2011) are applicable to other marginalized groups. Similarly, there is trauma in the Chicana community, caused by social-political-historical events and experiences, underpinned by wounds, built up over years, decades, and centuries (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2001).

The Chicana

This section delineates the experience of Mexican and Mexican Americans to create a backdrop for understanding the Chicana experience and identity.
Chicana Historical Backdrop

The seminal work on Chicano\(^2\) history by Rodolfo Acuña (1981) in his book *Occupied America* delineates the historical details from 1852 to the 1980s. Historical and political contexts set the backdrop for oppression and settler-colonialism of today’s area known as Southwest (Acuña, 1981; Hayes-Bautista, 1980). Thus, the history of the southwest region of the United States has enormous implications for Chicanas and their leadership. Policies and politics have historically been used as tools to colonize and systematically oppress poor people and people of color (Hayes-Bautista, 1980).

A key example is the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which gave Mexicans a choice to relocate within Mexico’s new boundaries or receive American citizenship with full civil rights. Yet the United States breached that treaty, violating the terms and never enforcing any of the agreements (Hayes-Bautista, 1980). Acuña (1981) chronicles the experience of Chicanos from the early 1800s to the late 1970s. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1948 at the end of the war between Mexico and the United States, resulted in the U.S. acquisition of Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah (Acuña, 1981; Hayes-Bautista, 1980). This breach is a pivotal example of land use to determine physical boundaries and establish citizenship and legitimacy in this country (Hayes-Bautista, 1980). The breach of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo epitomized and sanctioned systematic injustices against Mexican Americans, signaling that honoring agreements / laws / rights did not apply to Chicanos. A century later, the Bracero program and the Repatriation Act

\(^2\) Chicano is the male gender form of Chicana.
(Acuña, 1981) demonstrated the push and pull of Mexican immigrants when convenient to the United States, allowing the legal system to be used against Chicanos at whim.

**Chicana Identity**

In *Borderlands / La frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) framed the Chicana experience starting with the birth of the mestiza, forming the Chicana identity and setting the tone for the Chicana experience nestled in a historical, political, cultural, and spiritual contexts over the last five centuries. The term Chicana is rooted from the Nahuatl word “mexika,” meaning “original inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico” (Gutiérrez et al., 2007, p. x). Chicana embraces unique nuances such as an identity rooted in occupied Mexico. The term originated in the early twentieth century when it was used to derogatorily describe resistant Mexican Americans who refused to assimilate, who embraced the term even with its negative connotations, and inferred a relationship with the Indigenous people of the Americas, according to the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education (2020), also known as TACHE. In the 1960s, Chicanos reclaimed the identity as a means of empowerment for the Chicano Movement, embracing the strength of Indigenous culture over “Spanish-European” ancestry and standing in solidarity with all people fighting injustices (TACHE, 2020).

A social-political-cultural term, Chicano was popularized and used since the early 1970s to describe Mexicans and Mexican Americans and mainly in the male gender form of Chicano until feminist began using the female gender form, Chicana (Niemann, 2002). Chicanas are of Mexican ancestry (Gutiérrez et al., 2007). Identifying as Chicana acknowledges Indigenous, Spanish, and Mestizo heritage and includes constantly navigating borders based on race, class, gender, and sexuality (Anzaldúa, 1987; García, 2014). For
decades and centuries, through their fierce spirit, Mexican women have been the holders of and have passed on culture and traditions both overtly and covertly (Gutiérrez et al., 2007). For some Chicanas, identifying as such means prioritizing family and community (García, 2014; Niemann, 2002). Identifying as Chicana reflects an awareness of the historical periods of systematic oppression, especially racism against Chicanos, and acknowledges the resistance to domination (Gutiérrez et al., 2007; Hayes-Bautista, 1980).

**Chicana Voice**

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) brilliantly provided words, language, concepts, and frameworks to unpack and claim the identity and voice of Chicanas straddling borders. Navigating the border of language, whether written or verbal, finding and using language may be part of the challenge in documenting the Chicana voice and experience as the Chicana voice has been silenced (Niemann, 2002). According to Narismulu (2015), “now i speak in many, many broken tongues while i [sic] seek Africa” (p. 86). The quote evokes the role language plays in the oppression and is an inherent part of the journey of oppression as the oppressed are subjected to participating in the colonizer’s culture and then forced to use the colonizer’s language. The Chicana experience is parallel, as they are forced to use Spanish, another colonizer’s language. Settler colonialism impacts and has serious implications for people of color (Martínez, 2002) including Chicanas, specifically in the area of education as well as identity (Calderón et al., 2012). As a colonized group, when Chicanas speak Spanish, they speak the colonizer’s language. In addition, they use the “masculine plural” in Spanish, whereby Chicanas are cheated of their essence of being female (Anzaldúa, 1987).
However, there are gems in the colonizer’s language that capture the Chicana identity’s spirit and voice: words, phrases, and hybrids. Shifting from English to Spanish and Spanish to English allows for capturing the lived experience (Calderón et al., 2012). In the specific language of support are words that carry depth and complexity and offer an array of leadership tools. For example, *consejos* [advice from the heart] (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Espinoza-Herold, 2007), *cariño* [affection] (Valenzuela, 1999), *ánimo* [encouragement and motivation] (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002), *confianza* [confidence and confidentiality] (Alemán & Olivo, 2019; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006), a space to *platicar* [chat and share; intimate conversation] (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) and *desahogar* [vent emotionally] are Chicana leadership tools.

**Chicana Leadership**

Leadership is about creating a way for people to contribute for something extraordinary to happen. (Lee, 2010, p. 1)

Through their practice of leadership, Chicanas, on a daily basis, are working to make something extraordinary happen in the lives of those around them. Over the past three decades, Chicana scholars have acknowledged and researched Chicana leadership (Jiménez, 2012). For many Chicanas, leadership is cushioned in relationships with family and community (Bordas, 2007; Jiménez, 2012). According to Bordas (2007), relationships underpin a sense of community and looking out for the greater good. There are expectations of treating others respectfully, guiding, and coaching them to create possibilities for personal development. According to Bordas, “This is easier to understand when leadership is not seen as a position or a passing stage but as a lifelong commitment to remain as part of one’s community” (p. 40).
The inability to recognize the leadership that manifests in the everyday lives of Chicanas is linked to the failure to acknowledge and value Chicanas in general. Studying Chicana leadership calls for a paradigm shift that unpacks long-held stereotypes and superficial literature depictions that present Chicanas as submissive, docile, and subservient (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Jiménez, 2012; Niemann, 2002). These inaccuracies create an unfair lens from which mainstream researchers approach gender-based and people of color leadership (Valencia & Black, 2002). Moreover, it perpetuates misinformation, biases, and attitudes in the broader society about Chicanas, which may also underpin obstacles Chicanas confront on their leadership journey.

Generally, there appears to be a pattern of dismissing, making invisible, and not recognizing Chicanas (Cordova & Knecht, 2019; García, 2014; Gonzalez, 1998). However, having been left out of history books or investigation is not indicative of not existing. Rather, it speaks to “exclusion and neglect and negates the contributions of Latina leaders” (Méndez-Morse, 2000, p. 584). Chicana scholars have advocated acknowledging Chicana leaders from over the centuries, from the iconic Malintzin Tenepal as the mother of the mestizos and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the first feminist of the Americas (Wills, 2019) to the Adelitas, the revolutionary Soldaderas [female soldiers] fighting alongside males in the Mexican Revolution (Gutiérrez et al., 2007; Thelmadatter, 2021).

In Santa Cruz County, Chicanas have led and responded during pivotal times and events. For example, throughout the 18-month cannery strikes in the mid-1980s in Watsonville, California, that caught national attention in the news, cannery worker Gloria Betancourt led the striker’s committee (Shapiro, 2018). In another example, Cruz Gomez sued the City of
Watsonville arguing that at-large districts resulted in Latino voters being disenfranchised (Jones, 2008). She won the landmark case in 1988, creating implications for other governmental entities in California, including school boards, cities, and counties that took preemptive action. In 1989, in Watsonville, California, immediately following the aftermath of the disastrous 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, when the local hospital was damaged, Barbara Garcia, Executive Director of Salud Para La Gente clinic, responded quickly to the community’s emergency health needs (Townsend, 2015).

“Sadly, for every success story that is told there remain countless others that have gone untold” (Gutiérrez et al., 2007, p. 9). Even though Chicana leadership has been largely unrecognized, it is present in various roles as mothers, workers, community members, and professionally (Jiménez, 2012; Niemann, 2002). For example, Campesinas [women who work in the fields] are mothers, primary caretakers, and nurturers (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; García, 2014). In roles universally prescribed to women, they essentially work two jobs, one in the home and the other outside the home (Jiménez, 2012). They practice leadership by taking the initiative and doing what they need to do to motivate, support, and guide their loved ones—they are reliable, determined, visionaries taking action (Acevedo et al., 2001). They are leaders! Unfortunately, these are not the women that we think of when we talk about Chicana leadership.

**Leadership**

There are commonly known and agreed-upon leadership definitions and characteristics in the literature. But, not surprisingly, the concepts and theories are drawn from the perspectives of white men and are underpinned by dominant-culture values (Bordas, 2007). The concept
of leadership has for the most part been applied to business, government, nonprofit, commerce, and in relation to employee supervision—in short, it is workplace leadership. For example, in a workplace context, leaders are defined as honest, responsible, benevolent, intelligent, tough, determined, influential, visionary, reliable, and competent (Drucker, 2004; Goleman, 2011; Kotter, 1999). Leaders ask questions, act when needed, look out for the best interests of the broader group, and are planners (Drucker, 2004). They understand that they are ultimately responsible for the consequences of the decisions made, turn challenges into opportunities, and think collectively rather than focusing on the individual (Drucker, 2004).

** Movements**

The 1960s and 70s were filled with activism, fostering the Feminist, Black Panther, and Chicano Movements (Gutiérrez et al., 2007; Hurtado, 1996). The Feminist Movement, for all its contributions and efforts, has historically left out women of color, marginalized their experiences, and included them marginally in their discussions (Gutiérrez et al., 2007). Angela Davis stated that for “African American activists, race has been a blind spot for white feminists” (George, 2020, p. 13) as they focused on and sought equality with their male counterparts during the Suffrage Movement at the turn of the twentieth century and Feminist Movement of the 1970s (Espinoza et al., 2018; George, 2020; Gutiérrez et al., 2007). In her interview with Nelson George (2020), Angela Davis highlights significant issues: that gender and race do not need to be examined in opposition; that the White women’s movement did not have a monopoly on women’s issues; the need to reveal the contributions made by women of color and “working-class women.”
Nevertheless, there are white feminist allies that have supported women of color and their work. As a key example, Bettina Aptheker supported and stood by Angela Davis during her trial in the 1970s as she was tried for murder (Aptheker, 2011). Through her work in the classroom and publications, Bettina has been a staunch ally to women of color, using her privilege to historically contextualize and put forth the plight of women of color (Aptheker, 1982, 2011).

Sexism in the Chicano Movement was blatant and manifested in Chicanos taking visible leadership while excluding Chicanas (Méndez-Negrete, 1999). During the 1960s, with the Chicano Movement in its prime, the patriarchy in the movement went unchecked (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Chicanos marginalized and dismissed the participation of Chicanas in the movement (Méndez-Negrete, 1999). A classic example of male versus female leadership recognition is the United Farm Workers (UFW) Movement; Cesar Chavez is the iconic leader, while Dolores Huerta’s role is not as prestigious and much less well-known in the eyes of the general public (Méndez-Negrete, 1999). In their analysis of oppression faced by working-class Chicanos, Chicano scholars failed to address the oppression Chicanas faced because of their gender (Delgado Bernal, 1998). When sexism was raised, Chicanas were often dismissed and manipulated by Chicanos as they pressured Chicanas, in essence, to choose between the issue of race and gender (Delgado Bernal, 1998). The exclusion of women from the Chicano Movement has called for Chicanas to create their own centers (Gutiérrez et al., 2007).
**Theoretical Frameworks and Approaches**

Female scholars of color argue that many research models and frameworks were not created for or with people of color in mind (Bhattacharya, 2018). The following is a discussion of the theories, frameworks, and methods that guide this research, including core concepts and approaches. Gloria Anzaldúa asserted that the process of “theorizing” to highlight deficits that collude with marginalized groups’ oppression could also be used to liberate the same groups (Yosso, 2005). Anzaldúa (1987) stressed that it is essential to “create new paradigms, new narratives.”

Before discussing the academic theories, frameworks, and methods, there are key concepts that must be considered to understand the Chicana experience. First, paradigm-shifting—seeing things from a different perspective or with “new eyes” is a core concept required to examine Chicana leadership and the nuances surrounding it. It can uncover evidence of unrecognized leadership and capture authentic narratives and voices of Chicanas as they claim and tap into their leadership and call out systematic ways in which their voices are silenced and ignored (Jiménez, 2012).

Secondly, the approach of putting women at the center guides this research. In her work, Bettina Aptheker (1982) models putting women at the center which results in centering and honoring women’s thinking, perspectives, and experiences and creating autonomy for women but admits it is not easily attainable for women of color in the context of racism (Aptheker, 1981).
Chicana Feminist Epistemology

A Chicana feminist epistemological stance, as the primary lens, guides this research. Because there are not adequately accessible frameworks, Chicanas are left with the task of redefining and naming theories built from their own frame of reference (Anzaldúa, 1987). Dolores Delgado Bernal created a framework, CFE, which recognizes that hegemonic frameworks and research do not include the lived experience and intersections of race, class, and gender of the Chicana experience. A CFE provides a critical guide to the research on Chicana leadership. Using a CFE framework helps conduct the study and interpret the nuances that impact and influence Chicana leadership. At the same time, a CFE approach challenges mainstream and dominant approaches to research; it gives voice to the experience of Chicanas. It invites the use of cultural intuition, participatory action, and sacred space (Calderón et al., 2012). It offers a liberating approach to unpacking historical domination and misrepresentations of Chicanos. It allows for constructing interpretations and paradigms on the terms of Chicanas. This framework provides for theorizing and storytelling (Martínez, 1996) as a familiar way for Chicanas to discuss their lived experience, including race, gender, and class intersections (Delgado Bernal, 1998), and for them to claim a space in academia on their own terms. In fact, using CFE in research is an act of leadership in itself. The CFE framework and lens help center this research on how awareness of oppression is constructed and how culture influences Chicana leadership.

Testimonio

The spirit of a testimonio approach calls for critical consciousness, a focus on social justice, breaking silence to make room for the overlooked and unheard voices; it embodies
the spirit of resistance and taps into the collective brilliance of Chicanas (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Testimonio serves as a consciousness-raising framework that links the marginalized stories and history of Chicanas and centers that experience to seek social change (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). It is a methodological approach that contains the necessary components to capture perceptions, as well as collective, historical, geographical elements, relations, and dynamics from a firsthand experience. Testimonio contradicts, challenges, and defies the mainstream dominant culture and pedagogies. Testimonio demands an epistemological framework constructed in terms of the participants telling their stories and including them in the research (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Through storytelling and interviews, testimonio provides a methodology to sort out and reconcile confusion and perceived uncertainties surrounding the Chicana experience, solidifying balance between the oppression and cultural strengths. It builds on Anzaldúa’s (1987) lamenting for the “new mestiza” that is in constant evolution and definition. Testimonio is the glue that keeps the pieces of Chicana experience and liberation in place. It calls for a holistic focus on the parts of the Chicana that constitute their wholeness / collectiveness.

**Critical Consciousness**

Consciousness is a state of awareness. Part of the Chicana legacy is rooted in Aztec culture and includes *Tezcatlipoca*, “self-awareness, inner consciousness, and self-reflection” (Gutiérrez et al., 2007, p. 2). Paulo Freire (1972) explains critical consciousness as not only an awareness of the economic, political, and social conditions that create oppression but the willingness to take action. “The paradox of education is precisely this—that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated”
Freire used education and consciousness-raising as tools in his quest for liberating the oppressed. As he taught literacy, he used everyday examples and contexts of oppression to encourage consciousness-raising and to motivate taking action (Freire, 1972). I argue that the work of Paulo Freire can serve as one road map for Chicana liberation, specifically, moving from awareness to critical consciousness to challenging oppressive conditions (Freire, 1972).

Freire’s (1972) seminal work on the theory of critical consciousness in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* laid the groundwork for other approaches such as critical race and liberation theories. As a theory, critical consciousness dovetails nicely with critical race and liberation theory and is often referred to and integrated into those theories (Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

**Critical Race Theory**

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (2011) laid the groundwork for discourse on the intersections of oppression based on race, class, gender, and other areas of oppression. She coined the term “intersectionality,” essential to understanding CRT in multiple forms and identities. African American civil rights lawyer Derrick Bell and professor at Harvard Law School began writing in the early 1970s about what would be known as CRT. Other seminal and early contributors along with Derrick Bell, include Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Mari Matsuda (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Kohli, 2018). CRT theorists agree that racism is an inherent part of the fabric of American society (Crenshaw, 2016; Delgado Bernal, 1998).
Ecological Systems Theory

Chicanas, through their experience, interact with different systems. For example, on a daily basis most Chicanas interact with educational, employment, community and other systems (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Espinoza-Herold, 2007). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory describes system levels that are each nestled in a broader level. It includes immediate and everyday surroundings, such as family, school, church, and community settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Espinoza-Herold, 2007). It considers the interrelations between two or more systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013; Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Socially sanctioned attitudes, beliefs, and values permeate these systems and influence policy and laws and have a trickle-down effect on the other levels (Sherover-Marcuse, personal communication, 1985-1987).

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model serves as a framework to recognize, understand, and analyze the Chicana leadership experience and trajectory in different systems and actions at different times. At a macro level, the historical events and structural forces such as racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression often stand in the way of emerging leadership and stifle the leadership in communities of color, including the Chicana community.

Oppression and the Connection to Chicana Leadership and Liberation

Generally, oppression is described as repeated cruel and unjust treatment. According to Ricky Sherover-Marcuse (personal communication, 1985-1987), oppression based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or other axes of identification becomes systematic and cyclical when economic, political, and social power is imbalanced; it is a structural force
in our institutions, and in the public consciousness. It ranges from physical violence to the invalidation and (overt and covert) dismissal of people based on their affiliation with a group based on class, gender, race, and other axes of identification. An insidious dynamic in systematic oppression involves a fundamental process of dehumanization; it is cyclical and held in place by everyday coded language. People unknowingly collude with it. Systematic oppression is cyclical; it includes the mistreatment of a group of people that generates misinformation and ignorance about them, converted to socially sanctioned attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and assumptions. It then becomes the justification for further mistreatment (Sherover-Marcuse, personal communication, 1985-1987). These attitudes and beliefs, often perpetuated in coded language, contribute and exacerbate the issues marginalized communities are already challenged by. The cycle continues with the systematic mistreatment of a group of people. Through socialization, people are conditioned into being oppressed, the target of oppression, or the role of being oppressive, the non-target of oppression (Sherover-Marcuse, personal communication, 1985-1987), or what Tappan (2006) referred to as internalized oppression and internalized domination.

**Internalized Oppression**

I argue that internalized oppression is a dream killer and a significant obstacle to Chicana leadership. Those who have internalized the oppression believe the misinformation and lies about their group. It may lead to externalizing the oppression by taking it out on themselves or people like themselves—they may deny their group or culture (Sherover-Marcuse, personal communication, 1985-1987; Tappan, 2006).
Over time, the manifestation of internalized oppression has been and continues to be one of blame, “they bring it upon themselves,” or “that’s the way they are,” and “they should pull themselves up by the bootstraps.” However, Lilia Monzó (2016) contradicts the stereotypes and asserts that people of color do not address the subject of internalized oppression to protect their dignity. Supporting that internalized oppression is rooted externally, Williams (2012) argues that it is one of the essential tools through which systemic oppression sustains and continues in society. In Chicano communities, the belief of “si yo no puedo, tu no puedes, ellos no pueden, entonces nosotros no podemos” [if I can’t, you can’t, they can’t, then we cannot] is a classic example of internalized oppression reinforcing harmful systems and beliefs.

**Culture as a Way to Heal**

Historically, Chicanas have used culturally relevant and appropriate means to heal by using a *comadre* space, where listening takes place, and women care for each other deeply (Comas-Díaz, 2020). A *comadre* space is where trust and relationships are the foundation to sorting through and managing the obstacles and challenges life brings. This is a space to share with complete *confianza* [confidence] to share about “life, death, and everything in between” (Comas-Díaz, 2020, p. 159). This is a space where Chicanas can *deshogar*—an action and concept that is not easily translated. The essence of it is to vent emotionally, physically, and completely.

In my professional consultant and social worker roles, and as someone who trains people on the issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and for this research, my premise is that culture is benign. It can be a source of strength and pride and is embedded everywhere in our
daily lives. A standard definition of culture used in the 30-plus years of training on the issue of cultural competency (which then became cultural proficiency, then cultural relevancy, and finally the present-day spirit of diversity, equity, and inclusion) is the shared experiences or other commonalities that groups of individuals have based on—but not limited to—any of the following: race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, disability, religion, age, immigration status, and other areas of identification.

