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**Political Transformations: Hearing Latina Mothers' Voices in the
Educational Policymaking Process**

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**Political Transformations: Hearing Latina Mothers' Voices in the
Educational Policymaking Process**

by

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Dedication

To my father who died mid-dissertation.

I know you would have been proud.

To my parents.

Who gave me the lust for inquisitiveness and learning and a critical eye.

To the students not receiving the education they have a right to.

To the amazing women who participated in this study.

A las mujeres extraordinarias que participaron en este estudio.

Without you, this would not have been possible.

Sin ustedes, esto no hubiera sido posible.

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Political Transformations: Hearing Latina Mothers' Voices in the Educational Policymaking Process

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The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of the process of transformation of marginalized and disempowered parents into citizens active in the formulation of educational policy. These transformations are located at the intersection of Transformative Learning, an adult learning theory that uses critical reflection of beliefs and assumptions to produce a perceptual shift, and community organizing for urban school reform.

This dissertation set out to document the transformation into civically active citizens of one of the most politically vulnerable groups in the United States: the working-class, working-poor, Latina woman. Understanding how some women from this group gain political power and influence educational policy is a counter-hegemonic

project. The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a national group devoted to organizing for power, provides a learning environment and culture that foster such a transformation. The following questions guided this investigation: What changes in civic identity do parents undergo as they transform into citizens active in the formulation of educational policies at the district, city, and state levels? What strategies do parents use to become politically active in the context of educational policy formation at the district, city, and state levels? How do parents transform innate skills and knowledge into competencies necessary for political action? What experiences and attitudes turn a nonpolitical parent into a politically active citizen?

The research methodology and design were qualitative in nature, utilizing an ethnographic approach to query the understandings of transformation for ten Latina mothers, four of which are presented in this study. Interviews with and observations of these women served as primary data collection methods. The emerging account of transformation is documented in four narrative portraits. Findings suggest a model consisting of five general concepts that describe the transformation that these women experienced, including: 1) the historical, sociocultural, and personal contexts; 2) a prior state of depoliticization; 3) two foundational processes which include the constant presence of disequilibria and the ongoing exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; 4) four mediated experiences which include naïve participation, being recognized, understanding relationships, and becoming “un-grand-inquisited”; and 5) a final state of a transformed civic identity.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Average citizens, working-class and low-income individuals in particular, have little, if any, impact on the formulation of educational policies that affect the schools in which their children are enrolled. Yet there are instances in which these typically disenfranchised citizens become politically active and are able to effect change in the educational policy arena. This study will focus on the process of transformation of marginalized and politically disempowered parents into citizens active in the formulation of educational policy.

BACKGROUND

Schools tend to be the governmental institution with which the average citizen has the most contact. Ironically, most community members have little voice in the day-to-day operations of schools and tend to have insignificant influence on educational policy at the district, state, or federal level. In *Tinkering Toward Utopia*, Tyack and Cuban (1995) explain that a variety of groups have entered school politics, but that this apparent pluralism is misleading. They feel the politics of education has not been conducted on a level playing field. Members of the policy elite—people who manage the economy, who have privileged access to the media and to political officials, who control foundations, and who lead our city and state education agencies and universities—have disproportionate authority over educational reform. The authors go on to say:

Policy elites often claimed to be “taking the schools out of politics.” They sought to do this by centralizing control of schools and delegating decisions about education, wherever possible, to “experts.” In the process

they did not, of course, eliminate politics, but they acquired formidable powers: to set the agenda of reform, to diagnose problems, to prescribe solutions, and often to influence what should *not* [italics in original] be on the agenda of reform. (p. 8)

Stone, Henig, Jones and Pierannunzi (2001) explain that in addition to being controlled by elites, educational policy occurs in subsystems and is decentralized, taking place “out of the limelight of public opinion” (p. 100). This type of decentralization (toward the elites) occurs despite vocal support for parental involvement (decentralization toward the community) from the U.S. Department of Education and many state departments of education (Epstein, 2001). In Stone et al.’s (2001) words: “urban parents are scarcely visible as *active* [italics in original] stakeholders in the current school improvement movement” (p. 83). Not only do the elites control the policymaking environment, but they also perceive problems differently. For example, the author’s research determined that, in some cities, elites are likely to say that no educational problems exist while in others they may identify poor teaching and governance as concerns while other groups cite financing and social issues as key school problems.

Issues of race, class, gender, education, and political knowledge further exacerbate this lack of power (Conway, 2000; Gee, 2001). In addition, the democratic environment in which these citizens live also affects their ability to act. As Greider (1992) points out,

American democracy is in much deeper trouble than most people wish to acknowledge. Behind the reassuring façade, the regular election contests and so forth, the substantive meaning of self-government has been hollowed out. What exists behind the formal shell is a systemic breakdown of the shared civic values we call democracy. (p. 11)

It could be argued that we are at a point where there is no longer even a façade. In *Why Americans Don't Vote*, Piven and Cloward (1988) explain how the most minimal form of political participation, voting, attracts only about half of the eligible voters for presidential elections. Much less than that vote in off-year and local elections (Nelson, Carlson, & Palonsky, 1993). Furthermore, the authors detail how those who vote tend to be economically better off and well educated which has created a system in which the less well off are substantially underrepresented in the electorate. They explain how a tacit understanding has been reached that determines who has and who does not have political power. This agreement has relegated citizens to the “margins of politics, distant from formal power” (p. 30).

These preceding conclusions present a rather pessimistic diagnosis of participation in the educational policy process and of democracy itself, lending credence to Lasch's (1995) question: Does democracy have a future? On rare occasions, individuals can have effect policy systems profoundly (Frantzich, 1999). More importantly, when individuals mobilize as a group, they are able to drive issues through the system that have a direct impact on their own lives and on the schools their children attend (Shirley, 1997). These active citizens have embodied Putman's (1995) social life (networks, norms, and trust) that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives that benefit the society. They also exemplify Barber's (1984) view on politics, that it is not a way of life but a way of living. In Sehr's (1997) words: “The project of articulating a radical, participatory, and public vision of democracy and struggling to bring it about is the most important counter-hegemonic project that can be

undertaken in the United States today” (p. 28). Finally, Freire (1993) describes who must bring this vision of democracy about:

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. (p. 26)

Some may claim that stories of individuals and groups impacting entrenched political and bureaucratic structures are unique. However, as Schudson (1998) points out, “If these are mythologies, they are mythologies of the real; they tell of real people taking decisive actions, often against great odds, to genuinely change lives” (p. 291).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The central problem this study focuses on is nestled within the context of educational policymaking and political participation. Fowler (2000) explains how in the policy process, issue definition and agenda setting are relatively unfamiliar to the general public. If the public has any involvement with policymaking at all, it tends to be in the latter stages of policymaking—policy formulation and policy implementation. The public in general, and parents specifically, have little or no say in what educational problems become policy at the district, city, state, or federal level. In order to have more of an effect on issue definition and agenda setting, the average citizen will have to become politically involved.

Although much research and writing has been generated about political participation, socialization, and forms of civic association such as social capital, little

inquiry has examined the process of transformation itself. More specifically, little is known about how marginalized and politically disempowered parents become politically active citizens in the problem definition phase of educational policymaking at the district, city, and state levels.

As Sigel (1989) notes, because of the time and costs involved, few studies trace and explain developmental changes in political outlook as they occur over an individual's life-span. However, she notes that shorter-term ethnographic studies combining a developmental perspective with a sociocultural one can contribute to the understanding of political transformation. Five research questions will guide this qualitative study in an effort to help understand the process of political transformation in the context of educational policymaking.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a. What changes in civic identity do parents undergo as they transform into citizens active in the formulation of educational policies at the district, city, and state levels?
- b. What strategies do parents use to become politically active in the context of educational policy formation at the district, city, and state levels?
- c. How do parents transform innate skills and knowledge into competencies necessary for political action?
- d. What experiences and attitudes turn a nonpolitical parent into a politically active citizen?

- e. What resources do parents draw on as they become politically active in the context of educational policy formation at the district, city, and state levels?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Politically Active and Politicalness

Generally, when the terms *politically active* and *political participation* are used in the academic literature and media, they refer to voting patterns and behaviors. In this study, the terms refer to very specific forms of active involvement, including: attending community meetings; face-to-face interactions with decision-makers (for example, school board members, city council representatives, state legislators) either through personal meetings or by making presentations in city and state forums; conversations with community members, co-workers, colleagues, friends, and family members; and reading issue-specific literature.

This working definition is much like that of Blasé's (1991, pp. 1-2) conception of micropolitics,

Micropolitics is about power and how people use it to influence and to protect themselves. It is about conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they want. It is about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends.

For Greider (1992, p. 14), "politics creates and sustains social relationships—the human conversation and engagement that draw people together and allow them to discover their mutuality." Chambers & Cowan (2003) have taken this very basic view of politics and termed it "politicalness" to differentiate it from the degraded view of electoral politics. They choose to use the ancient meaning of politics to define

politicalness as the “capacity to gather with others as fellow citizens to converse, plan, act, and reflect for the wellbeing of people as a whole” (p. 18).

Civic Identity

Lane (1962) defines identity as the image of oneself that one constructs from self-referential thinking. It includes a) self-awareness, that is, the degree to which individuals are attentive to and aware of the wide range of phenomena that take place in their own mind; b) self-description, that is, the characteristics that individuals use to describe themselves and that they consider important features of themselves; and c) self-esteem, that is, the value individuals place upon themselves and their ideas (pp. 381-382). The term *civic identity* ties Lane’s definitions of personal identity to an individual’s concepts of community, politics, and democracy.

District-, City-, and State-level Policy

This study will focus on parents who attempt to influence policy-makers at the district, city, and state levels. At these levels, decisions are made that can affect the school a particular parent’s child attends, but that also can have an impact on schools across a city or state. Parents who become politically active may also attempt to influence policies that are not directly school related, but that may still affect their children in some fashion (for example, getting water and sewer systems into a neglected community). Each level has domain over certain policy decisions. For example, activism at the district level might be directed at transportation problems, the size of classes at a particular grade level, the purchasing of books for bilingual programs, or the hiring of dedicated school

personnel such as reading specialists. A parent might work with the city and the district to get a health clinic built at a school in a particular community or perhaps to push for extended services at public libraries. Examples of state-level policies a parent could attempt to influence include funding for after-school programs, modifying the state's accountability system, or instituting health coverage for all school-age children.