My experience as a trainer is that the discussion of culture is difficult; it often brings up feelings for white, mainstream participants—the sense of not having culture. It also creates confusion about what culture is and is not, often viewed as the manifestation of violence in particular groups. This thinking can lead to the misconception that some groups are more violent than others. I contend that all people have a history and a culture and that growing up in any culture brings both amazing things and hard things. It is critical to sort out cultural gifts from baggage. I argue that we tend to toss the word “culture” around when talking about oppressive practices or beliefs within specific groups. For example, there is a misconception that domestic violence occurs more frequently in Latino culture because of machismo. In reality, machismo translates to the spirit of sexism and chauvinism—no group has a monopoly on violence. Viewing a group or community with a deficit lens deprives one of the opportunities to see that group’s cultural wealth and assets, their capital wealth. Yosso (2005) outlines how the deficit lens operates by default; with a CRT lens, she unpacks how it is situated in and protected by the dominant culture. Shifting from how people of color have been marginalized dismissed, and made invisible requires a paradigm shift to view the assets
and capital they possess fully. To see how leadership manifests in the everyday life of Chicanas also calls for a paradigm shift and a focus on cultural wealth.

**Road to Liberation: Healing**

The overarching lens that guides the healing aspect of this research is a peer counseling model referred to as the nature of human beings (Jackins, 1965). The model’s premise is that all human beings are born intelligent, zestful, and cooperative (desiring to be close to one another). One gets hurt as one goes through life; however, natural healing mechanisms (e.g., laughing, crying, shaking, sweating, yawning, and talking) are in place. The spirit of the model is that human beings are resilient. When they tap into their natural healing mechanisms, they can tap their resilient nature and the ability to solve problems and challenges skillfully. Conversely, hurtful experiences that accumulate and are left unresolved may develop into patterns of behavior (often confused with personalities) (Jackins, 1965). This is just one model of many to use for healing.

Undeniably, unresolved hurts, wounds, and trauma interfere with leadership—without healing, leadership is nearly impossible; without leadership, liberation is unattainable. As a cornerstone of this research, I unpacked the role of healing. For Chicanas, the intergenerational wounds and trauma produced by external forces have been detrimental to their leadership. At the same time, the hurts, injuries, and trauma experienced internally in the home have significantly impacted and created barriers to their leadership. I had anticipated that this study would reveal obstacles and impediments from hurtful experiences while putting words, language, and frameworks for the natural, intuitive, and culturally relevant healing mechanisms.
**Liberation Theory**

The Oxford dictionary defines liberation as “the act of setting someone free,” including from oppression and “restrictive or discriminatory social conventions and attitudes” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). At the heart of this research is the pursuit of liberation, defined as to be free, present, deliberate, and direct in leading one’s own life. The late Ricky Sherover-Marcuse (2000), a white Jewish woman, pioneered teaching and training in unlearning racism, alliance building and communicating cross-culturally. Her seminal work provided a framework and guidelines for experiential work and processes that put theory into action. Her *Liberation Theory: A Working Framework* is the primary guide for discussing liberation in this research. Sherover-Marcuse (2000) posited that liberation theory encompassed ideologies, assumptions, explanations, and truths that serve to guide the process of liberation. She begins her 16-point approach with the assertion that liberation involves reversing the consequences and eradicating the roots of social oppression and concludes with the assumption that “liberation is possible” through healing and making “human connections.” Liberation also takes on the form of awareness of and resistance to societal inequities, albeit “subtle or even silent” and unnoticed (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006).

We understand human liberation as the result of praxis; a process of reflection as a preparation for action, followed by reflecting on the results of our action, which leads us to new insights and therefore to new action, in an ongoing cycle of growth and learning. (Ada, 2007, p. 110)

**Conclusion**

This literature review sets the backdrop for researching Chicana leadership. Chicana leadership, healing, and liberation are complex topics; as combined topics, they are even more so. Making sense of the literature called for navigating between the world of
mainstream values, expectations, and challenges, and the Chicana experience that includes biculturalism, intuitiveness, and its values, expectations, and challenges. The two worlds often conflict and require constant paradigm shifting.

As the dominant mainstream culture hovers over the Chicana experience, there is a sense of ambiguity and a need for constant vigilance. The richness of Chicana scholars, critical thinkers, and contributors to CFE, testimonio, critical race, and liberation theories helped frame and guide this research. Thus far, the research substantiates a richness of culture available to prepare Chicanas for and sustain their leadership.

**Gaps**

There is a huge gap in the literature regarding unrecognized Chicana leadership. There is a need to continue combing through the literature to reveal the concepts and spirit of leadership that exist but are unrecognized in the Chicana experience and to create fertile ground for Chicana leadership to be nurtured and thrive.

Also not in the literature, is the brilliance, naturalized leadership, and resiliency of the Chicana in its entirety. There is a wealth of literature surrounding broad, mainstream leadership and leadership based on race and gender but not how they intersect with ethnicity and culture (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Furthermore, the literature on the intersections of class, race, and gender in Chicana Leadership consistently makes reference to class but fails to unpack the nuances of how class manifests in the Chicana experience. There is a major gap in how class impacts leadership—class and race are often discussed as one. The difference between class and race is missed.
Chapter Three: Methods

Chicanas are leaders in their respective communities and families (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Some are leaders in community-based organizations, political arenas, academia, business, and other institutions. Other Chicanas have not had the opportunity to have formal education or lead in traditional settings like business or academia, but they are leaders. However, both groups exhibit significant unrecognized leadership. Every day, Chicanas do what are described as leadership activities and display leadership characteristics (Jiménez, 2012), including motivating, supporting, and guiding their families and communities, and every day their efforts are devalued and go unrecognized (Méndez-Negrete, 1999); in essence, their leadership is unrecognized. Chicanas’ motivation, support, and guidance are foundational to nurturing and sustaining families and communities (Espinoza-Herold, 2007) but are not recognized as leaders.

This research is inspired by the desire to encourage and support leadership in the Chicana community and reveal unrecognized leadership in schools and communities. This study posits that all Chicanas practice and have leadership qualities and that many forms of leadership are unrecognized. Therefore, this study of Chicana leaders includes recognized and unrecognized leadership, focusing on the everyday forms of leadership. This study does not focus on the leadership of all women.

This chapter includes discussions of the following: (a) restating of the problem; (b) the research questions; (c) positionality; (d) the research design and procedures: the research methodology: population and sample; (e) data collection procedures which include recruitment, location, interviews, focus groups, recording, and data transcription and
analysis; (f) instrumentations, specifically interviews and focus groups; (g) data analysis procedures; and finally (h) the chapter concludes with the anticipated limitations of the study.

**Restatement of the Problem**

Structural forces such as racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression often create dire social conditions in the Chicana community. According to Pew Research Center, in 2017, there were 36.6 million “Hispanics of Mexican origin” residing in the United States (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2017). In 2014, Hispanics made up 38.4% of the California population and 41.6% of the California prison population (Nellis, 2016). According to the United States Census Bureau (2022), Latinos make up 34% of the Santa Cruz County population. Regarding education, 41.8% of Hispanic Santa Cruz County residents aged 25 and over have less than a high school diploma compared to their White counterparts, at 9%. The contrast is similar when the stakes are higher, with 45% of White students attaining a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to Hispanics with a rate of 14.5% (Towncharts, 2022). Latino students are poorly educated (Gándara, 2010), and hostile educational environments for Latino youth feed the school-to-prison pipeline (J. Castillo, 2014). Outside of the educational system, poverty is an additional threat to Latino students. Latinos disproportionately represent the poor; they make up “51% of poor Californians but only 39.6% of the state population” (Sarah et al., 2021, p. 1). In some communities, immigration status creates fear of deportation for people who are undocumented (Brabeck et al., 2014). Furthermore, Latino children are separated at the border from their families (Varela, 2021). And, Dreamers watch their hopes put on hold (Wang & Sacchetti, 2021). These dire social conditions are exacerbated as they interact with other systems such as education, government
bureaucracy, law enforcement, and social services (Chibnall et al., 2003). These conditions are a call to action.

Every day, Chicanas practice leadership through their actions; they motivate, support, and guide their families and communities. They tap into generational wisdom and display leadership characteristics. Yet, as vital as their contributions are, their efforts are devalued and unrecognized (Méndez-Negrete, 1999); in essence, their leadership is unrecognized in educational institutions and the community.

**Research Questions**

This study focuses on unrecognized leadership and how race, class, gender, culture, and other factors influence Chicana leadership development. I examined the environments that nurture awareness and critical consciousness, the conditions that support the emergence and development of leadership, and how these experiences intersect with culture, oppression, healing, and liberation. Through face-to-face interviews and focus groups, this research seeks to answer the following broadly defined questions:

1. How do the interviewed Chicanas define leadership?
2. What are the conditions that participants say nurture Chicana leadership?
3. How do participants say leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community?

**Positionality**

In my professional career, as a facilitator and trainer, I focused on supporting participants to have a fundamental understanding of power, privilege, and oppression; built on their desire to interrupt oppression and work toward social justice; and provided them with the
tools to take action. As a result, I am well equipped with language and frameworks to research oppressive race, class, and gender structures. As a trainer, I navigate a fine line between using my experience to make a point and maintaining an impersonal “professional” approach. What underpins my approach to my work is the belief that participants have their unique answers to whatever challenges they confront. In addition, however, they may need ánimo [encouragement and motivation] and confianza [confidence]. As a researcher, I must monitor my positionality, track any impending biases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), and embody the spirit of testimonio to allow for first-person accounting of the Chicana participants to tell their own stories (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). I firmly believe that healing from hurts and traumas caused by systematic oppression is not only possible but also leads to liberation. However, I must recognize and accept that participants may not have a similar mindset and not bias my approach to the research. An approach and attitude of constant monitoring of my biases and desires guided my research and methodology.

**Research Design and Procedures**

**Research Methodology**

To research and capture Chicana voices authentically, I used Testimonio: “One’s testimonio reveals an epistemology of truths and how one has come to understand them” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 364). This methodology was a good fit for the research I conducted because Testimonio is a process, approach, and method; the spirit of Testimonio is an opportunity to tell stories and share experiences previously unshared (Acevedo et al., 2001; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). The stories may be based on personal or professional experiences situated in a political, social, or spiritual context (Alemán & Olivo, 2019;
Calderón et al., 2012). Testimonios could manifest orally and in writing and usually include an opportunity for reflection (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) that I argue helps to liberate Chicanas as they retell their experiences and that prompts participants to share their stories from their perspective. It is part of a decolonizing methodology (Calderón et al., 2012) whereby researchers defy the legacy and notions that depict Europeans as “the civilizing force of the world and as the masters of scientific advancement” (Alemán, & Olivo, 2019, p. 261). It allows for creating theories from the “lived” experiences using familiar forms of communication such as pláticas [dialogue] (Espino et al., 2012).

**Population and Sample**

This study focused on Chicanas residing in Northern California. Throughout this research, the term Chicana is used in distinction from Latina. Latina is the umbrella term that includes Chicanas; however, not all Latinas are Chicanas. Chicana embraces unique nuances such as an identity rooted in occupied Mexico and as a subset of the Latina identity. A social-political-cultural term, Chicana was popularized and used since the early 1970s to describe Mexicans and Mexican Americans (Niemann, 2002) and mainly in the male gender form of Chicano. For some Chicanas, identifying as such means prioritizing family and community (García, 2014; Niemann, 2002). Chicana identity acknowledges Indigenous, Spanish, and Mestizo heritage and includes constantly navigating borders based on race, class, gender, and sexuality (Anzaldúa, 1987; García, 2014).

The sample was limited to Chicanas, focusing on leaders who grew up in or resided in the Southwest and currently live in Northern California. Interviewees and focus group participants were drawn from the researcher’s network of acquaintances using a convenience
sample of available participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using a convenience sample based on the researcher’s network of acquaintances helped to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection for this study includes the following: (a) the recruitment and consent process for the interviews, and the recruitment and consent process for the focus groups; (b) considering and identifying the location; (c) designing the interview and focus groups; and (d) data transcription and analysis.

**Interview Participant Recruitment**

I used a convenience sample method of recruiting participants. Since the fall of 2019, I compiled a list of potential participants whose leadership has been minimally or not recognized but who display leadership characteristics in their homes and communities. For this research, *leadership* is defined as a person that takes action, small or big, to improve the lives of others, influencing and inspiring others, and managing during adverse times and circumstances (Bonilla-Rodriguez, 2011). Participants may represent leadership practice in business, education, activism, non-profit, or in a family, neighborhood, or local community. I have identified 20 possible interview participants. The selection parameters are (a) Chicana-identified; (b) age (young adults, middle age, and older); (c) residency in Northern California; and (d) context of leadership, e.g., home, non-profit, business, governmental agency, educational setting, or community work.

From the pool of 20 potential participants, I sorted and prioritized the list by age, leadership practice, and sexuality to create the order to contact the participants. I then
contacted participants through email or phone to invite them to participate and set up a meeting time to tell them about the project, establish their interest in participating in the study, and asked about their availability for the project’s duration. Once they agreed to participate, I informed them how data would be collected and used, the time frame for conducting the interviews, and the estimated time for each interview. Finally, participants signed consent forms before conducting the first interview.

I made the final selection of participants to reflect the most diverse group based on the previously mentioned criteria (Hatch, 2002). Once I confirmed that 5 participants were committed to participating, I stopped the recruitment process for the interviews.

**Focus Group Participant Recruitment**

Focus group participant recruitment required a separate process. Since the fall of 2019, I have compiled a list of potential participants whose leadership has been minimally or not recognized but who display leadership characteristics in their homes or communities. I identified 25 possible focus group participants. Some of these participants were on the potential list of interviewees but did not participate in a focus group if they participated in an interview. The selection parameters are (a) Chicana identified; (b) age (young adults, middle age, and older); (c) residency in Northern California; and (d) context of leadership, e.g., home, non-profit, business, governmental agency, educational setting, or community work.

From the pool of 25 potential participants, I sorted and prioritize the list by age, leadership practice, and sexuality to create the order to contact the participants. Then, I contacted participants through email or phone to invite them to participate and set up a meeting time to conduct to tell them about the project, established their interest in
participating in the study, and ask about their availability for the project’s duration. Once they agreed to participate, I informed them how data would be collected and used, the timeframe for conducting the focus groups, and the estimated time for the focus group. Finally, consent forms were signed before the focus group.

The final selection of participants was made to reflect the most diverse group based on the previously mentioned criteria, primarily age and context of leadership. However, they all had in common a Chicana identity (Hatch, 2002). The plan was that once I confirmed 6 to 8 participants committed to participating in the focus groups, I would stop the recruitment process. However, due to COVID and COVID-related issues, participants dropped out, and the first focus group had two participants, and the second had three.

**Location**

**Interviews**

Eight interviews were conducted in Santa Cruz County in a quiet neutral, and confidential setting previously agreed upon by the researcher and interviewee. Precautionary Pandemic safety measures were followed as needed and preferred. Both interviewer and participants had the option of wearing a mask, seating was relatively distant, and common areas were sanitized. Two interviews were conducted through Zoom. All of the interviews were recorded on Zoom. Access to the Zoom software is gained through Duo Security, a cloud-based two-factor authentication. I recorded both the in-person and virtual interviews on my iPhone as a backup. In addition, I took notes as I interviewed the participants to capture “key words and phrases” (Saldana, 2011, p. 39).
**Focus Groups**

Two focus groups were conducted in a public but confidential community space. Due to the pandemic, participants wore masks, microphones, equipment, and shared areas were sanitized, and social distancing was practiced.

**Interview Design**

Once participants agreed to participate in the research, I emailed them the consent form to review. The consent form included information about the study and informed participants that there would be two recorded interviews and that themes and findings would be shared with focus group participants. Participants were informed that information gathered would be kept anonymous, that participation was voluntary, and that they could resign at any time. After reviewing the form and assuring that participants were fully informed, they were asked to consent by signing the consent form. Data collection methods call for respect and creating a professional relationship. Weiss (1994) suggests treating the interview process as a contract whereby clauses are delineated and terms agreed upon as to how the interviewer and interviewee will work with one another. For example, the interviewer will define areas of exploration; the interviewer does not ask questions solely out of curiosity. Instead, the interviewer will act as a “privileged inquirer” (Weiss, 1994, p. 65), ensuring confidentiality.

Additional terms and considerations include providing interviewees with as much direction and information in advance, such as interview purpose, overarching themes, questions, interview process, and allowing the interviewees to choose the interview time and date. I sought to adhere to these terms and considerations as closely as possible.
Five women were interviewed twice during November and December 2021; each interview averaged about 1.5 hours. Four participants were interviewed in person and one using the Zoom platform. Interview questions were sequenced broadly to set the tone and build trust before moving onto the main topic of leadership and personal experiences. All questions related to and supported the discussion of Chicana leadership (see Appendix B for interview protocol).

**Interview Recording**

In-person interviews were recorded on Zoom on a password-protected laptop and recorded on a password-protected iPhone as a backup. Virtual interviews were recorded using the Zoom software. Access to the Zoom software was gained through Duo Security, a cloud-based two-factor authentication. I also recorded on my passcode-protected iPhone as a backup for the virtual interviews. In addition, I took notes during the interviews to capture “key words and phrases” (Saldana, 2011, p. 39).

**Interview Transcriptions**

Transcripts were generated from Zoom, and uploaded on my personal computer, which required a password to access.

**Focus Group Design**

Once focus group participants agreed to participate in the research, I emailed them a consent form that included information regarding the study, and asked if they have any questions or concerns. Participants were informed that the focus group would be recorded, that participation was voluntary, and that they could resign at any time. After reviewing the form and assuring that participants were fully informed, they were asked to consent by
signing the consent form. As with all data collection methods, approaching participants respectfully and creating a professional relationship is critical.

In January of 2022, two focus groups were conducted after interviews were completed. There was a goal of hosting approximately 6 to 8 participants as an ideal number for focus groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to maximize time and resources and facilitate equity in participation. However, due to last minute cancellations due to COVID-related issues, the focus groups were small, two participants at the first one and three at the second one. A research assistant was present at both focus groups. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. The research assistant and I arrived an hour before the start of the focus group to ensure a conducive focus group setting by attending to the physical space, positioning of chairs, and setting up of flip charts (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004). The need to protect participants physically and emotionally precedes and is of higher priority than collecting data. Therefore, as with the interviews, attention was given to creating a safe and productive space. To ensure such a space, as a researcher, I tracked and monitored potentially sensitive content and topic areas that might cause discomfort to participants—as a licensed clinical social worker, I am trained and experienced in maintaining group safety. Once a sense of the group was established through conocerimiento, I reviewed the agenda and facilitated shared agreements (ground rules) that are conducive to a safe and productive space. Participants were asked to agree to listen respectfully and honor confidentiality such as, “things of a personal nature stay in the room.” I then remind them of the purpose of the study and focus group (see Appendix B for Focus Group Agenda).
**Focus Group Recording**

Focus groups were recorded on Zoom on a password-protected laptop and recorded on a password-protected iPhone as a backup. Additionally, a research assistant was hired to capture participant responses. Scribing was done on a flip chart positioned for all participants to see collective responses.

**Focus Group Transcriptions**

The research assistant transcribed the responses on a Word document. Once the Word document was securely emailed to me, the research assistant deleted it from their computer, and the flip chart notes handed over to me. I listened to the recording shortly after the focus group to capture my initial thoughts.

**Instrumentation**

I mainly conducted face-to-face interviews and in-person focus groups. Interviews were the primary method used to collect data. I conducted two one-on-one interviews with 5 participants. In addition, I facilitated two focus groups with 2 to 3 different participants in each group.

**Interviews**

Before the interviews, participants were asked to review and sign a consent form that included the following: (a) information regarding the purpose of the study; (b) the research procedures; (c) the potential risks and benefits; (d) that there was no compensation for study participation; (e) the confidentiality description and explanation; (f) the participants’ rights, including participation as voluntary and the option to resign from the study at any time; (g) informing participants that there would be two interviews; that the interviews would be
recorded, and the interview themes and findings would be shared with the focus group participants; and (h) the directions for addressing questions or concerns. See Focus Group Consent Form (see Appendix C).

Additional terms and considerations included providing interviewees with ample direction and information in advance, such as interview purpose, overarching themes and questions, interview process, and allowing for the interviewees to choose the interview time and date.

The interviewing process and the sequence of the questions were designed to help set the tone for a secure space conducive to interviewing. The interview began with warm-up questions that asked the participant how she was doing and if she had any questions about the process. She was reminded that she was not obligated to answer all questions; she could pass on a question and pause or stop at any point. Finally, she was reminded that the study was about Chicana leadership.

After the warm-up, I asked the opening question to tell me about herself, including age, birth, upbringing, and growing up. The first question after the opening asks the participant to describe her culture growing up. The second question is related to identity—the third question allowed the participant to discuss success in her life. The fourth question was about the people that influenced her life. The fifth question asked participants to define leadership. The sixth question was about leadership obstacles and barriers. The seventh question was about healing. The final question asked the participant to share how leadership would look in her life in the future. The interview was closed by asking the participant if there was anything else they would like to share. Probes were used when an answer seemed incomplete or
needed clarification. Two general probes include (a) tell me more and (b) help me understand what that means? (See Appendix A for interview questions and specific probes).

**Focus Groups**

Focus group instruments included themes from the interviews and questions participants were asked, including defining Chicana leadership, sharing about the leaders in their lives, and whether they consider themselves leaders. Additionally, they were asked about their thoughts regarding hurts, wounds, trauma, healing, and liberation.