Working-Class, Low-Income

As Shirley (1997) points out, the nature of social class in the United States is “dynamic and multidimensional” (p. 58). Designations of terms such as “working-class” and “poor” are fraught with “subtleties and variations” (p. 59). For the purposes of this study, I will use Shirley's somewhat broad designations to delimit a social class range that these terms are meant to convey. “Working-class” refers to persons who have achieved some economic independence, that is, they may own homes, raise families, work hard, and pay taxes. In the middle would be persons who work several jobs or work sporadically, rent, and might receive some form of public assistance (often called “working-poor”). “Low-income” refers to individuals who typically do not work and are dependent on some form of state and/or federal aid. Although these definitions focus on the individual, they will also be used to describe communities, as in “working-class communities” or “low-income communities.”

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it will explain how innate skills and knowledge interact with personal experiences to transform a parent into a politically active citizen.

This understanding can help organizing groups, civic associations, educational institutions, and governmental institutions more effectively create structures that help citizens become responsible democrats and thereby increase their influence and effectiveness in the policy formation stage of educational policymaking. In addition, it will inform political and democratic theory about why people are civically inactive and what it takes to make them active. Finally, the findings can help people traditionally excluded from educational policy formation understand how they can transform their civic identity to become active political participants. Educational policies informed by those who are most affected by them will be more effective (Sarason, 1990). It is also hoped this study will help dispel the myth that there is a “mismatch between the requirements of democracy and most people’s ability to meet these requirements,” as posited by Lupia and McCubbins (1998) in *The Democratic Dilemma*.

LIMITATIONS

The focus of this study is narrow, thereby suggesting a variety of limitations. However, each of these limitations exposes areas in need of future research that can contribute to a better understanding of how to create more effective educational policies.

Although this study is based on the belief that educational policy will be more effective if it is informed by those that the policy affects, it will not explore whether or not involvement by typically disenfranchised citizens has any affect on policy. Rather, the intention is that this research will inform the field on how to increase participation in decision-making. Further research needs to be conducted on how increased participation

can be more effective in defining important educational issues and getting these issues onto the educational agenda (for examples of this type of research, see Mazzoni, 1991; McDaniel & Miskel, 2002).

By its very nature, this study has many implications about issues of power and oppression and will by necessity address these issues. Sidanius (1993) explains how social dominance theory posits that society is inherently oppressive and group oppression is the “normal” default condition of human relations. This oppression offers many explanations about barriers to participation and individual identity. However, the main focus of this study is on describing the process of individual change and not necessarily on barriers to participation and mobilization or how increased participation by traditionally unheard voices might challenge current hegemonic structures. Clearly, though, the participants that do transform into citizen-activist will be challenging the status-quo in a variety of ways.

Finally, this study is of limited duration. Follow-up studies will be necessary to determine if the participants who were active during the duration of the study remain active throughout their lives or if individuals at the beginning of the process become more active.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER

The LA riots in 1992 were my wake-up call. They made clear to me the fact that a sizable percentage of the population in the United States is disenfranchised and disempowered. The riots helped shake my complacency and moved me to action. In

searching for a way to be a part of the solution, I came to recognize that education is one key to empowerment, perhaps the most important. This understanding led me to quit my job as a software engineer in Silicon Valley, return to school for a teaching credential, and start a new career as a bilingual elementary school teacher.

Teaching was a profound, energizing, and positive experience. At the same time, it was frustrating and depressing. Teaching experiences in both inner-city public schools and elite private schools made it clear that education was not living up to its emancipatory potential. In addition, efforts to reform the system were having little effect on the students' skills, knowledge, and will they needed to possess in order to be able to effect change. As an educator, I felt I had little input into the policies driving these reforms. As an educator, I also understood that the students and families with whom I worked and who were most affected by reform efforts had no place at the educational policymaking table.

I believe teaching is the most powerful way an individual can contribute to this country's democratic potential. But I came to understand that shaping the educational context is also fundamental to educational effectiveness. Part of this learning came through my exposure to a community organizing group that partnered with the elementary school at which I worked. This group collaborated with working-class and low-income parents to help them identify educational issues that mattered to them and to get these issues on the city and state educational policy agendas. Hearing typically silenced voices speak to a room full of power moved me deeply—here was true democracy at work. These emotional experiences caused me to ask many questions. What motivated these

individuals with little recourse to act? Where and when did they acquire needed skills? What strategies did they use? How could one describe their transformation into politically active citizens? Why them and not most of the rest of us? What could we learn from them? Finding answers to these questions was a key driver in my decision to pursue graduate studies.

My current and future research interests include democratic theory, macro and micro-politics, the formulation of educational policy, and the relationship between education and civil society. Specifically, I am most interested in understanding the issue-definition and agenda-setting components of the education policy process, and how previously unheard voices can have a greater impact on educational policy. I believe policies informed by those who are most affected by them will be made and implemented more effectively. In turn, more effective education policy will improve the democratic learning that occurs in our schools, which will in turn strengthen this country's democratic capabilities.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The following chapter provides an overview of the educational policy context, forms of group mobilization, democratic theory, political participation, civic identity, and political socialization. These factors are combined to create a contextual framework to provide a mechanism with which to see the big picture, and at the same time, create a space from which to discuss the core of this study. The framework is followed by a

review of the literature on transformative learning and community organizing for school reform.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology for this study. This section includes a discussion of the research design, including participant and site selection, data collection and analysis methods, data presentation, and trustworthiness concerns. It also reflects upon issues of representation, translation, racial/ethnic categorization, the research-participant relationship, and the presentation of narrative.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings of this study—the rich narratives of four Latina mothers at varying stages of transformation into civically active citizens involved in educational policy. The portraits of each woman provide a thick description of their sociohistorical contexts and their individual stories of transformation (or not), and emphasize particular dimensions that each woman’s story adds to the findings.

In Chapter 5, I elaborate a model that details the context that frames civic transformation, the foundational and mediated process that facilitated the change, and the transformed civic identity.

Chapter 6 summarizes the research and the findings, answers the research questions, provides implications for theory and practice, and concludes the manuscript.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the literature review is threefold. First, discussions of educational policy, politics, democracy, and civic identity will be tied together to create a model to frame and narrow the study in order to clarify how this study fits into a bigger picture and suggest areas for further research. The framework will be followed by a review of the literature on adult learning theory, namely that of transformative learning. Finally, the specific context of community organizing for urban school reform will be discussed and tied together with transformative learning theory to create the theoretical perspective for this study.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING THE INCLUSION OF TRADITIONALLY UNHEARD VOICES IN THE EDUCATIONAL POLICYMAKING PROCESS

How then can disempowered citizens—previously silent in the creation of educational policy—manage to have their voices heard? Is it possible to investigate how these people transform themselves into citizen activists and learn from this transformation? To answer these questions, it will be necessary to create a contextual framework within which to locate these individuals. This framework covers four broad areas: the educational policy system, structures that enhance political power, theories of democracy, and individual civic identity.

The Educational Policy System

In order for non-elite actors to make their voices heard in the creation of educational policy, an understanding of what policy is and how policy is formulated is

necessary. Fowler (2000) defines public policy as: “the dynamic and value-laden process through which a political system handles a public problem. It includes a government’s expressed intentions and official enactments as well as its consistent patterns of activity and inactivity” (p. 9). She describes the classic 6-stage model in the policymaking process: issue definition, agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, implementation, and evaluation.

Fowler explains that, at any given time, every society has numerous social problems, but only a few are ever identified as public policy problems. She cites research that determines that policy issues in the United States are generally defined by foundations, universities, and policy planning groups such as think tanks. Members of these groups write reports, sponsor conferences, write articles and news releases, and use other channels of communication to disseminate their definition of the issues to government and the media. These issues drive the policy agenda which is “usually set by powerful politicians, such as presidents, governors, and legislators, who have been in their positions for a long time” (p. 16). These actors are responsible for deciding the list of problems that will receive serious attention. Generally, the only opportunity the average citizen has to influence policy is at the policy adoption phase. However, it is in the first two steps, issue definition and agenda setting, where non-elite voices are traditionally not heard. But it is in these steps that marginalized voices must be heard to make a difference in education reform. As Fowler points out:

If a policy issue is not well defined, it will not be perceived as important. If it is not perceived as important by a large number of people, it will never attract enough attention to reach the policy agenda. If it never

reaches the policy agenda, it will certainly never become formal policy (p. 167).

Setting the agenda also includes the power to decide what will *not* be discussed. This absence of discussion ensures that the status quo will continue and that policy review, evaluation, and change will be impossible (Zeigler, Tucker, & Wilson, 1977).

Fowler (2000) maintains that in education, state policy actors are more important than either federal or local ones. Within states, legislators and the state education system are the most powerful, while parents and the general public have the least influence on policy. How can the disempowered get items on the agenda? If power is the ability of one actor to affect the behavior of another actor, then those with little or no power need to accumulate more of it. The elites have access to money; information; and control over information, official positions, and organization. Non-elites have only one of these resources available to them—organization. They do, however, also have the power of numbers (Fowler, 2000). But, as Williams (2000) comments, “Even if marginalized groups achieve self-representation in decision-making processes, however, their mere presence may do nothing to shape the outcomes of those processes” (p. 125). That is, it takes more than numbers to effect change.

Civic Capacity

There are a variety of theories that describe ways in which an individual can have strong connections to some larger social group or entity. Currently, the most popular theory is that of social capital developed by James Coleman (1988). Coleman’s theory has been expanded in a variety of ways, most notably by Robert Putman’s (1993)

description of strong voluntary associations and their relationship to democratic governance. Putman describes these civic communities as having four key features: civic engagement; political equality; solidarity, trust, and tolerance; and dense networks for social cooperation (synthesized in Soder, 1996, p. 57-58).

Although these features seem to address the resources needed (organization and numbers) for marginalized groups to gain power, Stone et al. (2001) argue that social capital does not ensure effective action. The authors provide several criticisms of social capital theory to argue their point.

First, social capital concerns behavior that is largely interpersonal and private, for example, neighborhood interactions, bowling alone or in leagues (Putman, 1995, 2000), volunteer activities, and church membership. Put another way, it focuses on microbehavior—informal kinds of helping among people engaged in everyday activities. Second, social capital focuses on social realms apart from government and tends to portray government and politics as corrupting forces that inject lines of cleavage and conflict into otherwise harmonious relationships. Third, the theory fails to appreciate how raising the scale from small group to collectivity complicates matters. Fourth, by locating effective action in trust and interpersonal relationships, social capital fails to appreciate how formal institutions of governance can extend the force and authority of civic groups (indeed, they may be necessary). Finally, social capital does not address the need for public collective mediation among disparate interests and the relationship of these groups to formal institutions of governance.