Interview findings and themes were shared to elicit focus group participants’ thoughts. The focus group ended with a final question on the best way to support Chicana leadership. All questions relate to and support the discussion of Chicana leadership (see Appendix B for focus group agenda).

The purpose of the focus groups was two-fold. First, by asking participants to share their reactions to the findings and themes, the elements of the research enhanced the interview data (Hatch, 2002) as they offered additional perspectives and “new information” (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Second, as they responded to how to best support Chicana leadership, they served as a primary data source (Hatch, 2002).

An additional instrument was the consent form that participants were asked to review and sign. The consent form included the following: (a) information regarding the purpose of the study; (b) the research procedures; (c) the potential risks and benefits; (d) that there would be no compensation for study participation; (e) the confidentiality description and explanation; (f) the participants’ rights, including participation as voluntary and the option to resign from the study at any time; (g) informing participants that the focus group discussion would be
recorded and notes taken by a research assistant; and (h) directions for addressing questions or concerns. See Focus Group Consent Form (see Appendix D).

I conducted two focus groups; each focus group lasted about 90 minutes. Participant responses were charted on a flip chart; focus groups were recorded using the Zoom on a password-protected iPhone. As a backup, I also recorded on a password-protected iPhone. Focus group recordings were transcribed, and the data was reviewed and cleaned up.

The focus group opened with a warm welcome. The welcome was part of establishing a conocimiento; the term conocimiento comes from the word conocer [to know], this term was popularized in the 1960s and 1970s and originated from Razalogia (Vargas, 1987). According to Vargas (1987), when there is conocimiento there is an opportunity for an intercambio [an exchange], in this case, an exchange of ideas and “group interaction to produce data” (Hatch, 2002, p. 24). Explained to participants the importance of conocimiento before beginning the focus group. I asked each participant to share—to the degree that they were comfortable—their responses to the following conocimiento statements: name, how they identify, where they were born and raised, who is included in their family, and something the group would not guess about them.

The focus group continued by asking participants to define Chicana and leadership. I then asked about the leaders in their life and why they consider them leaders? I asked if they consider themselves a leader and why or why not? I asked them to think about leadership and then tell me what comes up when they hear the following words: hurt, wound, and trauma? There was a pause after each word to allow for scribing the responses. Continuing to think about leadership, I then asked what comes to mind when they hear the word healing? Next, I
asked what liberation means to them? All responses were scribed on a flipchart. After the
scheduled questions were asked, I shared the interview findings and themes and asked what
stood out to them, and if they had questions—responses were scribed on the flipchart. Lastly,
I asked participants what they believe is the best way to support Chicana leadership—
responses were scribed on the flipchart. Finally, I asked if they had anything else they would
like to share? I concluded the focus group by thanking them for their participation (see
Appendix B for Focus Group Agenda).

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis began with the interviews and included five sequential steps: (a)
Organize and prepare the data for analysis; (b) Review the data; (c) Code the data; (d)
Generate a list of descriptions and themes; and (e) Represent the descriptions and themes
(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Subsequently, focus group data was organized, reviewed,
coded, and combined with the interview list of descriptions and themes.

Interview Data

The interviews aided in examining how Chicanas interviewed defined leadership, the
conditions that nurture and encourage leadership and described obstacles to leadership, and
how leadership manifests in the Chicana community.

Beginning with how Chicanas identify and what it was like growing up female,
participants were asked about significant historical, political, or other major events
surrounding injustices that manifested in their lives. Additionally, they were asked about
hurts and wounds, healing and what leadership would look like in their future.
Analyzing the data began during the interviews as I listened to the participants, jotting notes to capture nuances in tone and body language (Hatch, 2002) and words, short phrases, or potential quotes (Saldana, 2011). The same process continued through the reviewing the transcripts, coding the data, and generating the themes.

“Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148), shortly after each interview, I captured general impressions of the interview and elements that stood out. The reflection was an invitation to track the distinctive perspectives of the research that was motivated by cultural intuition (Calderón et al., 2012). From the reflection patterns, trends, and concepts began to emerge naturally (Saldana, 2011).

Recordings were captured on Zoom on a password-protected laptop and, as a backup, recording on a password-protected iPhone. Organizing and preparing the data required transcribing the interviews. Interview transcripts necessitated correcting words and phrases that had originally been botched; for example, the word Chicana was consistently transcribed as either cheekiness or chicken. Correcting the errors was a tedious process but allowed an opportunity to become familiar with the data. With a revised version of the transcript, I reviewed the data for a broad, general perspective and sense of meaning, studying what participants said, as well as tone, impressions, and possible “use of information” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 193). I then began pre-coding the data by “highlighting, bolding” (Saldana, 2011, p. 95), underlining, and making comments on the side. With the notes from the interview and pre-coding, I created a preliminary code list including content descriptions and examples of data (Saldana, 2011). After the first round of interviews, I modified the code
list to insert a column for follow-up questions that came up from the first interviews, and added a third column for the data example.

Directed by a CFE to engage with participants in the interpretation, documentation, and findings of the research (Delgado Bernal, 1998), I employed a member-check during the second interview. As part of the member check, participants were provided a copy of the transcript from their first interview to review what they had shared in their first interview (Cordova & Knecht, 2019; Hatch, 2002) and to endorse the data that could potentially be used in the findings. Engaging participants in this manner ensured that I had accurately captured their responses (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Member checks build trust (Cordova & Knecht, 2019) and increase validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) in the research process, assist in checking research biases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ezzani & Brooks, 2019), and validate findings (Klenke, 2016). The modified code list was used for the second interview as part of the member check to include participants in analyzing the data (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

In an effort to put into practice the CFE framework that allows for cultural intuition and trusting a sense of knowing something instinctively, a viewpoint (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) front and center, the collective code list were shared with the participants as emerging themes after concluding the second interview and so as not to influence their responses.

After concluding all the interviews, I began the process of coding the data using CFE as a coding filter (Saldana, 2011) categorizing and labeling according to terms and language used by the participants. To make meaning and explain the data, I codified it by separating, clustering, and re-clustering (Saldana, 2011). After multiple rounds of categorizing and
coding, the categories and codes were combined, refined, renamed, or eliminated (Saldana, 2011). Then the process of creating themes and subthemes began; confronting the preliminary list of approximately ten reoccurring themes was daunting. Reducing the themes to the appropriate five to six themes (Saldana, 2011) for the study required reflection. By stepping away and coming back to the data, two overarching themes stood out: adversity and resilience. These themes guided the major findings of the study. Finally, consistent with Testimonio and CFE framework, narrative passages were generated for each finding.

**Focus Group Data**

The focus groups were valuable in capturing essential research elements that were not covered in the interviews. For example, as discussed earlier, participants were asked to define the term Chicana, to respond when they heard the words “hurt,” “wound” or “trauma,” and they were asked about liberation. They were also asked to define leadership, about the leaders in their lives, and whether they considered themselves leaders. The codes drawn from emerging themes were shared with the participants.

Similar to the interviews, focus groups were recorded using Zoom and backed up with a recorder. Additionally, the research assistant took note of focus group highlights as the participants responded to questions. During the focus group, I took notes whenever possible to capture potential quotes and to elicit clarification from participants and encourage elaboration of sharing.

Organizing and preparing the focus group data included: (a) transcribing the chart notes; (b) listening to the Zoom recordings; and (c) downloading the Zoom transcripts and correcting words and phrases that were incorrectly captured. Afterward, I reviewed the data
for a broad, general perspective and sense of meaning. I studied what participants said and their tone, impressions, and possible “use of information” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 193). The research assistant transcribed the flip chart notes. I followed the same process with the focus group transcripts, and flip chart notes to code the data and create themes as I did with the interview data. I then combined the data to prepare the findings for Chapter Four.

The findings are based on the Testimonios of the participants and presented in three sections and organized according to the research questions nestled in overarching elements: RQ 1—how Chicanas define leadership—was primarily addressed in a historical backdrop that included legal, educational, and religious systems and included culture, relationships, and spirituality. RQ 2—the conditions that nurture and impede Chicana leadership—were captured in leadership pathways and included discussion on the impact of gender, intergenerational trauma, awareness / awakening and consciousness, and healing. RQ 3—how leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community—included the participants’ collective responses to what Chicanas need to be leaders, consejos [advice], thoughts on leadership in the future, and a concluding discussion of finding a home (liberation).
Chapter Four: Findings

The study proposed to research unrecognized leadership in the Chicana family and community; to explore how Chicanas define leadership, describe their pathway to leadership, identify the conditions that nurture their leadership, and recognize the obstacles that impede it. It also sought to examine the cultural elements that help sustain individual and collective resiliency and how leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community. It explored how Chicanas work toward their liberation: to be present, deliberate, and direct, as well as to lead in their own lives. Finally, the study proposed to examine the Chicanas’ experiences of the environments that nurture awareness and critical consciousness, the conditions that support the emergence and development of leadership, and how these experiences intersect with culture, oppression, healing, and liberation. Through this research, I sought to answer three research questions: (a) How do Chicanas define leadership? (b) What are the conditions that nurture Chicana leadership? And (c) How does leadership manifest and is recognized in the Chicana community?

Findings

Using a Testimonio methodology allowed the participants’ stories to unfold and for emerging patterns and themes to materialize in their own words. The themes and subthemes were analyzed through a CFE lens and evolved into two overarching intergenerational themes: adversity and resilience. The themes and subthemes materialized as participants told of their experiences navigating institutional oppression that manifested in educational and legal systems through racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and institutionalized religion. Participants shared how the oppression manifested in familial, cultural, and gender contexts
and dynamics. The findings are based on the Testimonios of the participants and presented in three sections: (a) Historical backdrop includes the legal and educational systems, participants’ collective definition of and influences of leadership including relationships, religion, and spirituality. (b) Leadership Pathways capture the conditions that nurture and impede Chicana leadership, the impact of gender, intergenerational trauma, awareness / awakening and consciousness, and healing. Finally, (c) How leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community presents the participants’ collective responses to what Chicanas need to be leaders, consejos [advice], leadership for the future, and the process of finding a home (liberation). The order in which the findings are organized and discussed is designed to present them in somewhat of a chronological manner: reflecting on the past, exploring, and engaging in the present, and—while keeping the past and present in mind—contemplating future Chicana leadership and liberation.

**Participants**

Participants interviewed are representatives of the fields of education, health, mental health, social work, and community work. All grew up in California, except one who was raised in Texas. All are bilingual. One of the interviewees is married to a woman; the others are in heterosexual relationships. They self-identified as Chicana, Mexican, Mexican American, and Latina. Other identities include sister, daughter, wife, partner, lesbian, mother, godmother, and tía [aunt].

All the participants indicated they grew up around “strong women.” In addition, most of them described themselves as blessed with a gift. The gifts manifested as the ability to heal,
being highly intuitive, having a sense of knowing, and maintaining spiritual connections. Most were raised Catholic while also feeling connected to Indigenous and/or Eastern practices, and all described themselves as highly spiritual.

**Focus Group Participants**

The focus group participants spanned the careers of a teacher in higher education, a retired administrative assistant, a public health worker, a legal professional, and an executive director. Their ages ranged from 35 to 72 years of age. One participant was born in Mexico, one in Texas, and the others in California. Four identified as mothers; one did not have children. Four participants had been married at least one time; one had never married.

**Interview Participants’ Stories**

Using pseudonyms, this is a brief description of the participants. Bella, age 32, is a social worker and single, was born in Los Angeles, grew up in San Diego, California, and spent most weekends in Tijuana, Mexico. Bella’s parents separated when she was three; she often spent summers with her father and his family. She described her family as “the typical Latino family.” A fond memory growing up was four-wheeling in the streets of Tijuana where the “street dogs” would chase them—“we would try to like lift our feet so they wouldn’t bite us.” Another fond memory was camping with her dad and his family.

Ella, age 32, introduced herself by invoking her parents’ names and stating that they are from Guanajuato and “came to the US for very different reasons.” Ella was born on the Central Coast of California. Family is central to Ella. She knew her father’s family, many of whom lived in the United States as she grew up. However, her mother’s family was in Mexico; she said she experienced the “impact of immigration of not having her family so
close by.” She indicated that another significant aspect of her life was her disclosure—“dad is a farmworker” in the mushroom industry. Her mother also worked as a farmworker; however, when pregnant with Ella, she sustained an injury. Unable to return to work in her previous employment, she returned to school, learned to speak English, and enrolled in community college in the early childhood program. In the present day, Ella is a public health worker and is single.

Clarissa, age 50, was born and raised on the Central Coast of California. She described growing up “in the strawberry fields not necessarily working” them “but I was out there playing and getting my hands dirty.” She had five siblings growing up: three older sisters and two younger brothers. She worked as a program coordinator for about 15 years, a high school teacher for several years before becoming an assistant principal, her current role. She is married and has two children. She describes herself as intuitive and with a “sense of spirituality.” She identifies as a daughter first, then a sister, wife, mother, educator, community member, and Chicana. It took her some time to be comfortable identifying as Latina. Although, she said, “I like the term Chicana being, like, Mexican American” and asserted that she can be “Chicana first.”

Malin, age 56, was born in Mexico, came to the United States when she was four, was raised in Northern California until she was 13, moved to the Bay area and then to the Central Coast of California in her twenties. Malin is a licensed therapist, is married, and has two children. Malin shared that her sister “chose to step into the role of the parent” while her mother was unable to do so because of mental health challenges. Her relationship with her mother is pivotal to her testimonio. She indicated that a feminist studies course “changed my
She explained that through an oral history assignment, she understood, “she [her mother] didn’t have a chance.” Although her father passed away shortly after she was born, she got to know him through her sister’s stories of him.

Zella, 65, a health practitioner and owner of her own business, was born and raised in Texas but has spent most of her adult life in California. Her parents were photographers and owned a photography studio. They married, had four children, and divorced when Zella was about eight years old. Zella said, “Later . . . [we found] out that my father was gay.” But she shared, “You couldn’t be openly gay at that time, not for Latino men anyways.” She went on to say, “He ended up getting married to another woman and had a whole bunch of kids.” Zella herself is married to a woman.

**Historical Backdrop**

Findings from the first research question—How do Chicanas define leadership?—are presented through a historical backdrop that describes legal and educational systems, leadership from a Chicana perspective, relationships interviewees discussed, and participants’ sharing regarding religion and spirituality.

**Legal System**

The legal system in this country created laws that had enormous implications for Chicanas, their family, and communities. The interviewees collectively discussed three historical examples: segregation, immigration, and the Bracero program. Participants shared how the implications of each of these manifested in their specific experiences.
Segregation

Zella shared two personal stories that captured the lived experience of segregation in Texas. She recalls traveling from Brownsville to Kingsville as a young girl to visit relatives. She emphatically recalled that her mother would only stop at one gas station, and “we always got a hamburger in that area.” She remembered passing some of the hamburger places she saw in commercials and asking her mother to stop at one of those places. Her mother always responded, “No, no, no, no.” She also recounted that her mother “always carried an empty paint can on the floor in the back seat.” She confided, “It wasn’t until I was an adult that I realized these were segregated places; she could only stop at this one place.” Instead, they were forced to use the empty paint cans in lieu of a bathroom.

The second story related to segregation is of her grandfather taking her to get ice cream. She recalled her grandfather picked her up, put her on the chair, and instructed her, “no te muevas” [don’t you move] as he ordered something. She remembered a Latino man behind the counter “scooping some ice cream really fast and putting it on the counter.” She recalled that they ate their ice cream but at the time “didn’t know what that meant.” She didn’t realize that they couldn’t sit at the counter. Zella reflected that when people tell her she does not know about segregation because she is not Black, she responds by describing this segregated memory from her youth: “It said Whites only. I am not White.” With a sense of frustration, she acknowledged, “There’s that lack of awareness, you know, it’s running rampant.”

Immigration

Malin shared what she calls her mother’s “immigration trauma” and sacrifices she made decades earlier. After losing her husband, Malin’s mother was left with six kids, no income,
and family support waning. She uprooted her children and moved from Mexico to Northern California. Malin stated, “What’s interesting to me about hearing my mom’s story is that she had the foresight and the ganas [deeply felt desire] to make that leap to immigrate to the United States to change whatever opportunities her kids were going to have because she knew it wasn’t going to happen in Mexico.” The move to Northern California and bringing her children was made possible because she married a man from Oklahoma who did not speak Spanish and had fallen in love with her. Although Malin’s mother did not speak English, “she thought he was a good person and a good man, but she was never in love with him.” Malin and her family moved when she was four; they did not speak English. She indicates they “had immediate documentation status.” She remembered her stepfather fondly and said, “he was loving.” Ella also shared that her family experienced “immigration trauma.”

**Bracero Program**

Malin shared that like many “fathers of that generation, my father was a bracero, so he did that, for many years, and so my mom was the head of household in Mexico and that seemed to work, the distance of course; it’s going to be hard on any family but financially, it was, you know, it was fine.” Clarissa shared that her grandfather was also a Bracero, and his long periods of absence forced her grandmother to raise her children virtually as a single parent.

**Education**

The participants shared experiences navigating the educational system. This topic elicited the unspoken—faraway looks in search of answers, elaborating on the responses, pauses,
incongruent smiles, and dry laughter were tools they used to communicate their full experience.

Malin shared that her family was “one of the few Mexican families around.” There were two elementary schools where she grew up. While they offered some support, “they didn’t know what to do with us.” She indicated they weren’t “bilingual yet” so they were placed in the fourth- and sixth-grade combined bilingual classrooms. She pointed out that there were benefits in that students supported each other, presumably because they shared “similar immigration status.” They could speak Spanish and “felt culturally more connected.” She offered an example of “the institutional part of the racism” that they experienced. She recalled that they “all work really hard to participate in the fundraising events of the school.” They were inspired to reach the goal to get a movie night or some other prize for the whole class. She said, “Often, we were the highest fundraisers.” However, they never received the prize; she remembered, “It happened, more than one time.” She unpacked the implications of such experiences “for kids that are working towards something to get a prize right, you know it’s a behavioral incentive, kids really respond to that. For that not to happen was significant.”

Looking forward to the movie night with popcorn or the party, she remembered, “We would ask why didn’t it happen?” Her teacher would apologize and tell them it was not going to happen. “She didn’t ever want to elaborate, and you could tell she was upset. And she didn’t want to say, oh, this is racism.” She indicated that her teacher would try to advocate for them, but to no avail. She described that she only had one teacher, a white woman from back East that spoke some Spanish and became “a really strong advocate, but it was just her.”
Malin stated that they were frequently “denied a lot of those benefits from participating that other students, you know, weren’t denied.” She summed up by naming the experiences as “little things, like, that would happen” and labeling them as “false promises that kept recurring and continued to happen through to adulthood.” Apropos the discussion of education, growing up, Malin learned that her father, whom she never met, was self-educated. She recounted that he was a very intelligent man but was not able to go to school. She learned that he “read encyclopedias at home” despite having a “second-grade education.” She said that she heard from her sister that her father “loved education.”

Ella shared a pair of stories of her early school years. The first story starts with her first day of school when she “had no idea what was happening.” At one point, she sees her cousin getting on the school bus, and she attempts to get on the bus when her teacher grabs her, but they could not communicate because she did not speak Spanish. The teacher sat her down at a table; Ella recalled, “I just started crying.” She remembered that “this little white girl” sat next to her as she sat there with her lunch and milk. “She grabbed my milk, and she opened it, and she just put it in front of me and just sat with me.”

Ella remembered not knowing how to speak English or how long it took her to learn it. She said, “I don’t have a memory of how I learned. And so, you know, when I think of like my childhood, I don’t, I can’t remember a lot of that.” She reflected on her early experiences and wondered: “Knowing what we know about psychology and like repressed memories, right. I feel like it may have been very traumatic. And my brain was just like, let’s just forget that that happened. Let’s just remember the language and not remember how it happened.” She paused and stated, “All the memories of that time I don’t, I just don’t remember.”
Ella shared another story when she was in second grade. She recalled “feeling really anxious and stressed out because we were reading out loud. And it was going to be my turn. But I didn’t, I didn’t want to read.” She didn’t like reading aloud; she didn’t want anyone to hear her read. So, when her turn came, she “read, like really quietly.” She said, “And, then my teacher just skipped me for the rest of the time.”

Clarissa indicated her parents’ educational experience impacted her in multiple ways. First, although her parents spoke Spanish, they did not teach it to their children and “discouraged it.” When she asked about it, her mother told her it was “frowned upon” when she was growing up. As Clarissa shared her parents’ educational experience, she said that she did not learn anything about Chicano history until she went to college. She realized that if she did not learn anything about their history, her parents “definitely didn’t learn anything about theirs and they couldn’t even speak their own language” and “they were reprimanded for speaking their own language” at school. Second, although she grew up with bilingual parents and grandparents that spoke a bit of English, she recalled, “In high school, having to enroll in the Spanish classes and it being so difficult for me.” She continued, “because of how my parents grew up and, in the system, when I say the system I mean like the educational system, my dad went all the way up to eighth grade and didn’t go into high school but because of the system they grew up in and whether that be the educational system or just the governmental system.” Clarissa pointed out that knowledge is gained not only in an educational setting but also through “life experience.” She stated, “What drives that knowledge is our good life experiences and not so good life experiences.” Clarissa made yet another distinction regarding the bien educado [well-educated] and how it is different from
“systematic education.” She described the bien educado as someone who may have not gone to school but “grew up in a family who taught them how to be a good person.” She indicated such a person could come from a poor or wealthy family or from within or outside of the educational system. The bien educado has been “taught from generation to generation...that knowledge has been passed down.”