A central contention of the authors is that “the key to bringing about broad change in urban education lies in politics, not the pursuit of particular pedagogies or programs” (Stone et al., 2001, p. 124). This change cannot come from within the policy system. New ideas for educational reform need to be injected into the process through active commitments of energy and resources from outside the system. The authors introduce two working terms to address the limitations of social capital theory: civic mobilization and civic capacity.

Civic mobilization requires an effort extending across various sectors of the urban community and emphasizes active engagement in problem solving. It relies upon “the activity by which a diverse citizenry reconcile, put aside, or in some manner accommodate their differences in order to pursue their common well-being” (Stone et al., 2001, p. 8). It denotes the degree to which various sectors of the community come together in sustained support of school reform.

The end result of civic mobilization is civic capacity. Civic capacity relies on a commitment of resources—physical, personal, and communal—and a shared understanding. Like social capital, civic capacity depends on informal relationships and shared understanding built over time. But it also involves a more public and collective mediation among disparate interests and an integral relationship to formal institutions of governance (p. 27). In short, social capital is “largely the unconscious byproduct of everyday interactions. Civic capacity is the conscious creation of actors seeking to establish a context in which extraordinary problem solving can occur” (Stone et al., 2001, p. 156).

Social capital and civic capacity both presuppose a governmental model that allows for individual and group participation in the affairs of state. However, neither of these group dynamic theories is explicit about what type of democracy most lends itself to increasing social capital or civic capacity. Groups and the individuals that define them will not be successful in affecting such processes as problem definition and agenda setting if they do not believe that the context in which they live allows for this type of participation. Therefore, it is important to identify a theory of democracy that will most enhance citizen activism.

Political Participation and Theories of Democracy

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss multiple theories of democracy or whether or not increased participation is desired in a democracy. Indeed, arguments for limited participation have raged since the first inceptions of democracy in this country (Berry, 1984; *The Federalist Papers*, 1961). However, the above discussion on civic capacity presupposes inclinations that imply certain theories over others. First, deliberations about what kind of representative system (see for example Pitkin, 1967; Soder, 1996) are moot. Representatives (for example, legislators) are not distant people entrusted to do the right thing. Civic capacity makes representatives one of the stakeholders and, therefore, one of the actors. Second, democracy is not just voting; it requires active participation (see for example Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970). Third, democracy is not only the domain for political experts, as Lipmann (1922) argued. The average citizen does indeed have an opinion and can obtain the skills and knowledge necessary to be a part of public deliberation.

What theory of democracy, then, does civic capacity require? Geraint and Moyser (1994) discuss this difference between a realist conception, that places its stress on political leadership, accountability, and representation, and a participatory conception. Although they acknowledge differences in emphasis, they cite Pateman, Bould, and Barber as representatives of the participatory model. Benjamin Barber, in *Strong Democracy, Participatory Politics for a New Age* (1984), defines his ideal of democracy as:

Strong democracy in the participatory mode resolves conflict in the absence of an independent ground through a participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods. (p. 151)

Fundamental to this participatory model is the necessity of dialogue. This type of democracy has come to be termed deliberative democracy—the idea that legitimate lawmaking issues from the public deliberation of citizens (Bohman & Rehg, 1997). It is this type of democracy, full of difference and conflict, but also of dialogue and community, that lends itself to the creation of civic capacity. Not only does it imply that those traditionally silenced voices will be heard, but, as Lasch (1995) points out, it provides a setting in which people can meet as equals, providing an opportunity even for elites to speak to others instead of speaking only among themselves (p. 117).

What kind of person does civic capacity require? What skills would a person have to possess to be successful at pushing for educational reforms? Can an individual learn these norms and skills? To answer these questions, it is necessary to explore both the

civic identity of the individual and the ways in which a person learns effective political behavior.

Political Learning

The above discussion has focused on the macro level of political context. To examine how, when, and why individuals acquire particular political attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, one must look at the individual or micro-level perspective (Steckenrider & Cutler, 1989). This perspective is concerned with the gradual, incremental, and lifelong process of developing an individual's political self (p. 57). As Frantzich (1999) explains, "citizen activists are made, not born" (p. 198). This implies that learning is continuous throughout life, and that the political self established during childhood is not persistent (Sigel, 1989, xii). This lifelong process has been termed *political socialization* and is defined by Dawson, Prewitt, and Dawson (1977) as the "process through which an individual acquires his particular political orientations—his knowledge, feelings and evaluations about his political world" (p. 33). However, this process is not one-way. As Sigel (1989) notes,

We are changed by the social circumstances around us, and we in turn may attempt to affect or change these circumstances. *We* [italics in original] change as we make these attempts, but so does *society* [italics in original].... It is impossible, therefore, to study either in isolation. (p. 459)

It is reasonable to understand political *socialization* as something that happens *to* individuals, that is, that they are acted upon. Indeed, it may be this mindset that has contributed to the puzzlement that Stein (2002) expresses about how "political psychology, as a field of inquiry, has paid relatively little attention to learning" (p. 107).