**Definition of Chicana**

In particular, focus group participants defined the term Chicana as social activism in a historical timeframe at the tail end of the Chicano Movement. They indicated it entails knowledge, a commitment to change, challenging the status quo, and a connection to a political stance. They described it as a unifying and endearing term, “Chicanito,” rooted in tradition and with a connection to the “Meichas.” A Chicana, they said, is a political activist; it is a state of mind, decolonization, it could mean taking a stand or embracing a liberal ideology. They compared the term to Hispanic and Latino. For one participant, it meant living in the United States longer than living in Mexico. Regarding being Chicana, one participant declared, “That’s who I belong to” when referencing the Chicana Movement. Because the movement occurred decades ago, however, she said she considers the term Chicanas to be dinosaurs. She indicated that while the terminologies are changing from Chicana to Latinx to accommodate newly arrived immigrants and second and third generations, the spirit of the subject matter or politics does not change.

**Leadership Defined from a Chicana Perspective**

Collectively and broadly, participants defined leadership as abilities, skills, and characteristics, leading by example, and teaching. The participants’ responses fluctuated
from defining leadership in a formal sense to personal and informal leadership. As an ability, the definition included the capacity to help move a group or individuals towards a common goal or to “be a better version of themselves.” As a skill, they do this by inspiring and listening to others and “making people feel like they matter.” Finally, leadership characteristics include leading by example, serving as a role model, being a storyteller, putting themselves out there, and not being “afraid to make someone else uncomfortable.” They also indicated that leadership is teaching; it empowers oneself and calls for stepping into roles that “stretch our capacity and lead to the path of growth and positive impacts” in the family, profession, community, or social movements.

Participants made a distinction between leadership in communities of color and mainstream communities, with one participant indicating that “it’s really about the title, status, and money in the mainstream.” Ella quoted the familiar adage “leaders do the right thing,” however, she added that leaders “do the right thing, just because it’s the right thing to do, not because you know someone else is watching.” Another participant cautioned, “There are some leaders out there who are not positive.” The collective definition of leadership was found as participants shared challenging, and in some cases traumatic, contexts and experiences growing up in their family and nested within the educational and legal systems as described earlier. The definition continued to unfold as participants told their stories, shared their experiences, and told the stories and experiences of other women, such as their mothers, sisters, and grandmothers. There were also stories about others such as friends, fathers, teachers, and allies.
Define Leadership

Continuing with the focus group, participants defined leadership in a formal and informal sense. For example, at home, a leader is the matriarch; she is “La Jefa.” They indicated that leadership is a “big responsibility.” Leaders are people who influence, inspire, and motivate others; they are role models, accountable, and have integrity, courage, conviction, humility, and wisdom. Leaders teach, bring people together, exercise their leadership, influence organizations, are entrepreneurs, proactive, and “hand the baton” over to others. But, one participant said, “not all are activists.” Another participant indicated she practiced “subtle leadership” when she worked in a doctor’s office straight out of high school. In response to the questions of defining leadership, this same participant told a story of losing her father at age five and how this traumatized her mother. Shortly after burying her father, she shared that her mother’s siblings told her that they would be splitting up the kids because there was no way she could raise them on her own. She described her mother sitting there with her head hung, listening as her siblings told her what needed to happen. Her mother never once lifted her head and said, “if one of my children will be eating rice and beans, all my children will eat rice and beans. No one will split up my children.” Dismayed, her siblings told her there was no way she could raise all six children on her own. So she did it; she raised her children on her own. The participant indicated that her mother never shared how hard it was to raise her children as a single mother. However, instead, her mother did her best to engage in “fun activities,” including playing baseball with them.
Leaders in Their Lives

Participants were asked about the leaders in their lives. Learning about the leaders in their lives broadened the definition. They indicated that they came from different places and contexts. Family members were most often mentioned as leaders in their lives. Without question, mothers were most often named, followed by sisters and grandmothers. These leaders were described as fearless, persistent, strong, and often setting examples to add to the definition of leadership. Telling the story of her mother’s struggle, Ella said, “That’s how she came to the U.S., that’s how she learned English, and that’s how she provided for us. And her voice is very strong; she gave us that example.”

Zella described growing up around strong women such as curanderas [healers] and self-sustaining businesswomen. There was a pattern of examples of how mothers naturally practiced elements of leadership, specifically coaching and guiding. For example, Bella indicated her mother was influential in her life because she encouraged her to “get an education,” pushed her to be independent, and warned her “nunca sabes cuando un cabrón va dejar” [you never know when a (“scoundrel”) will leave you]. Her mother also told her, “Cuando crezcas tengas tu propio trabajo, tengas dinero” [When you grow up, have your own job, have your own money]. She also shared that her mother’s work ethic “really stuck,” and encouraged her to work hard to go after what she wants; she remembered her mother saying “nada es gratis en este mundo” [nothing is free in this world].

Motherhood, specifically single parenthood, and sacrifices appeared to go hand in hand for some of the participants. Single mothers raised three of the five interviewees for a portion of their growing up. Bella indicated her mother struggled because she was a single parent.
trying to raise four children. A father of two of her children was not involved, nor did he contribute financial support. She shared that her mother had a perspective that “the best school is like private school” and “my mom wanted to be able to provide that for us.” Her mother “worked a lot in order to be able to make sure that we had all of that.” Struggling financially, she worked graveyard shifts and day jobs. Bella noted that her mother must have been exhausted working so much while simultaneously raising four children. Clarissa shared that her grandma, her mother’s mom, was a single mother who raised her six kids on her own with the help of her own father because her husband lived and work back and forth between the United States and Mexico. After losing her husband and before moving to the United States, Malin’s mother was left with six kids to raise; she worked “a little puesto / a little store, but it wasn’t enough.” Zella’s mother, for a short period, raised three children as a single parent.

Leadership manifested not only among mothers but siblings as well. Sisters were significant in the lives of the participants. As leaders, sisters were described as “stepping up” and serving as confidants. Malin shared, “My oldest sister was the most influential because she stepped into the role of the parent” after her father died. Malin indicated that her sister had a strong personality “my sister is a force to be reckoned with.” Clarissa shared that her sister got out of “a horrible relationship” with a man she married. Then, on her own, “she raised four beautiful girls.” She pointed out that “in many traditional Chicano families to leave and divorce someone was not the thing—you had to make it work!”
Leaders in Their Lives

When I asked focus group participants who were the leaders in their lives, participants first named their mothers as the ones who worked hard. One participant said her mother inspired her by teaching her that “everybody is the same regardless of skin color” and that the “janitor is just as important as the CEO.” One participant said that she comes from a family of “very strong women,” calling her grandmother “La Jefa.” Fathers were also named as leaders; one participant said that growing up, her father took her to the library weekly and that he was “the wind beneath my wings.” She indicated that her father significantly influenced her upbringing—she had a “political frame of mind; he had a political edge, which was good for me because he was a great critique of when it happened to people throughout history.” She recalls him talking about the Japanese American internment and indicating that “this is not the only time this country has ever done that.” She stated that the tone he used “became a political point in my life.” Sisters were leaders in the lives of the participants. They were described as “badass,” creative, skilled, intelligent, fearless, having agency, and daring.

Participants referenced public leaders like Angela Davis, Malcolm X, and Paulo Freire. They named local leaders whose leadership manifested in teaching feminist studies courses or did training on how to get along with people and “frame of mind for getting along with kids and family” and voting rights activist. They mentioned comadres, professionals such as mentors (including males), and club members. In school, they indicated that teachers were leaders in their lives that they respected. One participant spoke highly of her counselor, who she says treated her mother with kindness, respect, and spoke Spanish, allowing her mother
to feel comfortable. A focus group participant expressed her gratitude for a trainer who taught her “to get along with people.” She indicated that exposure allowed her to deal with “despair and grief” and gave her “faith”—“I believe that there’s something larger than me, I believe that there’s good in the world.”

**Relationships**

Through defining and discussing leadership, relationships were a recurring theme. Participants shared the connection and bond with mothers, sisters, grandmothers, parents, siblings, partners, friends, *comadres*, coworkers, allies, role models, community members, and teachers.

Participants described their relationships with their mothers as significant. Clarissa said that there was nothing she wouldn’t do for her mother, “I couldn’t say no to my mother.” Ella indicated that she could not challenge her mother, especially about “her beliefs or her views,” even when she strongly disagreed. Even when they talked about difficulty in the relationship with their mother, almost always, participants describe their experiences with their mothers with tenderness and softness. Often there were pauses, lowered voices, reflective gestures, and deliberate delivery. These effects were especially evident in telling stories of how the women in their lives survived trauma and hardships.

Sisters were very influential in the participants’ lives because they made them feel “taken care of” and “protected.” They also role modeled courageous behavior and were often outspoken. But they were also “emotionally nurturing and culturally nurturing” and “teaching you how to be a woman.” Ella indicated that her sister was careful about setting an example; she conveyed an attitude of, “my little sister’s here like I can’t be acting like this or doing
these things.” She later shared about losing her sister when she was 16 and recalls thinking, “I don’t know how to walk without my sister by my side, on this earth.” Malin said watching her sister “go off to college” led her to believe that she, too, could go to college and “figure out what I was going to do with my life.” Clarissa shared similar sentiments about her older sister. She said, “She was influential in the fact that I saw her go off to college, and so I said, if she could do it, I could do it, too.”

Fathers were also recognized as leaders in their lives and were described as humble, honest, and “full of integrity.” Some of the participants indicated that their fathers were very influential in their lives. One participant said her father was a “very, very fantastic role model.” She also said, “Going back to you know who I see has influenced me is that strength behind that hard-working attitude, you know, and ability to provide for your family at whatever costs, wherever, whatever means necessary.”

**Friendships, Networks, and Community**

Zella had friends that introduced her to new things, friends that helped her out, and friends that were part of her community and welcomed her. However, not all her friendships were unconditional. She shared that when she came out to a friend, “She stopped being my friend, she rejected me.”

Clarissa stated that she relies on her network to give her “honest feedback.” She believes she can lean on them for personal or professional issues. For example, she indicated she calls on an educator colleague when she needs “a teacher’s perspective.” Or, she can call on her mother, sister, friends, or *comadres* for personal issues. When asked for a definition, she replied, “A *comadre* for me is someone who is your confidant, whom you can go to no
matter what . . . through thick and thin. Traditionally it’s been when you baptize or take a child to communion.” She explained comadres further: “non-traditionally . . . they’re your closest friends” and “We got your back!” She shares that her sisters are also her comadres.

To Ella, being part of a community carries a responsibility: “We’re a reflection of where we grew up and the experiences that came from that community.” Being part of a community is “a reminder that you’re not alone.” She unpacks community relationships; she understands that “the rest of the community knows who this child is in relation to that person.” She recalls when she was at a family party having a beer when her mother approached her and said, “your God kids are present.” Caught off guard, she replied, “No, they’re not here.” Her mother reminded her, “you’re still a godmother.” She also shares that the impetus for returning to school for a Masters “was so that I could get the tools that I felt like I needed in order to be like recognized as someone who’s qualified to make important decisions that could impact the youth in my community.”

Bella has had role models, colleagues, and friends that are part of her network and community and that have inspired her. She talked about the “amazing women that, you know, are able to do really amazing work in the community.” She also shared that she hasn’t “had like a lot of Latina or Chicana leaders in my life, I feel like most of the ones that I’ve had have been white Caucasian.” She indicates she is in search of “these women, and thinking where is my community?”

As a member of her community, Malin shared that when she was in her 30s, and her kids were born, she realized, “This isn’t about you anymore” and that she told herself she had to work for her “children’s generation” and “the next seven generations.” She feels a personal
responsibility: “As a human on this planet is my responsibility to do what I can to, you know, make the world a better place for my children and the next seven generations.”

**Teachers**

Participants reported having strong relationships with their teachers. For example, Zella said her teacher taught her the skills to be a performer; another teacher gave her “permission to perform.” Clarissa remembered her first-grade teacher as “a strong leader in our school community.” When invited to family events, “she would show up; no other teacher in my whole entire career ever did that.” Ella talked about her teacher that aimed to soften the blows of “false promises” that manifested in the school.

**Religion and Spirituality**

Religion and spirituality were prominent themes. Most of the participants reported being raised Catholic or raised by religious women who attended church and practiced Catholicism. Religious practices crossed over to spirituality in the adult lives of the participants.

Clarissa indicated that holidays and her family life growing up “all revolved around Catholicism.” She said, “I still go to church because my mom is, as I mentioned, very Catholic.” Every now and then, her mother calls and said, “Mija let’s go to church.” Clarissa empathetically said, “I’m not going to say no to my mom,” but instead replied, “Yes, mom, let’s go to church.” Then, she clarified, “but I also have incorporated a lot of our ancient practices.”

Clarissa recalled communicating with a deceased relative who, she later found out, was her great-grandfather when she was about four or five years old. During that time, Clarissa had an “imaginary friend” who would talk to her when she was playing. After some time, her
friend told her he would be moving on; she said she was “in tears when he told me that it was his time to move on now.” When probed, she responded, “I say there’s a sense of spirituality.” She went on to say, “a lot of that spirituality and that intuition stayed with me throughout my entire life.” Her imaginary friend influenced her because when she started to see “other spirits, other images,” he “reassured me that it was okay for these things to be happening; for me to be seeing these are following my intuition.” She wishes she had paid more attention to it but had no one to talk to about it. She wondered why the images kept coming to her and why that was happening to her. She looked for someone to guide and talk to her and let her know that what she was experiencing, and feeling was “totally okay.” She recognizes that she could never talk to her mother about it because her mother was very Catholic.

Malin said her mother “was always praying.” She indicated that her mother “was a very spiritual woman.” She understood that “spirituality really mediated and lessened the impact of her mental health symptoms.” As a mental health therapist, she acknowledged prayer: “I interpret that as a meditation, it has the same positive impact.” In her practice, when clients have “a strong spiritual component,” she encourages them to continue using it, calling out the positive therapeutic effects and embracing “it as part of people’s culture.”

Zella indicated that part of her heritage was Jewish, but “my grandmother and my great grandmother dropped that because they married a Latino Catholic guy.” Bella said she was raised Catholic but did not practice it. However, she indicated her mother often referred to God.
Religion crisscrossed other aspects of Chicana life, such as family, culture, and relationships. Family members often became the children’s Godparents, and even when they weren’t relatives, the bonds created through the madrina/padrino relationship were strong. Ella said of her Godparents: “I always told my padrinos this, I always felt like they had a lot of love for me.” She stated that her padrinos were considered part of her family.

Ella said, “I thought being Mexican also meant like you’re Catholic.” However, as an adult, after attending a silent Buddhist retreat, she came into her spirituality as she “sat in silence.” She also offered a perspective as she spoke to the “history of colonization knowing that religion was used as a tool.” She talked about the Indigenous people that were tortured and killed in the name of religion. She stated that religion (Catholicism) “was forced upon us” and imagined how “painful” the experience was, and as a result, there was a desire to “ease it.” She eloquently connected the dots to the desire to ease the pain that came with “accepting it a little more with each generation.” She felt the consequences are that subsequent generations now “embrace it [religion] fully.” She recognized that it “became a form of survival and even at that moment when it was forced on us.” However, despite knowing the historical facts that religion played in the colonization, she knew she cannot and would not challenge her mother because her mother is very religious. Instead, she said with confidence, “I’ll just be there for my mom.” Ella realized that attending church makes her mother happy, is helpful to her, and that her mother would say, “this is what I practice to save my soul.”
Spirituality was a prominent theme and underpinned the collective testimonios that captured the participants’ gifts discussed in mental, physical, and spiritual contexts and experiences.

Malin recognized her “lifelong quest for healing.” She indicated that since she became a therapist, she appreciated her experiences “helping others in their quest for healing and being a witness to their healing.” She said, “it’s phenomenal, I feel like I’m a midwife” and “feel blessed” to help people heal. Her gift is parallel to her grandmother, who was a curandera [healer] and assisted with midwifery.

Zella’s testimonio about her gift of “healing hands” was recognized as a young girl. She remembers her hands would blister for no apparent reason. Once while visiting her grandmother, her aunt was not feeling well and later became ill, and Zella’s hands blistered. Her grandmother, a curandera, took Zella to see her mentor, another curandera. The two curanderas confirmed, “You have healing hands, and from now on, whenever you are in an area or somewhere where somebody is not feeling well, your hands are going to get hot.” They performed a “ritual prayer thing.” She explained, “They did some stuff with my hands.” She apprenticed with her grandmother, helping her prepare tinctures; her grandmother would ask her opinion, and Zella would offer suggestions. She indicated, “I don’t know why, but I could taste it, I could feel it.” After that, as she was growing up, her mother would encourage her to use her gift. She would often say, if someone had a headache or cramps, “masaje la cabeza, pon las manos en el estómago” [massage their head, put your hands on their stomach]. According to Zella, she continued using her gift but did not realize until she was an adult that what was going on “was a good.”
Similarly, Clarissa’s gift manifested in her ability to connect with spirits, specifically her deceased relatives. She defined spirituality as “really working with myself and the creator and, you know, asking my spirit guides to guide me.” She said, “it’s hard” and offered an example of connecting with spirits. The event occurred on her way to work early one morning. She indicated she woke up with “this really sad feeling in my chest.” She described it as intense and a sense of having her grandparents in her chest. She took deep breaths and told herself she was okay and just had to make it through the day. She began “crying and crying,” then she asked herself what she needed “to do right now.” Her parents’ house was on her way to work. Suddenly, Clarissa realized, “I need to give my mom and dad a hug.” She felt as though her “grandparents wanted to be with them at that moment.” She’s crying; it is 7:30 am; her mother asks, “What’s going on? What’s going on?” She tells her mother, “I need to hug you because all my grandparents, all my grandparents, mom are right here in my chest, and they’re telling me I need to come and hug you and dad right now.” She wondered if her mother understood and thought her father didn’t. She hugged her parents, and she thanked them. For Clarissa, that’s an example of the distinction between religion and spirituality. She said, “you know there’s a difference,” and “my mom would have got it if I would have said, oh God is telling me right now I need to come and hug you.” She went on, “But because of how I said it, she just was kind of like, yeah, what do you what do you mean?”

**Culture**

How participants discussed how culture manifested had religious undertones. Jewish heritage was part of Zella’s family; however, the traditions and rituals were not passed down.
She indicated that although she was part Jewish, she doesn’t celebrate Hanukkah “because my family didn’t celebrate it.” Though there was one remnant of Jewish culture, the hanging of a mezuzah; her mother hung one outside her door as Zella was growing up, and she continues that tradition today by hanging one outside her door. Admittedly, Zella stated, “I never really knew what that was.”

Zella explained her understanding of how culture is passed down. It is “the ancestors, the grandparents, the uncles that carry on their tradition, not only cultural tradition but religious tradition, and it gets handed down.” She indicated that whomever it gets passed down to, they make the decision regarding “how much they want to support it.” She confirmed that in her family, it was passed down through her grandfathers. She notes Catholicism was practiced in her family “because Catholicism was the religion of my grandmother’s husband.”

Malin learned from her sister that her father whose parents were “indigenous from the mountains” and “was self-taught in astronomy” would track astronomical events. She said he would sometimes “get them up in the middle of the night” and would say, “okay, we’re going to go and see a meteor shower everybody.”

Ella recalled her mother: “She was feeling a little weird, and she noticed that the kids at school were acting a little like they had a lot of energy.” Her mother then realized it was a full moon and said, “That’s why!” Ella could not help but tease her religious mother by saying, “sounds like you’re a bruja [witch], mama,” and continued, “which I’m sure there’s some of that in us.” She finished by saying she told her mother, “Hmmm, it doesn’t sound Catholic at all.” She went on to reflect, “taking those moments has like oh, this is my mom…making connections to the moon.”
A focus group participant said, “I believe that there’s a reason why things happen, and Buddhism has given me a lot of tools for adjusting and accepting and not falling into despair.”

**Leadership Pathways**

The findings from the gender discussion are offered as a backdrop before discussing the second research question, what participants say are the conditions that nurture Chicana leadership. Then afterward, the additional findings are presented and include obstacles, trauma, awareness, and healing.

**Gender**

To understand leadership from a gender perspective, participants interviewed were asked what it was like growing up female? Two of the most prevailing themes in the responses were role models and strong women, especially in the family. “Growing up female was good because I had such strong positive female role models in my life,” shared Clarissa. For example, she shared that her mother “spearheaded the strawberry business for our family,” and her grandmother raised six kids on her own as her husband was gone most often during the Bracero era. Although she never met her grandmother, who she described as “a strong, strong woman,” she credited her invaluable help her amidst her “most trying times” during her teenage years. When asked for clarification, Clarissa answered, “I wrote to her. I journaled with her. She would send me these signs to help guide me.”

In response to the same question, Bella answered, “Oh, boy. It was a challenge, growing up with three brothers.” She said, “It was a struggle for me like I’m feeling like my brothers can get away with things.” She added that she didn’t feel safe walking down the street.
Nevertheless, she pushed the boundaries and, as a result, was called “machorro” or “marimacha” [tomboy] because of her behaviors and how she dressed. Her mother responded, “Tu no te debes avistir así” [you should not dress like that]. Or “pero eso no es para mujeres” [but that is not for women]. She prefaced her remarks with “no es que me regañaba” [it’s not that she scolded me].