Dawson and Prewitt (1969) explain that, “political socialization as cultural transmission and as individual learning—are complementary” (p. 13). In this paper, the two terms are used interchangeably.

Steckenrider and Cutler (1989) identify three clusters of explanations as to why political socialization is continuous throughout the life cycle, that is, why adults are susceptible to political change: 1) societal-level phenomena such as wars, depressions, and urban growth; 2) time-lag or temporal aspects in which the changed social or political world renders the political orientations acquired earlier less relevant or incomplete for the current circumstances; and 3) the acquisition of new roles and life experiences such as marriage and entry into the labor force (pp. 57-58). It is this third aspect that much of the research into political socialization focuses on. The authors suggest that new roles lead to socialization or resocialization, which can result in new or changed political values and attitudes. However, individuals play a variety of roles, and these roles may complement each other or exist in conflict. For example, a woman’s traditional views of gender roles and commitment to family will affect a political role that she wishes to play (see for example Carroll, 1989; Conway, 2000). On the one hand, motherhood could depress the level of participation because of time and energy constraints. On the other hand, motherhood could promote interest in specific types of political issues or foster certain political values (Sapiro, 1984, p. 61).

Dawson et al. (1977, chap. 5) describe two types of political learning: indirect and direct. Indirect forms of political socialization entail the acquisition of predispositions which are not in themselves political but which subsequently influence the development

of the political self. Nonpolitical orientations are acquired and later directed toward specifically political objects to form political orientations. For example, an individual could transfer attitudes toward school authority to political authorities. Skills such as public speaking learned in school can be used in political settings. Indirect learning can also happen through apprenticeship where political skills and behaviors are learned in nonpolitical situations such as participating in a 4-H club or scouts.

Direct forms of political socialization refer to experiences that are explicitly political and occur in several forms. First, actions and attitudes can be imitated. For example, children may choose the same political party as their parents. Second, individuals can anticipate a need and set out to learn the necessary skills. Third, direct learning can occur through experience, for example, by interacting with public officials. Finally, direct political socialization can happen through formal schooling.

Individuals change as they undergo socializing experiences. Sapiro (1984) maintains that “the process of political integration involves an alteration of ‘webs of significance,’ that is, change in an individual’s understanding of and sense of relationship to the political system. In order to be a full-fledged citizen of a democratic polity, one must see at least some of the connections between government and politics and one’s own life” (p. 84). Mezirow (1997) calls these connections *frames of reference*. He explains that they can be transformed through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which individuals base their interpretations, beliefs, habits of mind, and points of view. Changes to an individual’s frame of reference occur through an “accretion of transformations in point of view” (p. 7).

Individual transformation can also be characterized by an individual's changing sense of political efficacy—the belief that one has some influence over political events, that when one acts, the political system responds (Lane, 1999). Lane describes two forms of efficacy: *internal* political efficacy in which an individual feels personal control, and *external* efficacy in which a person feels that his or her political acts are effective and that the political system is responsive.

In order to understand the connection between the individual and the creation of educational policy, it is helpful to visualize how the components discussed above—the policy system, civic capacity, theories of democracy, civic identity, and political socialization—relate to each other, what the dependencies are, how they reinforce each other, and in the end, how they shape the type of education that the children of the affected communities are receiving.

A Model for Individual Participation in Educational Policy

Individuals must have an understanding of themselves as political beings and of the contexts in which they exist in order to have to have an effect on educational policy. Part of this context exists at the macro level and is best characterized by a systems level approach which includes federal, state, and local environmental factors that affect political decision making and policy creation (Easton, 1965). The individual interacts with others and the environment at the micro level. Experiences and life situations combine to affect norms, values, and behaviors and to mold individual identity (Milbrath, 1965). An individual's democratic beliefs interact with this civic identity and help determine what behavior an individual is likely to exhibit. Combining parts of Easton's

(1965) political systems approach, a generalized conception of Milbrath's (1965) model for political identity formation, civic mobilization and capacity, and the influence of democratic theory provides a useful model to understand the stages that an individual must progress through to become active in educational policy formation. Additionally, it illustrates how an individual can both affect and be affected by the environment.

Figure 1 shows a conceptual diagram that is useful for analyzing the influences on civic identity, ways that this civic identity might be transformed into action, and how this

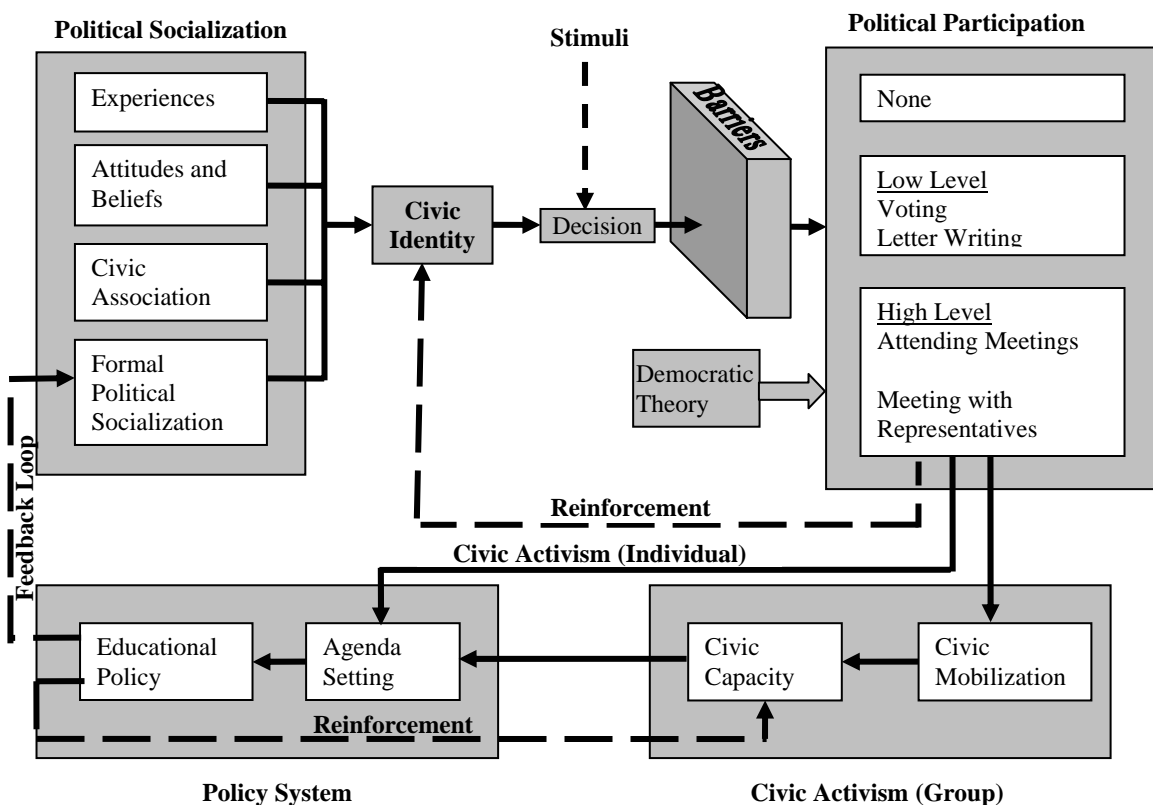


Figure 1: Influences on civic identity, the creation of civic capacity, and influencing the education policy agenda.

action can affect educational policy. It reflects the basic sociopsychological personality of Kurt Lewin's field theory, which "posits that human behavior is a function of both the

forces of the environmental situations in which actors find themselves and the psychological predispositions which the actors bring to these situations” (DiRenzo, 1974, p. 20). The individual is represented by the box entitled *Civic Identity*. Civic identity, in many ways is like Lane’s (1972) “political personality” which he defines as the “enduring, organized, dynamic response sets habitually aroused by political stimuli” (p. 5). Political personality “embraces (a) motivation, often analyzed as a combination of needs and values (the push-pull theory); (b) cognitions, perceptions, and habitual modes of learning; and (c) behavioral tendencies, that is, the acting out of needs and other aspects of manifest behavior” (p. 5). The model shows how contextual, environmental, and experiential factors influence civic identity and individual and group behavior. The model also shows how this behavior might be channeled into action that can influence the creation of educational policy. Unlike Milbrath’s (1965) model, this diagram does not incorporate a time dimension.

Since political socialization is ongoing and new experiences create a civic identity that is fluid and constantly in flux, the model can be used to describe an individual’s past experiences, the current “state” of civic identity or political action, or used to map out a possible course of action an individual might take in order to become more politically powerful.

The model shows how broad aspects of political socialization, political participation, democratic theory, activism, and the educational policy system interact. The reinforcement feedback loops describe how individuals, by participating (and more importantly, succeeding), will be more predisposed to act (Milbrath, 1965). That is, by

active participation, an individual's civic identity will be stimulated and the person will be more inclined to be an active political participant. Likewise, success in creating education policy will increase a group's civic capacity. This sense is termed *political efficacy*—the belief that one [or a group] has some influence over political events, that when one acts, the political system responds (Lane, 1999). In some instances, individuals can work independently to effect policy agendas (see for example Frantzich, 1999). In others, individuals mobilize as a group, as Shirley (1997) describes in *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform*. Frantzich and Shirley generally describe successful efforts. However, there are many instances of failure, both by individuals and groups, to effect changes in education policy (Gewertz, 2002; Sarason, 1990; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The third feedback loop shows the relationship between education policy and formal political socialization, namely, that which occurs in public schools. As Robert Westbrook (1996) explains:

The relationship between public schooling and democracy is a conceptually tight one. Schools have become one of the principal institutions by which modern states reproduce themselves, and insofar as those states are democratic, they will make use of schools to prepare children for democratic citizenship.... One reasonable measure of the strength and prospects of a democracy is the degree to which its public schools successfully devote themselves to this task. (p. 125)

The implication is that education policy that is informed by the very people it affects will reflect what is most important to a given educational community, and that these policies will in turn reform schools so that they are more effective in teaching children how to become active democratic participants.