Zella answered, “I grew up in a family surrounded by serious ain’t no shit women,” comparing them to Rosie the Riveter types. In her family, the women led—they could do anything! From gender prescribed activities of making dresses, cooking, and cleaning. However, they could also engage in male-prescribed duties such as cutting the grass, building things, and “fixing a leaky roof.” She went on to say she grew up around women that did not “have the luxury or the room to say you can’t do it.” Of her grandmother, Z said, “my grandma ruled” and “she kicked butt.” But as daring as the women were, there were also cultural expectations. Zella shared that there was “an expectation especially living in Texas of how a woman or a girl or a wife should be not only in the South, but also being Latina.” She felt as though she always had to watch what she did and how she showed up. She could never “walk out the door without being dressed and made up.” She indicated that her mother was a “good example” and “followed the traditional thing to do.” However, both Zella and her mother would push the norms. Her mother divorced her father, which was unacceptable to Zella’s grandmother. She pushed the boundaries even more when she “got together with a White guy.” However, she indicates that her mother experienced an “epiphany of oh, my God, I can live differently than my dad, my mom.” When Zella married a White Jewish man, her mother could not only not “say anything about it,” she also had to answer to her
grandmother, who held an attitude of “you taught her how to be with a White guy kind of thing.” However, Zella would push the boundaries even further as she came out to her mother. However, there was a price to pay: she did not allow her to have a relationship with her brother and sister. But her siblings would secretly reach out to her sending her notes and cards.

Ella shared that through her experience growing up female, she always had a preview of life since her sister was about a year older than her and “experienced everything first.” She indicated that she was often excited, anticipating what was coming and realizing that “I’m next.” Such was the case when she started to menstruate and “knew exactly what was happening.” She said she “felt supported” because she had a role model in her sister. She stated that her “parents were not traditional in the gender role.” As “husband, wife, mother, father, like they did everything equally.” She shared that her father would take the children to union meetings while her mother went to school. He would make their lunch and braid their hair. There was one thing where she experienced an apparent difference, however, it was having sex before marriage. She was discouraged from having “sex before marriage” because “no one is going to want to marry you.” Conversely, her brother was given a safe sex talk.

Malin said, growing up female was “Oh, interesting.” She did not grow up with male figures except her brothers; she indicated that the women took on the traditional male roles expected in Mexican culture and family. She noted that her older sister “took on the character after my dad died . . . she was a leader.” She said that while her mother was a “traditional Mexican mom,” her sisters stepped in to raise her because of the trauma her mother was grappling with due to her husband dying and “experiencing the immigration trauma.”
shared that her mother “was raised in a time where she didn’t feel comfortable stepping into her full self.”

A focus group participant recalled a high school student sharing that she had the ambition to go to college, but her father was “very traditional.” There were the expectations that she would “just get married and have kids.” The participant shared with the student that getting a college degree was one of her regrets. The student shared the story with her father; her father then said it was okay for her to go to college.

**Nurturing Chicana Leadership**

Conditions that nurture leadership have already been discussed in the above findings, including supportive relationships with other women, family members, *comadres*, life partners, and allies. However, when asked about conditions that nurture Chicana leadership, respondents pointed to specific character traits such as respect, honesty, integrity, inspiration, and genuineness. Participants indicated that inspiration nurtures leadership—to feel inspired, there is a need to relate to and see herself in that person. Inspiration also comes from people who have made things better for others, people who “believe in you—it’s an investment,” explained Bella. Another way leadership is nurtured is by having strong supporters, role models, and teachers.

Maya Angelou’s famous quote, “People will never forget how you made them feel,” came to life as a participant shared, “feeling like you belong and like you matter in the world at this moment—a sense of safety to be courageous and go a little deeper.”

According to some participants, leadership also comes from within; leaders need to nurture and care for themselves. However, there was a strong sentiment that practicing self-
care is “so hard!” yet “we tell everyone to take care of themselves.” All participants gave examples of ways to practice self-care, such as going to the beach, taking a hike or a walk, gardening, meditating, reading a book, and spending time with friends. The connection to self-care promoting one’s leadership was well captured as Clarissa said, “Nurture yourself to promote your leadership.”

Support also nurtured leadership. Participants credited people in their professional, community, and personal lives when asked who had supported their leadership; they mentioned friends, colleagues, teachers, administrators, community members, supervisors, and other Chicanas. All the women interviewed credited their mothers with supporting, encouraging, and influencing their leadership. Other family members that were supportive were grandmothers, sisters, and aunts. Two participants adamantly credited their fathers for profoundly influencing their leadership, and one credited her husband.

Zella relates to support for her leadership to her coming out experience. She revealed, “Being gay takes a lot of courage . . . we didn’t have laws that protected people. But the people that said, I love you anyway. You know, those were the people that gave me the courage.” Participants shared that they were inspired by bilingual Chicana role models and felt they could attain those roles, and therefore felt supported by their leadership. As mentioned earlier, there was significant discussion about their leadership being supported by their ancestors.

**Obstacles**

Examining the pathway to leadership also requires examining what impedes leadership. While many conditions nurtured leadership, some obstacles impeded leadership. There was a
collective awareness that obstacles, hurts, and wounds can prevent one from acting as a leader. However, a commonly held perspective was that managing those hurts, wounds, and trauma could propel one to become a leader. External obstacles to leadership outside of the family included racism, prejudice, attitudes, and narratives that imply, “They are never going to amount to anything, so why should we invest in them,” said Bella. Also, Clarissa noted not having enough Chicana role models or learning about them or other people of color in school was an obstacle.

Another obstacle is “internalized oppression based on racism.” Clarissa mentioned Chicanas being too critical of one another as an obstacle. “Feelings” internalized can often be the root cause of leadership obstacles. For example, “feeling insecure, feeling like I’m not the right person” or not fitting in, said Ella. Bella wondered why “we’re not thinking about encouraging our children to become leaders.”

Zella indicated her mother’s influence on her caused confusion. She shared that she performed, danced, and sang on stage at an early age. At her performances, her mother often said with great pride, “mira, mira, mija” [look, look, my daughter] but would then tell her, “But don’t get too cocky.” She recalled that her mother was beaming with pride one minute and discouraging her in another.

**Trauma**

Trauma was a theme that cut across the participants, including intergenerational trauma. Bella thought aloud, “When you experience trauma, what happens to your brain and your cognitive process?” Ella shared that she used to believe that dealing with trauma meant going to therapy, and after a few sessions, “you’re healed.” But then experienced that the wounds
triggered her and found it “so debilitating I would get mad at myself because this isn’t supposed to happen; I’m healed.” Zella shares her experience of being “disowned” for about two years after she came out to her mother. As mentioned earlier, Zella was not allowed to communicate with her siblings for two years.

Malin discussed her mother’s struggle with mental illness growing up. She stated, “I was disappointed in my mom” and “kind of mad” at her. She said she had the urge to tell her, “Come on, mom, get it together.” However, one assignment—to conduct an oral history—in her Feminism 101 class changed everything. She interpreted her mother’s experience differently. “I understood that she didn't have a chance.” Through this assignment, she not only learned of her mother’s early life trauma but also of her grandmother and aunt's experiences of being robada.³ She learned that her grandmother did not want to be married but was “forced to marry her abductor,” and her aunt “had to stay with her abductor and raise a family with him.” Through this assignment, Malin “discovered the power of oral history.” She didn’t know what that was, and I remember when she was alive, I understand that I was like that, but what I understand now is that there was so much trauma when she was growing up because her father died, too. “So, what I am piecing together in my mind is she got re-traumatized when my father died because she had experienced that as a child.” She went on to lament the absence of mental health services at the time and that her mother had internalized the trauma and never talked about it.

³ The term robada refers to women who are tainted because they have been abducted and are forced to marry their abductors.
Participants discussed adversity through struggles, obstacles, and trauma, and they also shared moments and times of awakening, awareness, and consciousness.

**Hurt, Wound and Trauma**

Focus group participants were asked to share thoughts that came up for them when they heard the words “hurt, wound, and trauma.” In response, one participant said, “They are very strong words” another said that it made her think of how Latinas are portrayed as *sufridas* [through media] but that they are “more badass than ‘sufridas.’”

One participant said it reminded her of embarrassing and traumatizing meetings and situations where she felt she should not be taking up space— “it makes me feel small.” She explained that it happened when she tried to explain something or people questioned or disagreed with her in a “confrontational way.” Participants indicated that the words evoked a sense of “deal with some or all of your past.” Another said it reminded her of being “talked over in meetings.” One participant indicated that it made her think of the “immense responsibility to acknowledge the trauma,” including “earth trauma.” She elaborated that it is incumbent on leaders to restore and bring peace to the community.

One participant shared a story about a newly formed Chicana group of community activists. She tells a story of how disappointment shows up in leadership when planning a conference for Chicanas. She hoped to create friends and do friend activities in that process. However, she discovered that it was not about “building friendships or creating sororities, it was about doing caucus work in this group.” That meant there was a goal to accomplish to plan and implement a conference. The conference was remarkably successful, with over a hundred attendees in a relatively small community. However, she pulled away from the
group and found herself blamed and “torn apart” by other Chicanas for pulling away. Retrospectively, she realizes that she raised their hopes, their hopes were let down, and they got hurt, then mad at her. As a result, she “grew afraid of leadership.” Another participant chimed in that leaders sometimes do things that hurt other people, “but strong leaders do what is right.” Both participants agreed that there would be disappointments, and when there is a disappointment, leaders get blamed.

Participants discussed adversity through struggles, obstacles, and trauma, and they also shared moments and times of awakening, awareness, and consciousness.

**Awareness (Awakening) and Consciousness**

Similar to Mali sharing her awareness to reframe her mother’s trauma contextually, other participants shared experiences that exemplified their awareness of oppression, how it manifested in their lives, and how they managed it.

Bella’s awareness that she experienced and managed sexism came as she described her mother’s *consejos* about navigating the world independently. Taking Chicano studies courses gave Ella language and a frame of reference to understand her experience. She summarized her experience during that time: “That’s where I started uncovering my own identity and defining that for myself.”

Both Ella and Clarissa had stories about the awareness of the struggles of the UFW. Ella remembers her father taking her and her siblings to Union meetings, playing with her brother, pretending to be union negotiators, and asking her father about Cesar Chavez when she learned about his role in the UFW in college. Making a connection to the UFW, she asked her father, “Did you really know Cesar Chavez? Is that real, and he stopped what he was
doing, and he looked at me like, in my eyes, and he said, asi como estamos hablando, yo conoci a Chavez” [just like we are talking, I met Chavez]. She said, she was impressed that her father met Chavez and that he reported that he was “one in a million like he was a unique person.” Clarissa remembered learning about the UFW grape boycott in middle school or high school. She indicated that hearing it on the news made a “big impact” on her. She remembered wanting to talk to her father, a grower and anti-union, but he never wanted to engage in a conversation. She reflected, “It took me a while to understand his point of view.” But her father’s actions spoke loudly; she recalled a “time when the migra [immigration raid] came.” She vividly recounted how her father had instructed the workers to leave and go into their home that was nearby: “I remember sitting there and my dad telling me close all the curtains.”

Clarissa’s testimonio of awareness goes back to working with youth at an alternative school decades ago. She tapped into the difference between alternative practices and approaches that resonated with students. She integrated Indigenous practices such as “talking sticks,” meeting in “circles,” and using the Aztec calendar in the curriculum. She mentioned that much of what they did back then is what “schools are trying to incorporate” now. She recalled, “When I was growing up, there was hardly any books written by Chicano authors or any stories about Chicanos.” But, she says, as her kids were growing up, she read them what few books by or about Chicanos she could find. She made it a point to have such books at the school she works at, so they are available when children come in. She sometimes reads the books to the students when they ask about them. Clarissa shared a story of running into one of the previous students from her early years of teaching. Her former student, a nurse, told
her she wanted to thank her for the book that Clarissa read to them: “That book just always stayed with me; it made such a big impression on me.” Clarissa added that she is not the only one of her former students that thanked her for something that she “taught them that revolved around Chicano history or Chicana history.” When probed about whether she believes education can be a foundation for leadership? She responded, “yes, it can if it’s taught in the correct way.” A follow-up question to Clarissa is if strategies include exposure to books, contexts, history classes, and representation. She affirmed the strategy. Another follow-up question is if she believes she is “planting seeds?” She noted that it is not just planting seeds through using a textbook: “It’s important to plant seeds in the conversation you have with the students, planting seeds, and being that example for the students.” She emphasized the importance of making a connection and “having those talks” with students.

Zella’s sense of “something ain’t right” underpinned her intuitive knowing and awareness and consciousness. She employed that awareness and consciousness as she discussed the implications of navigating heterosexism as it manifested when she came out. She offered that when one comes out, “You pull your whole family out of the closet too because they have to come out to their friends that they’ve got a gay kid.” She suggested that family members must address their feelings of “that makes me uncomfortable” or their thoughts of “What’s my boss going to say, what are they going to think about me because I have a gay kid.” She said, “You know, so it’s not just me coming out of the closet; I pull my whole family out of the closet.”

The following Testimonio captures how Malin’s environment influenced her critical consciousness. Malin indicated, “participation in social justice is really related to my feeling
connected to my Mexican culture, directly, and that is because of our state in Guanajuato. You know that’s where the Mexican Revolution started. People are very progressive in Guanajuato in general. It’s almost part of our DNA.” She believes that people from that area are progressive, no matter where they immigrate. She said, “This is my theory, that it’s really that connection to our state and our town in Mexico. That it is oral histories passed down generations before people immigrated, because our grandparents were part of the experience of the Mexican Revolution and the hardships. So, our state, you know, that’s the Cradle of the Revolution, right.” Her father and where he’s from have influenced her; she says, “I carry that Mexican identity and that sense of work towards social justice.” Her family came from the “Cradle of the Revolution” in Mexico. But growing up in Oakland in her teen years also shaped her consciousness. Malin said, “You almost can’t live in Oakland and not have a political perspective; it’s like living in Berkeley.” She pointed to the prevalence of “overt racism because there are many people of color, African Americans Asian, you know, immigrants.” She said you could see the institutional discrimination playing out, in politics, housing, and job and educational attainment. She indicated the discrimination she faced in her “little classroom” in her previous elementary school paled in comparison to what she witnessed in Oakland. As a result, Malin found herself gravitating toward movements that “empower people and movements that create change and improvement in people’s daily lives; equality and social justice.”

A focus group participant asked, “What moves you from prayer to action?” When probed, another participant shared her story of being at a conference in Sacramento—three hours away from home—focused on healthcare for women, and she noticed that most of the
participants in the room were Latinas. That experience made her wonder, “Why can’t this happen in my community?” This would be the impetus for her to lead a successful conference with 130 participants in 1981. She indicated that the conference three hours away exposed her and raised her consciousness about possibilities. However, a question lingered; she wasn’t sure how it happened. She indicated there could be awareness, but what makes the shift, she wondered? Probing even more with the question, “What made a housewife organize and pull off a successful conference for over 100?” she paused to answer the question and indicated that she attended the university and had heard about the conference. When asked how she got there? She said she had gone with friends. I clarified the question of how she got to the university? The participant paused, reflected, and remembered that her dad encouraged education.

**Healing**

Participants mentioned many forms of healing, including spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental. Several participants noted that healing is a “process” that evolves; however, Bella stated, “not sure if we ever fully like 100% heal.” Collectively, the participants indicated that hurt, wounds, and trauma, whether experienced internally or externally through racism, prejudice, and attitudes, require healing to access leadership. They were asked to define healing. Bella said, “healing is sort of like that act towards like trying to be whole again.” Malin said, “healing is the reintegration of the self from the hurts that have negatively impacted our lives and prevented us from being the full person we can be.” Clarissa said, “healing is coming to terms with what traumatized me. I’m coming to terms with all my hurts
and wounds, knowing that everything has happened for a reason.” Zella defined healing as “forgiveness and continuing the legacy that heals you.”

Specifically, Bella assessed, “The injustices women of color have faced . . . makes them more distrustful of others.” She went on to say, “a lack of trust can really affect you,” and “it is possible to heal from that.” Ella contemplated, “A lot of us Chicanas become who we are because of the struggle that we’ve experienced.” There was a collective sense that the experiences that required healing were painful and traumatic, and they must be embraced in an uncomfortable and unique way. Ella said, “The more that I step into that healing, the more I find I need to heal, but the stronger I feel.” She continued, “that hurt fuels our passion.”

As participants shared healing stories, Malin captured a collective sentiment, “Amazing healing is happening in people’s lives.” As a result, Ella said, “we become beautiful people—phenomenal women.” However, Clarissa clarified, “it can go both ways”; sometimes, the hurt and wounds that traumatize are the impetus for becoming strong leaders but can also impede their leadership. Ella stated, “It is our responsibility to recognize the good and the bad of that experience.” She warned that “uncured trauma” would limit us if we don’t uncover it. However, she said, we get to decide when with who and how. She cautioned, “But if it goes uncovered, then that’s as far as we get.”

Questioned about the healing that took place between her and her mother, Zella indicated, “She loved me more than she wanted to be away from me.” She said they were good friends and had a “really good time” together. She said, “I think it was her love and her missing me that made her less reactive, but not welcoming.” Zella offered that she understands her
“mother’s side because her husband turned out to be gay.” She stated that she believed her mother was proud of her and admired her courage.

Malin not only addressed her own healing but also said, “I’m a midwife supporting people in their healing, and it’s kind of like hospice work to me. I feel blessed to be in that role to help mediate people’s healing and witness them become more whole persons and reintegrate themselves.” It’s a lifelong process, Malin noted; “it’s not just your therapist but your support network that will move you along in that process.”

Most participants indicated that healing involves self-care, including a connection to nature, such as gardening and “getting my hands into Mother Earth and asking her to help guide me.” In addition, they used ancestral healing rituals that include sage and smudging to get rid of negative energy in the home and ask the creator to help guide their decision.

After participants addressed healing from hurts, wounds, and trauma, they were asked how they managed stress and trauma. All the interviewees had a combination of practices to manage stress and trauma. Some had a spiritual practice that stemmed from Eastern or Indigenous beliefs. They practiced self-care, including meditation, exercise, and mindful eating. They leaned on their network of women, friends, and comadres. Acknowledging and pinpointing the cause of the stress and trauma is key to addressing it. Bella pointed out that the need to be resilient could sometimes encourage “downplaying our experiences” of trauma. Zella felt strongly that a strategy for managing stress and trauma was to let go and not believe that “God punishes you.” Another point made by Malin to manage stress and trauma is an ongoing process that calls for a conscious commitment. Ella recognized that “what we do for our physical bodies, like showering and eating, are a constant thing” that
holds true for healing—it is a “daily and life-long practice.” Generally, and collectively, participants believed that healing from hurts, wounds, and trauma is not only possible, but also required to take on leadership.

**Healing**

Focus group participants were asked to share thoughts that came up for them when they heard the word “healing.” They responded that healing meant bringing people together to figure things out, opening up one’s heart, a willingness to forgive and accept, working through hurt, wounds, and trauma to heal and find resiliency. They indicated that while adversity is sometimes the “foundation that keeps us moving,” it is “necessary for leaders to heal.” One person stated that as a concept, “healing is universal,” and another referenced elders and said, “leaders are healers and healers are leaders.”

**Leadership Manifestation and Recognition**

Findings from the third research question: How do participants say leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community? Begin with responses to that question. Subsequent responses include what Chicanas need to be leaders, the advice they would give to other Chicana leaders, their future leadership, and conclude with a discussion of finding home—Chicana liberation.

In response to how leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community, participants indicated that “we have leadership,” such as elected officials, specifically women of color, in congressional and senatorial roles and administrators. They also gave examples of how leadership manifests in ways recognized in the mainstream and in ways that it is not.
Examples of how leadership manifest was nestled in communication. Specific comments from participants suggested that leadership manifests when people listen and make eye contact, they stop what they were doing to listen and when they are “respectful, polite, and genuine.” As previously discussed, participants indicated that leadership manifests through respectful, authentic communication and interactions; Ella captured a common sentiment among the participants, “those things are never really even brought up as leadership traits.”

When asked about how leadership manifests in the Chicana community, Malin responded that it manifested through public figures such as Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez. However, she said of leadership that, “it’s very broad, and it’s stepping into situations that require supporting someone.” Raising the hardships of the “immigrant experience” as an example. She delved deeper, indicating that leadership was not recognized. “No, absolutely not, not in this country.” She says, “I don’t think it is recognized. The cynical part of me says that’s on purpose, that’s on purpose to keep people from stepping in and ... to keep people oppressed.” She went on to say that not only is it not recognized, but also in “Anglo culture,” leadership is defined narrowly, and “it’s a way to keep people from getting into leadership roles.”

When asked if their leadership was recognized, Zella confirmed that it was “but they didn’t have the word leadership” back when she was growing up. When probed, she indicated that these were the women that people went to for help, these were the women that got things done, and these were the role models.

When asked how leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community? Bella responded, “It’s hard; there’s a struggle; there’s a huge lack.” She lamented, “I haven’t
had a lot of Latina or Chicana leaders in my life,” indicating that most have been White. She wondered if it was because of the area she lived in and said, “I just keep searching, where are these women, like am thinking like where’s my community?” She went on to say, “where do I find them. Which just makes me question, like, what’s missing in our system that these women are not being acknowledged.”

Clarissa indicated being a positive role model is a leadership act as it encourages others to look up to you, which in turn encourages others “to incorporate some of those qualities.” She also said, “I don’t think it’s recognized enough.”

Ella believed that leadership manifests in how a person treats others through authentic communication and behavior when no one is watching. However, when asked if that type of leadership is recognized, she indicated that it is not recognized in the “traditional” or “conventional” ways, such as the ability to do public speaking or engage charismatically. However, she indicated that she does not recognize that as leadership.

**What Chicanas Need to Be Leaders**

When asked what Chicanas need to be leaders, the responses fell into broad categories: (a) a space that nurtures leadership, (b) to be treated with respect and dignity, (c) positive role models, (d) institution level, and (e) an “amplified vision.”

When asked what Chicanas need to be leaders, Bella said, “they need the space” to have their leadership nurtured. Several participants indicated there are not enough spaces that nurture or provide opportunities for Chicanas to be leaders. Ella zeroed in on the lack of “opportunities or spaces to sit with ourselves.” Bella also said that there aren’t accessible leadership programs, and when there are, they are cost-prohibitive.
Participants shared their experiences and how they’ve been treated—many of those experiences encouraged or impeded leadership. To support Chicana leadership, Ella advised, “believe us when we show up; it takes so much for us to speak up.” She explained how she is treated when seeking services at a doctor’s office or bank. She asserted, “Give me that respect; acknowledge that I’m there, and provide the service to me that you provide to everyone else.” She shared her discouragement by how people are treated based on how they look and not “for the value they bring” and losing the opportunity to “work together to make a change.”

Generally, and collectively, participants said that Chicanas need to seek and find positive role models, whether in the family, community or broader. Clarissa said that they need to support each other to “find opportunities, open doors, and encourage one another.”

Malin distinguished what Chicanas need from an institution or non-institution level. She said, institutionally, increasing the opportunities for educational attainment by offering supportive systems like EOP “to rectify the injustices is necessary.” She went on to explain the need to disrupt the good old boys’ network that manifests when white folks “hired their white friends from the same agency—that’s how it worked.” She acknowledged that “there’s a concerted effort to change, but it doesn’t have to be that hard.” She suggested, “start your own program...thinking about how the agency can recruit and retain.”

Chicanas indicated that there must be an “amplified vision” that includes capacity, time, interest, and the planting of “little seeds” to encourage and support Chicana leadership.
What **Consejos** or Advice Would You Give to Other Chicanas?

For some of the participants, the idea of giving advice was not appropriate; however, reframing the question to what **consejos** would you give changed the spirit of the inquiry. In response to this question, a key theme recognizes one’s power manifested in skills and the ability to be a leader who inspires others. Bella described her **consejo**: “Recognize your own power, you’re fully capable of inspiring other people and becoming a leader.” Chicanas are encouraged to look to other women who inspire them, reflect on their inspirational qualities, and emulate those qualities. Zella urges, “Don’t be afraid. Do not limit yourself. Be proud of you!” Interviewees called for tapping into confidence and addressing chatter counterproductive to leadership. “You have the ability to be a leader regardless of whatever narrative you might have that you’re not capable of or that you’re not fit to be a leader,” said Bella.

Other **consejos** include the idea that leadership is a skill that can be built upon. Ella emphasized the importance of trusting intuition and following “your heart.” In addition, there is the need to process life experiences and recognize how they “continue to show up in our lives, and how they shaped who we are,” said Ella. Furthermore, relationships are critical to leadership, not just the relationship with others but the relationship “with yourself to understand all those pieces and identities that we carry,” said Ella.

Malin began her response with “**consejos** of encouragement,” pointing out that life is a marathon that brings learning opportunities and challenges, maybe even trauma. She indicated that through experience, she learned that sometimes a challenge “feels like it is going to be forever” and may bring up “anxiety and maybe even depression, and we can get
stuck there, and so the trick is to have hope.” She encourages Chicanas to show up and be willing to do the work whatever it may be: “It will change the world; the world is not static.”

There was a strong message to “be more in balance to experience that true like peace and calm that comes with just knowing who we are.” At the heart of the suggestions for striking balance was authenticity and self-care, which is captured by Clarissa: “Be you, do you, learn from your mistakes” and the warning that there are “going to be times when you want to give up but be resilient and take care of yourself.”

**Chicana Leadership Lived**

Participants were asked if they identified as leaders. Here are their responses: Because she considers herself an introvert, Bella has difficulty identifying as a leader. However, she indicates she “will speak up when necessary.” Zella responded emphatically, “Sure, sure!” For Ella being a leader means thinking of “the younger kids in my family and other kids.” Setting an example is important to her; she constantly asks herself how she would I act if they were around? She said, “I want to provide the best example, even if they’re not around.” Malin identifies as a leader specifically through her actions, she initiates leadership in her community, and she looks out for the interest of the next seven generations.

Clarissa responded, “no and yes.” She struggles to identify as a leader because she is in a new role as an administrator. However, she said, “As a high school teacher or after-school program coordinator for several years, I would say, Yes, I was a leader in those settings.” She also notes that she is a leader in her family.
**Identify as a Leader?**

Most focus group participants considered themselves leaders, some unequivocally and others conditionally. However, in small groups, some felt they could lead quietly. One participant indicated she felt like a leader sometimes; another said others had told her that she was a leader, and another said it was hard for her to own it personally. They saw themselves as leaders in accepting leadership roles, being present, “handing over the baton,” inspiring and encouraging others, sharing knowledge and wisdom, working for social justice and social change, having cultural context and cultural framework. One participant indicated that it is not necessary to have followers to be a leader.

When asked about what leadership would be like in their future, Chicanas responded that (a) they could see themselves working collectively, (b) leading by their values, (c) reflecting on their past experiences, and (d) healing from trauma.

Chicanas indicated they could see themselves working with and supporting other women, Chicanas, working as part of a team. However, Bella grappled with the desire to work with other Chicanas but did not know how. A reoccurring pattern was living by the values instilled by their parents. For Ella, it was important to set examples “to pass on to the next generation.” She elaborated, “Since I was little, my mother would say, no hagas cosas malas que parescan buenas, y no hagas cosas buenas que parescan malas. And for me, that means, have your intentions clear when you do something because someone’s always going to have something to say about what you do, whether it’s good or bad.”

Participants held a positive attitude about their leadership in the future. To reflect on their leadership in the future, they looked back at their past experiences, including the traumatic
ones. For example, Malin said, “I had to find my way,” and that she needed to heal from the experience of having lost her father at an early age. Clarissa reflected, “the first thing that comes to mind is positive; there are some leaders out there who are not positive.” Zella is committed to being a role model for others who can look at her and think, “If she can do it, I can do it.”

One focus group participant said, “You know, so I’m handing the baton over to another generation to keep them going.” She underscored the importance of modeling in one’s character and actions, especially “in terms of a stance or resistance is very important.”

**Finding Home: Chicana Liberation**

The findings provided examples of how leadership is defined by the participants, the pathways to leadership, and how leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community. It has also pointed to liberation by recognizing and owning leadership. One significant finding that has not yet been discussed is the concept of a “home” as it manifested in these Chicanas finding themselves, being in their element, and living on their own terms—a definition of liberation. The idea/concept of home was something more than geographic. Through their stories, participants epitomized a sense of belonging, a sense of safety, and living authentically in the present. Participants shared how they worked toward their liberation: to be free, present, deliberate, direct, and lead in their own lives. They shared defining moments in their lives where they found themselves “at home.”

Zella described an exhilarating experience of the first time she went to a gay bar shortly after coming out. She said she was in heaven: “staying up all night and dancing at a bar with a whole bunch of girls and seeing them kiss and oh my God and they’re not in trouble
nobody’s going to tell on them.” Far away from home, she didn’t have to worry that anyone knew her or would tell on her. That experience gave her unconditional permission to love another woman, “it was that oh my God, I can do this, too.” After that, she said, she “couldn’t come out enough,” introducing herself as a lesbian at every opportunity she had. She was in her element; she was home.

Bella talked about moving from Southern California to Central California. She was born in Los Angeles and spent summers there with her dad and his family. She was primarily raised in San Diego with her mother and brothers and often spent weekends in Tijuana. When she moved to a city on the central coast that she describes as “felt strangely like home to me, and it continues to feel like home to me.” She also reflected that now that she is older, she has a different experience of what it means to be a woman, indicating, “I get to define that, now!”

Bella described home as a sanctuary away from the racism in school: “I was mostly outdoors. I was an outdoors kid, every day after school.” She described climbing a tree in her backyard: “Hang out and watch, you know I enjoy people, not knowing that I was there.” She shares that being outdoors was a very healing experience.

Ella found her “home” place at San Francisco State University in Chicano Studies and Latino Studies courses. She states, “That’s where I really found like, this is where I belong. And, like, learning about the history of colonization and the impact that had, and that it still has on our communities.” She states that Raza Studies “made me feel alive.” She started volunteering at a student-run clinic in San Francisco’s Mission District, finding yet another
place of home where people were “passionate” about the work they were doing, and the spirit of the mission overlapped with Raza Studies.

Clarissa captured being at home as she talked about being in nature with her “feet on Mother Earth,” feeling the “positive energy that she has.” She described feeling the wind, taking deep breaths, and releasing; she stated, “you know it’s healing.” She is at home in her garden, where she talks about “my hummingbirds that come and visit me.” She shared that she also gets a visit from her “elder who comes and visits me at night when I call.” She knows with confidence that things are going to be all right.

**Liberation**

In the focus group, when asked about what came to mind when they heard the word liberation, participants responded with words and phrases. For example, they said, “freeing . . . being free . . . being unshackled . . . I am free of that anger . . . you no longer have control over me.” They also responded with thoughts and concepts; liberation meant to “deconstructing 600 years of systemic racism,” or “forgiveness” and “releasing.” Liberation in the context of gender indicated releasing gender roles and recognizing the work needed to be done in the Latino community regarding gender roles. It also suggested addressing the stigma of not being married or not having children. Liberation meant, “being comfortable in one’s skin,” and “loving oneself unconditionally.” One participant said that liberation meant undoing the effects of personal, political, or institutional oppression. “So, when you can finally stand in your own integrity and your own true self that respects yourself, loves yourself, and that acknowledges your leadership and everything good about you—then you are truly free.”
Summary

This chapter has summarized the findings and results of the study. These findings provide rich data to answer the research questions, how do Chicanas define leadership? What are the conditions that nurture Chicana leadership? How does leadership manifest and is recognized in the Chicana community?

The findings are a result of individual interviews and focus groups. Through both, there was a deliberate focus on creating a space for participants to share on their terms, thus creating a channel for trust and personal reflection—leading to complex and intersectional themes that emerged. Through their authentic sharing, participants defined leadership on their terms and through their experience; the examples they offered were layered in culture, language, relationships, and spirituality. They shared the values, conditions, and people, including self, that nurture leadership. They affirmed that Chicana leadership exists and manifests in the everyday actions of Chicana life and is recognized without the label leadership.

Participant discussions revealed a legacy of healers and courageous and forward-thinking leaders. The study created a forum to discuss experiences of oppression and examine that oppression in hindsight to reframe and understand it differently. This methodology was critical in yielding fresh insights and showing the intersection of key themes.

They painstakingly talked about intergenerational familial trauma and struggles spanning multiple generations as they shared Testimonios of overcoming adversity through their strengths and resiliency.
The collective sharing from the participants invites an analysis, conclusions, implications, and recommendations discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Five: Analyses, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

A woman with six children loses her husband. After the funeral, as she sits quietly with her head hung down, her siblings tell her that she will have to split up her children because there is no way she can take care of them on her own. Shaking but never lifting her head, she says, “If one of my children will be eating rice and beans, all my children will eat rice and beans. No one will split up my children.”

This story epitomizes leadership being revealed through adversity and resilience; adversity as the essential impetus to exercise leadership, coupled with resilience underpinned by culture, spirituality, and reverence for relationships.

This chapter summarizes the study, analyzes findings and conclusions, offers recommendations for practice and future research, and concludes with implications for better understanding Chicana leadership.

Summary of the Study

Statement of the problem: Chicana leadership exists, but it has been ignored, unrecognized, and dismissed (Cordova & Knecht, 2019; García, 2014; Gonzalez, 1998). This study proposed to research unrecognized leadership in the Chicana family and community guided by three research questions: (a) How do Chicanas define leadership? (b) What are the conditions that nurture Chicana leadership? And (c) How does leadership manifest and become recognized in the Chicana community?

The research study took place between November 2021 and January 2022. I interviewed five participants two times per person, and I conducted two focus groups. Using a Testimonio methodology to gather data and a CFE lens to analyze the data, two overarching
intergenerational themes emerged: the roles of adversity and resilience in fostering leadership among Chicana women.

**Analytical Overview of Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

This section provides an analytical overview of the findings and conclusions from this study. This study examined unrecognized Chicana leadership and provided the opportunity to explore leadership in its “everydayness,” through family stories, and in a broader historical context. The participants of this study and the women they discussed demonstrated leadership through their relationships as mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, *comadres*, friends, and through culture and spirituality. The emergence of consciousness and awareness was critical to their path to leadership. For these Chicanas, leadership manifested through resilience and navigating adversity.

**RQ 1: How Do Chicanas Define Leadership?**

In this section, I define leadership from a Chicana perspective, with adversity and resilience emerging as key elements of the definition.

Collectively, study participants defined leadership in practices that included meaningful and authentic communication through respect and heart; consideration of others by leading through example and serving as a role model; personal and professional growth through healing and stretching oneself; confidence to confront adverse situations; and a responsibility to family and community. They also contrasted leadership in mainstream communities where it appeared to be about “title, status, and money.” However, delving deeper to examine the impetus and motives for leadership in the Chicana community provided a fuller definition of Chicana leadership.
Leadership Impetus

Adversity was a key feature in the lives of study participants due to the oppression of Chicanas and their families as they lived in the Southwest. Specific accounts related to the Bracero Program, immigration, and segregation (Acuña, 1981; Hayes-Bautista, 1980). Participants indicated that these historical forces had personal and specific impacts on their lives. For instance, the Bracero Program was an agreement between the United States and Mexico from 1942 to 1964, under which millions of Mexican laborers came to the United States temporarily (Acuña, 1981). The Bracero program forced women to raise their children as single mothers in Mexico, creating family tensions and struggles. As women migrated from Mexico and left behind family support, mothers were forced to uproot their children in search of better conditions. One of the lasting results of immigration has been personal trauma and familial disruption. Upon reaching and settling in the United States, the lived experience of segregation in the United States was also confusing at best and traumatizing at worst.

Similarly, the education system set up conditions of adversity for these women. As children attend school, they navigate and experience the two different worlds of home and school. The educational system was one of the earliest exposures to systematic oppression; participants shared experiences in the educational system that created confusion, hurt, and trauma. For example, a participant told me how she and some of her classmates were denied a prize they had earned for their fundraising efforts; this left a lasting impression on her of the insidious injustices of the educational system. Another participant reflected on her parents’ experiences of being prohibited from speaking their home language, Spanish, at
school. This is a classic example of how injustices fester for generations; it captures the way that intergenerational trauma is not only passed down but builds additional layers. Many parents of that generation, doing what they thought was best for their children, chose not to teach their children Spanish in order to spare them the trauma they had endured. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to them, speaking English would not protect their children from oppression and racism. In fact, children must be prepared to navigate a hostile world that manifests in both physical and emotional ways; they must be warned about the intentional and unintentional destruction of their being based on the color of their skin (Coates, 2015).

Coates points out that the annihilation may come from those who are supposed to protect people: “all of this is common to black people. And all of this is old for Black people.” This sentiment echoes the feelings of study participants; it captures their exhaustion from intergenerational trauma.

**Leadership Motivation**

The study revealed that the impetus for leadership was often related to a response to adverse conditions. The participants discussed their responses as obligatory, indicating that some women had no choice or simply could not say no. For example, participants acknowledged women who were forced to marry their abductors and raise their children with them because they had no choice. Then there were the mothers that worked tirelessly to support their children and the women that raised their children as single mothers living under adverse conditions. There were the participants whose situations were not adverse but felt they could not say no to their mothers out of reverence for the adversity their mothers had faced; one participant realized in her 30s that it was no longer about her.
In all of these situations, the women made decisions, even when feeling that they had no choice. Through their stories, it was clear that specific factors and forms of awareness were motivating them. The desire for a better future for those they loved motivated them to overcome whatever challenging situation they faced. In every instance, the choices they made had to do with their family, most often their children. Something meant more to them than simply enduring the adversity they were facing.

**Gender**

Participants described adverse aspects of growing up female. They experienced a sense of unfairness, specifically regarding what male siblings got away with. Double standards regarding sexuality were part of this. Inequitable treatment at home because of being female established a sense of injustice in the consciousness of the participants early on and primed them for resistance later in life.

Participants shared experiences of struggles they and the women in their lives—mainly their mothers—faced. They were conscious of the strong women in their lives, the sacrifices they made, the choices they were forced to make, and their resilience. This awareness contradicts the depiction of the stereotypical submissive, martyred Mexican woman. Instead, these are women who made conscious decisions and sacrifices with a purpose: for the wellbeing of their children. Examples are the mother who decided to raise six children on her own rather than have them split up and the mother that worked long hours to put her children through private school. Sending their children to private school is a goal sought out by many Chicana families, and accomplishing such a goal is a source of pride (Zavella, 2001). The literature supports mothers’ sacrifices to put their children through private school. Jo Anna
Mixpe Ley writes about her mother, “Como superwoman, she morphed from mi mami, to la mujer que limpia casas, to the factory worker, y la mujer who cleaned hotels, all to pay the tuition for my ‘private eskool’ education” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p 19).

Mixpe Ley further reflects on her experience of attending a private school across town that differed significantly in terms of race and class, including the topic of what mothers do in their everydayness as they send their children off to school. She describes receiving la bendición [a blessing], tenderness expressed through a kiss, ensuring she is protected from the elements with a coat, and giving some form of consejo. In this case, her mother tells her to tell anyone who asks that she works at a hospital. Her understanding of the sacrifice her mother made is captured in the following quote: “I was unaware that sacrifice signified that my mother would be willing to eliminate her own identity if it meant that one of her children could survive” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 19).

To fully understand the gender role in leadership regardless of culture, maternal intuition and thinking must be considered. Ruddick (1980) contends that “maternal practices begin in love” and that mothers are compelled to protect their children and nurture their development. This will be discussed further in the section that addresses how leadership manifests. This assertion helps to understand how the women related to this study were willing to put the needs of their children first; it is an understanding of their children’s vulnerability and a desire to protect them.

*Managing Adversity Through Resilience*

As observed in this study, resilience was a gateway to leadership and was mediated by cultural factors. Resilience can be defined as a particular form of strength that has fed
Chicanas’ recognition of and resistance to oppression over decades and centuries. Resilience was incubated and shaped by cultural, familial, spiritual, and healing experiences. As a result, participants proved that they and the women in their lives could navigate and overcome adversity by drawing on their inherent resilience.

In this study, it was evident how cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) and practices influenced daily interactions. For example, within the concept of the *bien educado* there is an expectation that one will conform to certain practices such as *saludando* [greeting / acknowledging]. The simple practice of *saludando* has powerful implications for leadership: it sets expectations and establishes human connections. To illustrate this dynamic, consider an event that took place in this study. Before commencing with one of the focus groups, we engaged in a *conocimiento* process, which is an introduction beyond names. After the participants introduced themselves, I introduced myself and indicated we would be starting. Without saying a word, one of the participants nodded her head to the side and looked in the direction of the research assistant whom I had failed to acknowledge. Gratefully, I apologized, asked the research assistant to introduce herself, and thanked the participant for bringing it to my attention. Initially, none of us had spoken any words through that exchange, but we had acknowledged a profound understanding and expectation. In effect, this participant tacitly assumed the leadership role through her action.

A practice such as *saludando* engages human connection; it is critical to this study because it highlights a cultural obligation to respect every person present. It is an underpinning for reverence in relationships, especially with mothers and elders. Such understandings and expectations were found throughout the study, where participants not
only reflected on their understanding of leadership but also exercised their leadership skills in
the group or in the interviews.

**Spirituality**

Most participants were influenced by religion, specifically Catholicism, through their
mothers and grandmothers. One participant described how she once thought being Mexican
meant being Catholic. As an adult, she developed a more critical lens, learning that religion
was imposed on Indigenous people and used as a tool to colonize them. However, having
acquired this critical lens, she is now able to recognize that the practice of religion can offer
genuine comfort. Religion appeared to be a predecessor for developing personal spirituality.
For many that spirituality manifested in Eastern and Indigenous practices in their adult lives.

Several participants brought up remnants of ancestral practices. Malin’s grandmother, a
curandera, assisted midwives. Malin sees herself as a “midwife” helping people labor
through their trauma. Zella, mentored by her grandmother, a curandera, continues to use her
“healing hands” in her health practice. Ella is cognizant of the implications of the ancestral
practices handed down over generations, such as observing the moon or the misunderstood
practice of brujería [witchcraft]. Clarissa maintained spiritual connections to her ancestors.
These practices are also strategies that may have helped survive intergenerational adversity
over the decades and centuries (Anzaldúa, 1987). All these examples epitomize the
underpinnings of leadership qualities but are usually not recognized as such in traditional
scholarship.
RQ 2: What Are the Conditions That Nurture Chicana Leadership?

As has been established through this study, Chicana leadership exists in multiple forms; what nurtures these many forms of Chicana leadership? In the next section, I discuss the elements such as relationships and belonging that nurture Chicana leadership. However, I begin with analyzing how language is key to understanding Chicana leadership and how it is nurtured.

Language

Language is critical to the analysis of this study, since it is a key element dividing the several worlds in which Chicanas live. Chicanas are caught between multiple worlds at different times. Communication, both verbal and nonverbal, exemplifies a contradiction between the English language and Chicana culture. For example, while predominantly speaking English for the study, participants used Spanish words and phrases that were indicative of the culture; this language carried tones of tenderness and terms of endearment that captured and reflected the relationship between reverence and cultural significance.

Often participants spoke in Spanish to introduce statements so they would not be misunderstood. For example, when sharing what her mother might have said, a participant prefaced her comment with, “no es que me regañaba” [not that she would scold me].

Participants sometimes grappled with words or phrases in English and found it easier to use Spanish to convey their intentions. Much like certain beliefs and concepts that cannot be captured and understood cross-culturally, some words could not be captured in English. While they were speaking English, primary sentiments were captured in Spanish.
Often, participants discussed the concept of leadership and leadership actions while never using the word leadership. This is understandable because the participants’ leadership concepts and actions do not align with how mainstream culture defines them, where leadership is often attributed to males and takes place in business and institutional settings. Chicana scholars understand the lack of framework. Hortencia Jiménez (2012) deems the leadership actions that manifest in the everyday lives of Chicanas often behind the scenes and in a familial context as “doing leadership.”

As previously discussed in the literature review, examining the use of language is critical to this study in that it brings voice to Chicana identity, struggles, and culture (Anzaldúa, 1987; Calderón et al., 2012; Martínez, 2002; Niemann, 2002). As the participants frequently illustrated, the use of Spanish captured meaning beyond the words themselves. Spanish words captured more vividly for them the tools for leadership; for example, from the literature review key terms were: consejos [advice from the heart] (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Espinoza-Herold, 2007), cariño [affection] (Valenzuela, 1999), ánimo [encouragement and motivation] (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002), confianza [confidence and confidentiality] (Alemán & Olivo, 2019; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006), and a space to both platicar [chat and share; intimate conversation] (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) and desahogar [vent emotionally].

Finally, many things were left unsaid but communicated non-verbally, through long pauses, half-smiles, and side glances as if the participants were practicing their leadership intuition. Respectfully, the unspoken was honored with a mutual understanding that some things are best left alone.


**Relationships**

The study revealed that relationships are essential to Chicana leadership, especially relationships with mothers. Relationships with mothers were almost sacred in context and dynamic. The findings clearly indicated that relationships with mothers are pivotal to Chicana leadership and laced with reverence, unwavering respect, admiration, and deep commitment and connection. There appeared to be a sense among participants that they could not deny a mother’s request. Even when there was disagreement with mothers, participants talked about their mothers with softness and tenderness. Mothers will be further discussed.

Relationships in the family inspired a sense of community that manifested in family gatherings and almost always included extended family, religious practices such as attending church, and confirming Godparents. This concept of relationship starkly contrasts from the mainstream nuclear family concept. While masculinist mainstream culture encourages individualism and making choices based on one’s own needs, Chicanas in this study often made decisions based on a range of relationships and the needs of others.

Several participants reported positive relationships with their fathers, affirming that Chicanas may have a favorable relationship with their mothers and fathers (Hurtado, 1996). Debunking the myth of the macho father who does not allow his daughters to pursue an education, a couple of participants partially credited their fathers for their leadership success. They stated that their fathers had encouraged them to pursue schooling. In addition, relationships with teachers were significant, confirming that teachers make a difference in their students’ success trajectory. For example, one participant indicated that support from her teachers encouraged her lifelong appreciation for music and entertainment.
Home and Belonging

The concept of “home,” captured the spirit of belonging, not just a physical space. Home manifested in these Chicanas finding themselves, being in their element, living on their own terms, and having a sense of liberation. For the women of the study, the need to belong was profound and understandable because of their awareness of a hostile mainstream culture; their epicenter was often rooted in family and community. This was exemplified as they described finding refuge during adverse situations. They could lean on others like themselves; they sought out kids at school where they were one of a few Mexican families or in a classroom where they were a part of a group that did not speak English.

Foundational to liberation was a sense of belonging, which participants indicated was most manifested when they found “home.” Home was nestled in family, culture, and spirituality—in places where participants could see themselves. Logically, when they found home—there was a sense of belonging.

As participants discussed their role as teachers, it appeared that they sought to create a sense of belonging for their students. Exposing youth to Indigenous culture and books that reflected their culture created a sense of belonging, validating Chicana and Indigenous cultural values. Furthermore, they understood that culture and belonging were conducive to learning and facilitated student success. Therefore, as they intentionally constructed an optimum learning environment, I would argue that they were also safeguarding culture. This can be seen as an exercise of non-traditional and unrecognized leadership.
Awakening, Awareness, and Critical Consciousness

The study sought to explore the continuum from awareness of oppression to critical consciousness (Freire, 1972). There were instances of awakenings, awareness, and critical consciousness throughout the study. Participants consistently demonstrated a keen awareness of oppressive conditions and social inequities that impacted their lives. The findings confirmed that critical consciousness is one key to Chicana liberation and the exercise of leadership that liberation enables.

As they discussed adversity, participants demonstrated tapping into an intuitive awareness of knowing that “something ain’t right.” That knowing was laced with cultural, familial, and relational experiences. Those experiences created conditions conducive for awakening and awareness; and that then led to action, and to building the critical consciousness muscle. Participants shared stories of pivotal moments in their lives where their awareness converted to critical consciousness and led them to take action (Freire, 1972). Examples included enrolling in college and taking feminist and Raza study courses.

Through one assignment in an undergraduate feminist study course, everything changed for one participant when she conducted an oral history. It allowed her to see her mother through from a different lens and to appreciate her resilience. It allowed for a necessary reframe what she had perceived as weakness was, in fact, strength (Calderón et al., 2012). It allowed for a deeper analysis, considering the decades of sacrifices made by and trauma endured by her mother. This is an essential lens through which to view Chicana leadership in context. The exponential difference a Raza or Chicano/a study course can make is phenomenal. As students decided to enroll in such courses, they consciously shifted from the
traditional courses to explore a different perspective. They were pursuing their own understanding of leadership. These courses helped shape participants’ identities as they saw themselves in textbooks and the curriculum. It became the stimulus for how Chicanas would apply critical thinking and consciousness in their life work—as teachers, exposing students to Indigenous practices and connection to culture.

Critical thinking and critical consciousness are crucial to analyzing Chicana leadership. For example, as mentioned earlier, Chicanas are often projected as victims of machismo in media and literature. That projection perpetuates two misperceptions—it underpins an assumption that Chicana culture has a monopoly on sexism, and it portrays Chicanas as inherently submissive. Through critical thinking, it becomes obvious that no group or culture has a monopoly on sexism; it manifests differently across groups, such as machismo for Spanish-speaking people. The findings from this study debunked the myth of the docile Chicana; it shines a light on the ways that the women of this study are survivors and have thrived in the face of adversity. With a critical consciousness, the shift from victim to survivor to thriving leader is enabled.

Critical consciousness may emerge from and be influenced by experiences and connections to the physical locations and environments growing up. A participant born in Guanajuato called it “the cradle of the” 1910 Mexican revolution. She described it as filled with progressive people and as part of her “DNA.” Although she left her birthplace as a child, she had constant exposure to progressive and revolutionary ideas and people through family stories and conversations and visits to her birthplace. Therefore, it made sense that she
spoke of it as an inheritance of a legacy that inspired her critical consciousness and commitment to social justice.

**RQ 3: How Leadership Manifest and Is Recognized in the Chicana Community?**

To answer and analyze the findings related to RQ 3, this section revisits leadership, the need to heal from adversity, how leadership manifests and is recognized, and concludes with liberation.

Identifying as a leader may be difficult for some Chicanas. Certain participants were confident in identifying as a leader. In contrast, for others, it was conditional and based on roles and recognition. Unpacking the ability to identify as a leader requires examining the term leadership. Generally, the term is associated with people in visible positions of power in politics, business, education, public institutions, etc. However, the study participants described leadership through acts, characteristics, and drive, including impetus and motivation. Additionally, within the definition, participants said it meant tapping into inherent gifts and talents and serving as role models to inspire others.

The consideration of what participants said about or described as leadership gave rise to a concept that does not easily translate as leadership outside of the Chicana experience. A host of non-traditional terms are called for: hyphenations, hybrids, borderlands, hubs, contradictions, shifts, and spaces in between. These terms locate key experiences of Chicanas and capture the concept of Chicana leadership. The lack of a single term to name the concept of leadership as it occurs in the lives of Chicanas does not mean that leadership does not exist; instead, it calls for Chicanas to claim it on their own terms.
Desahogar as Healing

The Spanish word for healing is desahogar, it is a combination of the prefix des [un] and the word ahogar [drown]. Therefore, it is appropriate that the word and concept guide the discussion of the deep sense of suffocation caused by a drowning of the Chicana voice and experience and rooted in centuries of trauma and adversity. Undeniably, unresolved hurts, wounds, and trauma interfere with leadership—without healing, leadership is nearly impossible. Without leadership, liberation is unattainable.

Healing is innate to the nature of human beings and takes different forms, such as laughing, crying, talking, and more expressions (Jackins, 1965). The experiences of the hurt dictate the method used to heal; for example, if a child is ridiculed, laughing as a way to discharge the embarrassment would make sense; if one experiences sadness, crying makes sense (Jackins, 1965). Unfortunately, the innate response to heal from hurt is often interrupted by well-meaning people. Children have been distracted from the healing process when their attention is pointed to something else, “look at the . . .” and adults are told “chin up” when expressing distressing emotions.

When healing is allowed to occur naturally, there are remarkable outcomes. For example, a natural healing process manifests when space, support, and attention are provided to discharge hurts and wounds; as a result, there is a clarity that opens up and allows for the unveiling of solutions and resolution (Jackins, 1965).

The findings from this study confirm the need to heal from intergenerational trauma and adversity (Zavella, 2001). I contend that the healing must occur in a familiar and culturally relevant manner. It was clear that spirituality and cultural practices inspired and propelled
healing. I argue that culturally rooted words such as *desahogar*—when contextualized in *platicas* [chats], underpinned by *confianza* [confidence and confidentially], and laced with *añimo* [encouragement]—naturalize the healing process.

For some participants, healing was about self-care. Gardening was an example of self-care with one participant sharing about getting her hands into “Mother Earth” as she gardened. Mothers and gardening have an intricate connection; many Chicanas grow flowers in honor of the mothers and women in their lives who came before them (Zavella, 2001).

This study shows that relationships are the bedrock of healing, whether with ancestors, family, or friends. As mothers nurture and look out for the wellbeing of their children, I reason they are practicing another source of healing. Having had their own experiences of injustices, they attempted to mitigate future adversities for their children. They guide and teach their children to navigate an unfriendly world that sees them through the color of their skin (Coates, 2015). Through this interaction with their children, mothers often have a double impact by addressing and healing their own experiences of injustices, as well as preparing their children.

As referenced in the literature review, centuries of oppression (Alexander, 2011; Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Hayes-Bautista, 1980) have left many Chicanas emotionally fragmented. Therefore, it makes sense that participants discussed healing to restore oneself and described their striving toward wholeness.

Healing is a universal concept, and it manifests differently in all cultures. The film *Beloved* (Demme, 1998), based on the book by Toni Morison, offers a powerful scene of healing. In the forest, Baby Suggs, a grandmother and spiritual leader, calls out to the
children to join her; then, she calls out to the men. She directs the men to dance; as the men
dance, the spirit of celebration beckons for healing. She urges the women to weep for the
living and weep for the dead. She urges them to love their “flesh,” to touch and love their
face, she tells them to “love hard!” As community members follow Baby Suggs’s directions
to love themselves and engage in the act of self-love, she reminds them that, “God has led
you home.” She is creating the path toward liberation through healing and celebration.

The scene provides vivid reminders of the power of healing and self-love. Study
participants affirmed a similar need for collective healing through and with family,
community, and ancestors. It is a reminder that healing through self-love is essential to the
liberation of Chicanas and their community. Unlike vanity or narcissism, self-love is rooted
in a collective process. Self-love is a form of resistance to systematic oppression, a powerful
response to dehumanization; it intentionally strengthens the foundation of resilience. Most
importantly, it provides a strategy to underpin confidence, especially for children navigating
the unwelcome and forthcoming experiences of their formative years.

Healing and liberation are intricately connected. I would argue that when there has been
extensive trauma, as the women in the study described, liberation cannot happen without
healing. While healing can be seen as a response to adverse conditions, working through
those conditions and finding solutions is a process of liberation. In seeking healing, there also
seems to be a process of seeking liberation.

**Leadership Manifested**

The study confirms what Chicana scholars have written about: that Chicana leadership
exists in the everyday lives of Chicanas (Jiménez, 2012). It also confirmed that leadership
manifests in response to oppressive structural forces that are constantly in motion, and that Chicanas took action to survive intergenerational adversity. It manifested as women guided, nurtured, and sustained families over generations through their healing as curanderas; it also manifested as they supported others, and as they spearheaded and maintained businesses with foresight as mentioned in the findings.

Leadership also manifested through motherhood in action and role. A critical aspect of the study was the centrality of the role of mothers to Chicana leadership. As mentioned before, mothers often make decisions based on the needs of their children. Considering the needs of others is a leadership quality (Bordas, 2007). For the women of the study, however, many of the decisions made were often rooted in trauma and adversity. In addition, there seemed to be a maternal intuition constantly at play; mothers are the first coaches in a child’s life as they support and guide them.

As stated earlier, mothers make decisions based on the needs of their children. In addition, they also are instinctively attentive to their children’s needs and continuously nurture, protect, and teach their children as their maternal thinking guides them (Ruddick, 1989). Intuition underpins maternal thinking and is in constant operation; intuition is a sense of knowing something, that inner voice, that feeling about something that comes from paying such close attention to their children (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Ruddick, 1989). As participants discussed experiences and relationships with their mothers, they were revealing the results of maternal thinking and intuition: the ways in which their mothers loved, nurtured, coached, and protected them—they were naming leadership skills. However, calling the actions of maternal thinking and intuition acts of leadership is met with the same
challenge of revealing unrecognized Chicana leadership. Through her work, Ruddick described the lived experience of maternal thinking, and through the prism of a feminist framework, it is legitimized. Similarly, Chicanas have described unrecognized Chicana leadership, and Chicana scholars are legitimizing Chicana leadership. Unrecognized Chicana leadership and maternal thinking, both underpinned by an intuitive knowing, exists; but traditional scholarship has yet to fully recognize it.

While motherhood was significant in how leadership manifested, this subject was also evident among siblings as well—sisters were significant in the participants’ lives. As leaders, sisters stepped up and served as confidants.

Leadership was evident as participants shared how they navigated social inequities and systematic oppression. A constant and nuanced manner was one way that leadership manifested, with specific forms and styles of communication: the insistence on respectful and authentic communication.

Although not called leadership in these exact words, Chicana participants manifested their leadership in bringing to life the need to preserve culture. They did so as they claimed Indigenous practices in education and spirituality; honored the ancestors and elders; used their bilingualism; and embraced the spirit of the bien educada.

**Recognition of Leadership**

Chicana leadership acts are recognized in the Chicana community, but are not necessarily labeled as leadership. One important way that leadership in the Chicana community was recognized was through the sacred relationships with mothers. Mothers guided and protected their children and counseled their daughters to be independent and self-reliant (Yosso, 2005).
It is recognized when mothers desire the best life for their children and give them *consejos* for a better life than they had—through telling those stories, leadership is recognized.

Additionally, leadership was recognized every time participants shared about the adversities in their lives and in the lives of other women, especially how they managed the adversity. Again, they did not necessarily use the term leadership, but they did confirm it when I probed further. Leadership was recognized when participants were asked about the leaders in their lives and who influenced their leadership. In the literature, it is the women who fought in the Mexican revolution, activists who worked on voting rights and started clinics and elected officials. It is recognized in the form of exemplifying self-reliance (Zavella, 2001). As Chicana scholars and others challenged the lack of recognition, it was actually being recognized.

It is even recognized through pop-up poetry on YouTube; in Matriarch by Xicana Revolt, two poets recognize Chicana leadership in sharp contrast to perceived stereotypes such as “to show you who’s really the head of the household”; through spiritual practices to protect and teach (Holtry & Crespin, 2019). Through values-laden examples, they warn men not to take a “woman’s kindness for weakness; respect for subservience; love for obedience,” lest they face the consequences (Holtry & Crespin, 2019). Finally, they conclude with a powerful acknowledgment of women, particularly Abuela [grandmother] and great grandmother; they include other roles such as mother, sister, and aunts as they recite, “she is the matriarch, you will honor her always, and she will love you forever” (Holtry & Crespin, 2019).

Recognizing Chicana leadership in all its different forms also recognizes the collective Chicana experience and lifts up the Chicana voice.
Liberation

Liberation is core to this study. Highlights of liberation theory include: working toward eradicating social inequities (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006), the belief that human beings are born good and can be allies to one another; that oppression is systematically underpinned by the imbalance of economic, political, and social power; and through clearing up misinformation and resisting socialization that conditions people into the role of the oppressor or oppressed; these are some of the ways liberation is conceived (Sherover-Marcuse, 2000). Furthermore, liberation manifests through reflection, awakening, awareness of oppression, and taking action (Ada, 2007; Freire, 1972). The participants expressed overarching sentiments of liberation, including freedom, healing, forgiveness, and self-love. They also shared stories of liberation. For example, Zella shared coming out and being in her element in a gay bar—she said she couldn’t come out enough. She described an exhilarating feeling of being at home. The concept of a “home” manifested in these Chicanas finding themselves, being in their element, and living on their own terms—a definition of liberation.

Embarking on this research, I hypothesized that when Chicanas recognize their leadership, they rise to it. What has become evident through this study is the role of healing in leadership and liberation. A focus group participant’s comment captured that sense, “So when you can finally stand in your own integrity; and your own true self, that respects yourself; loves yourself, and that acknowledges your leadership and everything good about you—then you are truly free.” Along the way of researching its three main questions, this study has also addressed the question of, How does one come into integrity, self-respect, and self-love in order to recognize their leadership?
Reckoning with Systematic Oppression

Earlier, I discussed the need for healing from trauma, hurts, and wounds due to the systematic oppression endured. I would argue that there must be a reckoning with the unresolved hurt and trauma. I contend that the hurt and trauma do not merely go away. It thwarts liberation most insidiously in the form of internalized oppression. While systematic oppression has been discussed earlier, it is critical to once again raise the issue. Understanding internalized oppression requires unpacking systematic oppression.

The following discussion provides a framework for understanding the cycle of systematic oppression and how internalized oppression is a dream killer. Ricky Sherover-Marcuse (personal communication, 1985-1987) asserted that misinformation, lies, and ignorance about a group of people—e.g., women, people of color, or any marginalized group—generates socially sanctioned attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and assumptions about the group. This, in turn, becomes the justification for further mistreatment resulting in an insidious cycle of oppression. Reducing people or groups to stereotypes is a process of dehumanization, which leads to scapegoating, blaming, and dismissing the group. Unless there is an awareness of engaging in the process of dehumanization and interrupting it, there is a next step that naturally occurs: colluding with the oppression. For example, when something oppressive is said, and one remains silent. Sherover-Marcuse (personal communication, 1985-1987) argued that people are not born perpetrators of oppression—they are socialized into the role. Therefore, it makes sense that oppression cannot occur unless there is first a process of dehumanization. Raising the issue of dehumanization is important because it names the dynamic that oppressed people experience, and Chicanas are no exception.
For Chicana liberation to occur, it is critical to recognize and name the process of dehumanization that is constantly at play. When participants discussed adversity, it was often a result of systematic oppression, which included a process of dehumanization.

What has not yet been discussed related to systematic oppression is a concept that was vaguely addressed by one of the participants as she asked why Chicanas are so critical of one another? In doing so, she raised the issue of internalized oppression. When there is no outlet for suffering, mistreatment, and dehumanization, it results in internalized oppression. Internalized oppression is when a person of an oppressed group believes the lies and misinformation about their group (Sherover-Marcuse, personal communication, 1985-1987; Tappan, 2006). Managing adversities and social inequities due to systematic oppression is extremely challenging, and managing internalized oppression presents a different set of trials. It is at the root of “why Chicanas are so critical of one another.” It makes it difficult to find “home,” take pride in one’s culture, or find liberation. I would argue that to work towards liberation requires acknowledging internalized oppression and committing to interrupting and dismantling it. It also means recognizing the intergenerational struggles, resistance, and resilience that was at the heart of the study. It requires acknowledging the need for allies, in the words of one of the participants, “being there, showing up, loving me no matter what.”

Liberation also means considering, recognizing, and appreciating the sacrifices made by the women that came before. This liberation process thus is directly related to the process of developing leadership recognition. Times are different and the degree of sacrifices made by those women may no longer be necessary. Explicit awareness of non-traditional leadership roles may become easier to recognize in current times. However, I would argue that what
must remain intact is the spirit of the motivation to sacrifice: it embodies a commitment to
our children and communities. Lastly, the participants pointed out that we have much
collective work ahead to liberate Chicanas. Chicanas must do the personal work to heal from
intergenerational adversities; they must recognize and own their leadership; they must
continue to work on the social inequities that manifest through gender, class, and racial
oppression; they must be role models; they must remember and honor the ancestors while
continuing to look out for the next seven generations. And, for there to truly be liberation,
collective healing and celebration must take place.

Conclusion

In answering the research questions, the study revealed how Chicanas define leadership
and how leadership is nurtured. Chicana leadership exists and is recognized but not to the
same degree that it should be and not in the non-traditional ways in which it manifests.
Chicanas are not the only group to face adversity and survive because of their resilience; they
are not the only group that has demonstrated resistance to intergenerational trauma as a result
of racism; all oppressed groups have their stories and accountings. What this study
demonstrates, however, is how dehumanization through racist and sexist stereotypes has been
overlooked and how it manifests in the everyday lives of Chicanas. Overcoming this
internalized oppression, self-healing, intergenerational strength—the bedrock provided by so
many mothers and grandmothers—is the foundation of what has previously been
unrecognized Chicana leadership.
Implications

On a small scale, this study illustrates the potential of unpacking and naming unrecognized forms of leadership not just in Chicana communities but also in other communities. Moreover, it is an invitation to recognize and understand leadership through adversity, resilience, healing, and liberation. It encourages research in areas that could make significant differences in communities that suffer from systematic oppression and social inequities. For example, it calls for examining the role of healing in leadership, humanizing the dialogue between students and teachers and teachers and parents, investigating how internalized oppression divides communities, and how Chicanas can rise to leadership and maintain a connection to culture, family, and community.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendation One

Given that adversity, resilience, healing, and liberation were vital to the study, I recommend that educators keep in mind those elements as they teach and support students in higher education. Nurturing and supporting critical thinking and raising awareness of social inequities are important parts of encouraging students’ future capacity for leadership. The recommendation includes creating a safe and productive space for students to process feelings and emotions that may arise as they hear for the first time about some of the historical atrocities committed toward marginalized communities. Naming adversity was crucial to the study; equally important was connecting the need for healing. Not addressing the emotions and feelings that surface may inadvertently feed internalized oppression. It could result in vicarious trauma for some students, much like the intergenerational trauma
that haunted many women of the study. Teachers should be aware of the high potential for this to occur with students.

**Recommendation Two**

It is imperative that we recognize and engage Latino parent leadership. A lesson learned from the study that applies to this recommendation was the need to “belong.” Engaging Latino parent leadership as well as welcoming and training parents are well-documented as constructive tools in student development. Similar to the first recommendation, we must pay attention to and support parents at an emotional level as they engage in and rise to their leadership. That means creating a belonging environment that is conducive to engagement.

For both recommendations, there is a need to explicitly recognize the power and privilege teachers and administrators hold and how those roles have generally colluded with institutional and systemic oppression. Rather, students and teachers must show up as teachers and students (Freire, 1972). Finally, both recommendations call for humanizing transactions among students, parents, and teachers.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

**Recommendation One**

It is clear that social inequities caused by systematic oppression create barriers to Chicana leadership and threaten the Chicana community’s wellbeing. What is not clear is the role that internalized oppression plays in barriers to Chicana leadership and how this may jeopardize the overall wellbeing of the Chicana community. Therefore, a recommendation for future research is to examine the role of internalized oppression in creating barriers to leadership and threatening the wellbeing of the Chicana community. Unfortunately, raising the issue can
be viewed as taboo, perhaps due to the daunting pain that underpins it, or the confusion caused by believing lies, stereotypes, and misinformation about Chicanas. These falsehoods can create a sense of not knowing where to begin. Future research could provide strategies to confront the effects of internalized oppression and lead toward collective healing and liberation.

**Recommendation Two**

Research Chicana liberation in the context of gender, cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), and personal development. A contradiction that is not easily unpacked is the space between the expectation that Chicana mothers will put their loved ones first and the need to attend to a mother’s own development and self-love.

For many Chicanas, this is a transitional period. The challenge will be how to navigate the borders of the needs of others and their own. The study contains clues. Participants expressed the constant sacrifices their mothers had made, specifically before the participants became mothers themselves. Much like their mothers and parents had done for them decades prior, several of the participants recounted intentional decisions they made to assure that their own children would have a better chance at life. However, times change, and today’s opportunities are different! Adversity will continue, but it will take different forms. Intergenerational resilience will still be in place; the need to step up to leadership will still be there. What will be different is how Chicanas create the balance amid the contradictions. This is an area that needs much research. The question is how Chicanas continue to work for collective liberation and rise to leadership without jeopardizing and abandoning culture.
Concluding Thoughts and Reflections

The study set out to examine unrecognized Chicana leadership. A major impetus for the research was the daunting intergenerational social issues negatively impacting and jeopardizing the wellbeing of the Chicana community.

Through uncanny parallels among the interviewees and focus group participants Chicana leadership stories emerged. These powerful stories revealed details and nuances of lived experience, and unveiled and recognized Chicana leadership. It lifted the voices of a few women who are representative of the inter-generational oppression and trauma experienced by many other women. It provided rich data debunking many myths and stereotypes, such as that Chicana / Mexican women are weak and submissive. It revealed the resilience, strength, courage, and love that motivated Chicana leaders to take action even in the most adverse conditions. Managing adversity through resilience was a gateway to leadership; adversity often preceded leadership, but spirituality, hope, curiosity, and inspiration allowed adversity to be surmounted and leadership to surpass it.

Culture, language, spirituality, and intuition were dominant factors. A central theme was the role of motherhood, specifically what it brings with it: maternal intuition and maternal thinking.

Constantly at the hub of contradictions, Chicanas are caught between stereotypes and their truth and reality. They are not the docile, subservient, and submissive women so often depicted; no, Chicanas are tenacious, resilient, and persevere!

It is important to note that Chicanas are Latinas, but not all Latinas are Chicanas. While this research may apply to Latinas, significant aspects of the themes revealed are specific to
the Chicana experience. Latinas share many commonalities, but Chicana language, history, and geographical experiences create a different epistemology; narrowing the focus allowed for a more revealing emphasis on the Chicana experience.

Reflections

The women of the study redefined notions of sacrifice, resilience, leadership, and liberation. In modeling what their mothers and the women before them had done, they understand the embodiment of sacrifice as a conscious and deliberate choice. They tell us that resilience is sustained through healing and remind us that one cannot be resilient if one is overwhelmed with trauma.

They point out that leadership manifests daily through respectful and genuine interactions; heart, mind, and consideration for and commitment to family and community are key. They remind us that intuitive knowing and awareness invite critical thinking, which then leads to critical consciousness and calls to interrogate the dominant narrative that has long impeded Chicana leadership and liberation. In defiance of the dominant narrative, they tell stories of how the women in their own lives—and they themselves—have a sense of the historical injustices suffered by Chicanas. This knowing has been passed down generationally without ever reading a book or learning about them in school.

In hearing their stories, we are reminded that the liberation of a people is a collective effort that calls for honoring and respecting all relations, including the ancestors and spirit guides, as we remember those who came before us and the seven generations that are yet to come. Yet there cannot be a liberation movement unless there is healing; we are encouraged
to desahogar [heal] and tap into cultural and spiritual practices. In the nuances lie the urging for self-love and self-respect that results from desahogando.

Making human connections and securing a sense of belonging is (a) critical to all human beings, and (b) a requirement for nurturing Chicana leadership. It is in that place of belonging and finding home that leadership thrives; it is in that place that the healing can take place or continue; it is in that place that the awareness is confirmed and transforms into critical consciousness; it is in that place that liberation invites us to breathe fully, rest from the exhaustion, and most importantly to love and respect ourselves. To embrace and fully support Chicana leadership, we must continually ask the question, what made a difference in your leadership—what are the forces that shifted you into leadership?

This study is nestled in the spirit of hope, love, and liberation.
References


Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Research Questions

1. How do Chicanas interviewed define leadership?
2. What are the conditions that participants say nurture Chicana leadership?
3. How do participants say leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community?

The questions below are intended to set the tone for a secure space conducive to interviewing. Questions will be asked in the order listed below and as written. Probes: when an answer seems incomplete or needs clarification, two general probes will be used:

1. Tell me more
2. Help me understand me what that means

Warm Up

- How are you doing?
- Any questions about the process?
- Please feel comfortable to let me know if you would rather not answer a question with a simple “pass.”
- You may pause and or stop at any point of the interview.
- As a reminder, this study is about Chicana leadership.

Opening

Tell me about yourself: How old are you, where you were born, raised, who was a part of your family growing up?

Probes:
- What is your fondest childhood memory?
- What work did your parents/family do?

1. How would you describe your culture growing up?

Probes:
- Do you have a favorite dichos/phrase/sayings?
- Was there a political, historical, or major social justice event that impacted you or influenced your life?
  - Did you or people close to you participate in or take any action in response to that event?
Identity

2. How do you identify?

Probes:
  o What makes up that identity?
  o What was it like growing up female?
  o What was it like growing up________(class)?

Influences

3. Who was most influential in your life—why and how?

Leadership

4. How would you define leadership?

Probes:
  o Who have been the leaders in your life? Tell me about them.
  o Do you consider yourself a leader? If so, why? If not, why not?
  o Who has supported your leadership?

5. What conditions do you believe nurture leadership?

6. How do you think leadership manifests in the Chicana community?
   o Do you think it is recognized?

Leadership Obstacles/Barriers

7. What do you believe gets in the way of Chicanas being leaders?

Probes:
  o Do you believe that hurts and wounds can keep Chicanas from being or acting as leaders?

Healing

8. How would you define healing?

Probes:
  o Do you believe it is possible to heal from hurts and wounds?
  o How do you manage stress and trauma?
9. **What would leadership look like in your life in the future?**

**Probes:**
- What consejos/advice would you give to other Chicanas to live their life in that manner?
- What do Chicanas need to be leaders in their lives?
- How can Chicanas be supported in their leadership?

**Closing**

- Anything else you would like to share?
Appendix B: Focus Groups Protocol

Research Questions

1. How do Chicanas interviewed define leadership?
2. What are the conditions that participants say nurture Chicana leadership?
3. How do participants say leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community?

Focus Group

Agenda

Welcome & Introductions:

- Conocimiento:
  - Name
  - I identify as…
  - I was born…raised…
  - My family includes…
  - Something you would never guess about me is…

Review the Agenda

Shared Agreements:

- Listen respectfully
- Honor confidentiality

Explain the study and purpose of Focus Group

- Questions?

Questions for the group

1. How do you define Chicana?
2. How do you define leadership?
3. Who were/are the leaders in your life? Why?
4. Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not?
5. As you think about leadership, what comes to mind when I say the words hurt, wound, or trauma?
6. As you think about leadership, what comes to mind when I say healing?
7. What does liberation mean to you?
Share interview findings and themes

1. What stands out for you?
2. What questions do you have?
3. What are the best ways to support Chicana leadership?

Closing: Thank you so much for your participation!
Appendix C: Interview Consent Form

REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

TITLE OF THE STUDY
Chicana leadership: Understanding How the Ordinary is Extraordinary

NAME OF THE RESEARCHERS
Blanca Tavera, San José State University Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership
Dr. Rebeca Burciaga, Dissertation Committee Chair, San José State University

PURPOSE
You are invited to participate in a study that proposes to critically research unrecognized leadership that is in place in the Chicana family and community. This research explores how Chicanas define leadership, describe their pathway to leadership, identify the conditions that nurture their leadership, and recognize the obstacles that impede it. This study also examines the cultural elements that help sustain individual and collective resiliency and how leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community. Finally, it explores how Chicanas work toward their liberation: to be free, present, deliberate, direct, and lead in their own lives. The overarching themes of culture, leadership recognition, healing, and liberation are core to this study.

This research seeks to answer the following broadly defined research questions:

1. How do Chicanas define leadership?
2. What are the conditions that participants say nurture Chicana leadership?
3. How do participants say leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community?
PROCEDURES

Participation in this study involves two 60 to 90-minute interviews at a mutually agreed confidential setting or virtually using the Zoom software. The interviews will take place during November and December 2021. Interviews will be recorded using the Zoom software and the Otter.ai application as a backup. Notes will be taken during the interview. In addition, interview recordings will be transcribed. Transcriptions from the first interview will be shared with the participants to review and request changes or eliminations. In addition, collective themes from the interviews will be shared with two focus group participants. Names or identifying information will not be included in sharing interview findings or discussing the results in the dissertation. All recordings will be destroyed after the research is concluded.

POTENTIAL RISKS

There may be minimal risk of participating in the study. For example, you may feel embarrassed or find it difficult to answer the questions.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There are no expected benefits to participating in the study other than contributing to the study of unrecognized Chicana leadership.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation for participation.
CONFIDENTIALITY

The confidentiality of the participants is a priority. Therefore, participant names or identifying information will not be included in sharing interview findings with focus group participants or in the publication or dissemination of the dissertation. Interview transcripts will be stored in a computer that requires a password to access. All recordings will be destroyed after the research is concluded.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San José State University. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Blanca Tavera at (831) 818-9941
- Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Rebeca Burciaga at rebeca.burciaga@sjsu.edu
- For questions about participants’ rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Mohamed Abousalem, Vice President for Research & Innovation, San José State University, at 408-924-2479 or irb@sjsu.edu
SIGNATURES

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be a part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

**Participant Signature**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant’s Name (printed)</th>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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☐ I consent to the recording of the interviews.

**Researcher Statement**

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

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<th>Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent</th>
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Appendix D: Focus Group Consent Form

REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

TITLE OF THE STUDY
Chicana leadership: Understanding How the Ordinary is Extraordinary

NAME OF THE RESEARCHERS
Blanca Tavera, San José State University Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership
Dr. Rebeca Burciaga, Dissertation Committee Chair, San José State University

PURPOSE
You are invited to participate in a study that proposes to critically research unrecognized leadership that is in place in the Chicana family and community. This research explores how Chicanas define leadership, describe their pathway to leadership, identify the conditions that nurture their leadership, and recognize the obstacles that impede it. This study also examines the cultural elements that help sustain individual and collective resiliency and how leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community. Finally, it explores how Chicanas work toward their liberation: to be free, present, deliberate, direct, and lead in their own lives. The overarching themes of culture, leadership recognition, healing, and liberation are core to this study.

This research seeks to answer the following broadly defined research questions:

1. How do Chicanas define leadership?
2. What are the conditions that participants say nurture Chicana leadership?
3. How do participants say leadership manifests and is recognized in the Chicana community?
PROCEDURES
Participation in this study involves a 60 to 90-minute focus group. The focus group will be held in a public but confidential community space. Participants will be required to wear masks, microphones, equipment, and shared areas will be sanitized, and we will practice social distancing. The focus group will take place in December 2021. Focus group will be recorded and transcribed. In addition, a research assistant will capture responses on a flip chart. Names or identifying information will be removed from the transcription and not captured on the flip chart. All recordings, transcriptions, and flip chart notes will be destroyed after the research is concluded.

POTENTIAL RISKS
There may be minimal risk of participating in the study. For example, some of the topics may make feel uncomfortable participating in the focus group. Also, although I will ask participants to agree that what is shared stays in the room. There is no guarantee that it will not be shared outside of the group.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS
There are no expected benefits to participating in the study other than contributing to the study of unrecognized Chicana leadership.

COMPENSATION
There is no compensation for participation.
CONFIDENTIALITY

The confidentiality of the participants is a priority. Therefore, participant names or identifying information will not be included in the publication or dissemination of the dissertation. Focus group transcripts will be stored in a computer that requires a password to access. All recordings will be destroyed after the research is concluded.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San José State University. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Blanca Tavera at (831) 818-9941
- Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Rebeca Burciaga at rebeca.burciaga@sjsu.edu
- For questions about participants’ rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Mohamed Abousalem, Vice President for Research & Innovation, San José State University, at 408-924-2479 or irb@sjsu.edu
SIGNATURES

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be a part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

Participant’s Name (printed)  Participant’s Signature  Date

☐ I consent to the recording of the focus group.

Researcher Statement

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent  Date
Appendix E: Script Email Invitation to Participate in Study—Interview

Hello (name),

I hope you are doing well. I am not sure if you know that I am currently enrolled in an educational leadership doctoral program at San Jose State University. I am researching unrecognized Chicana leadership, including identity and the intersections of race, class, and gender and how it impacts the emergence of Chicana leadership. I will also examine Chicana leadership through the social-political-historical contexts that often create trauma and obstacles to leadership. Finally, I will explore strategies that support leadership, focusing on healing as the basis for liberation.

I would like you to participate in the study if you are interested. If you agree to participate, I would like to interview you twice. The interviews would range from 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews will be held in a private and confidential setting. There is also the option of conducting the interviews virtually. I will be recording the interviews and taking notes as well. The recordings will be transcribed, and only I will have access to the recording and notes. I anticipate that the interviews will take place during November and December.

Interview findings will be shared with two focus participants. However, your participation is confidential; you will be identified with a pseudonym if you decide to participate. No information that could identify you directly will be shared.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may drop out at any time. We can agree to meet for the interview in a confidential setting.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at blanca.tavera@sjsu.edu. Would you kindly let me know if you would like to participate? If you agree to participate, I will send you a consent form to review and sign before the focus group.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Take good care,

Blanca
Appendix F: Script Email Invitation to Participate in Study—Focus Group

Hello (name),

I hope you are doing well. I am not sure if you know that I am currently enrolled in an educational leadership doctoral program at San Jose State University. I am researching unrecognized Chicana leadership, including identity and the intersections of race, class, and gender and how it impacts the emergence of Chicana leadership. I will also examine Chicana leadership through the social-political-historical contexts that often create trauma and obstacles to leadership. Finally, I will explore strategies that support leadership, focusing on healing as the basis for liberation.

I would like you to participate in the study if you are interested. If you agree to participate, I would like you to participate in a focus group. The focus group will range from 60 to 90 minutes; will take place in a public but confidential community space. There will be approximately 6-8 participants. Due to the pandemic, participants will be required to wear masks, microphones, equipment, and shared areas will be sanitized, and we will practice social distancing. A research assistant will be hired to capture participant responses on a flip chart. As a backup, the focus group will be recorded. I anticipate that the focus group will take place during December 2021 or January 2022. Your participation is confidential; should you decide to participate, you will be identified with a pseudonym. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may drop out at any time.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at blanca.tavera@sjsu.edu. Would you kindly let me know if you would like to participate? If you agree to participate, I will send you a consent form to review and sign before the focus group.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Take good care,
Blanca
Appendix G: Script Phone Invitation to Participate in Study—Interview

Hi (name),

How are you? Is this a good time to talk? If not, can we set up a time to talk? (If so) I am not sure if you know that I am currently enrolled in an educational leadership doctoral program at San Jose State University.

I am researching unrecognized Chicana leadership, including identity and the intersections of race, class, and gender and how it impacts the emergence of Chicana leadership. I will also examine Chicana leadership through the social-political-historical contexts that often create trauma and obstacles to leadership. Finally, I will explore strategies that support leadership, focusing on healing as the basis for liberation.

I would like to interview you for the study. If you agree to participate, I would interview you twice. The interviews would range from 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews will be held in a private and confidential setting. There is also the option of conducting the interviews virtually if you would like.

I will be recording the interviews and taking notes as well. The recordings will be transcribed, and only I will have access to the recording and notes. I anticipate that the interviews will take place during November and December.

Your participation is confidential; should you decide to participate, you will be identified with a pseudonym. No information that could identify you directly will be shared. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may drop out at any time.

What do you think? Are you interested in participating? Do you have questions or concerns? Would you like to take some time to think about it? If so, when would be a good time to follow up with you?

If you agree to participate, I will send you a consent form to review and sign before the interview.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me.
Appendix H: Script Phone Invitation to Participate in Study—Focus Group

Hi (name),

How are you? Is this a good time to talk? If not, can we set up a time to talk?

(If so) I am not sure if you know that I am currently enrolled in an educational leadership doctoral program at San Jose State University.

I am researching unrecognized Chicana leadership, including identity and the intersections of race, class, and gender and how it impacts the emergence of Chicana leadership. I will also examine Chicana leadership through the social-political-historical contexts that often create trauma and obstacles to leadership. Finally, I will explore strategies that support leadership, focusing on healing as the basis for liberation.

I would like you to invite you to participate in a focus group. The focus group will range from 60 to 90 minutes. It will take place in a public but confidential community space.

There will be approximately 6-8 participants. Due to the pandemic, participants will be required to wear masks, microphones, equipment, and shared areas will be sanitized, and we will practice social distancing.

A research assistant will be hired to capture participant responses on a flip chart and as a backup, the focus group will be recorded.

I anticipate that the focus group will take place during December 2021 or January 2022. Your participation is confidential; should you decide to participate, you will be identified with a pseudonym. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may drop out at any time.

What do you think? Are you interested in participating? Do you have questions or concerns? Would you like to take some time to think about it? If so, when would be a good time to follow up with you?

If you agree to participate, I will send you a consent form to review and sign before the focus group.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me.