Within the framework, this study focuses on civic identity and how experiences, attitudes and beliefs, civic associations, and political socialization interact to transform individuals into civically active persons. The following sections provide a detailed look at the type of learning necessary to drive this transformation, and a specific type of political socialization that focuses on creating power for typically marginalized voices.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

The subject of this study of how marginalized voices can be heard in the making of educational policy implies a transformation of identity. This transformation can occur in several ways, such as through processes of socialization and indoctrination. It can also occur through adult learning that is dedicated to serious engagement of critical, ethical, and political issues. By emphasizing not *what* we know, but *how* we know, transformative learning theory provides a framework in which to describe these transformations. For Kegan (2000), changing what we know is informational learning. It is “literally in-*form*-ative [italics in original] because it seeks to bring valuable new contents into the existing form of our way of knowing.” Trans-*form*-ative learning, for Kegan, “literally puts the form itself at risk of change (and not just change but increased capacity)” (p. 49).

Baumgartner (2001, p. 18) uses Dirkx’s four-lens approach to describe transformative learning philosophies. These philosophies include Freire’s (1993) emancipatory view that acknowledges social inequities and champions liberation, Mezirow’s (1991; 1995; 1997; 2000) more cognitive approach using critical reflection and discussion, a developmental approach that seeks meaning-making and acknowledges

the importance of mentors, and a spiritual-integrative approach that emphasizes the extrarational in transformative learning. Mezirow's theory has emerged as a useful foundation for research, although in its almost thirty years of existence, it has been modified and elaborated in reaction to critiques and to the theory's use in unanticipated contexts. Mezirow's theory and common critiques will be outlined in the following sections followed by the conception of the theory that will be used as a framework for this study.

Making Meaning as a Learning Process

For Mezirow (2000), learning "is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action" (p. 5). That is, learning is epistemic cognition. The process involves formulating more dependable beliefs about our experience, assessing their contexts, seeking informed agreement on their meaning and justifications, and making decisions (p. 4). This learning may be intentional and deliberate, occur incidentally as a by-product of another activity, or be "mindlessly" assimilative. Learning generally involves the use of language, but it can also involve a presentational construal in which words are not required to make meaning, such as by experiencing presence, motion, color, texture directionality, aesthetic or kinesthetic experience, empathy, feelings, appreciation, inspiration, or transcendence (p. 5). Quoting Weiss (p. 6), Mezirow explains how human beings have an enormous capacity to non-consciously make inferences from complex data, to solve difficult puzzles, and to make broad generalizations from particular experiences. Mezirow explains that, since language and

culturally specific social practices are implicated in learning, understanding will be “enabled and constrained by the historical knowledge-power networks in which it is embedded” (p. 7).

Epistemic learning requires an awareness of the context of your beliefs and those of others and a critical reflection on the validity of their assumptions or premises.

Transformative learning then, for Mezirow,

Refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7-8)

The theory focuses on how a person can learn to negotiate and act for his or her own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings, rather than those uncritically assimilated from others.

Domains of Learning

Mezirow (1997; 2000) draws on two of Habermas’ (1984) domains of learning (the two remaining domains are impressionistic and normative). *Instrumental learning* involves learning to control and manipulate other people or the environment, for example, problem solving to improve performance. *Communicative learning* involves feelings, intentions, and moral issues with the purpose of learning what others mean when they communicate with you—in essence, assessing the meaning behind the words; the coherence, truth, and appropriateness of what is being communicated; the truthfulness

and qualifications of the speaker; and the authenticity of expressions of feeling (Mezirow, 2000, p. 9). As Mezirow states, “we must become critically reflective of the *assumptions* [italics in original] of the person communicating” (p. 9). This reflectivity is achieved through *rational discourse*, which, if successful, leads to an understanding of the issue at hand. Communicative competence allows a learner to negotiate his or her own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than simply to act on those of others (what Mezirow refers to as autonomous thinking) (p. 10).

Reflective Discourse

Mezirow (2000) contends that we are conditioned to think adversarially, in terms of winning and losing, or proving ourselves; as his quote of Tannen posits, we are an “argument culture” (p. 11). In an argument culture, information is compromised and impedes learning, necessitating a move away from self-serving debate to “empathic listening and informed constructive discourse” (p. 12). For Mezirow, discourse is the process of active dialogue with others to understand the meaning of an experience and requires the following (pp. 13-14):

- More accurate and complete information
- Freedom from coercion and distorting self-deception
- Openness to alternative points of view. Empathy and concern about how others think and feel
- The ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively
- Greater awareness of the context of ideas and, more critically, reflectiveness of assumptions, including their own

- An equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse
- Willingness to seek understanding and agreement and to accept a resulting best judgment as a test of validity until new perspectives, evidence, or arguments are encountered and validated through discourse as yielding a better judgment

Meaning Structures

Combining cognitive, affective (emotions, feelings), and conative (desires, intentions) dimensions, Mezirow (2000) describes the “structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions” as a “meaning perspective” which he now interchangeably terms a *frame of reference* (p. 16). A frame of reference provides context in which to make meaning and may be represented as cultural paradigms or personal perspectives. Dominant paradigms that unite the particular with the universal become “worldviews.” Frames of reference are composed of two dimensions, a habit of mind and resulting points of view. A *habit of mind* “is a set of assumptions—broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience” (p. 17). Mezirow (1995) first described meaning perspectives (habits of mind) as

a set of psychocultural assumptions, for the most part culturally assimilated but including intentionally learned theories, that serve as one of three sets of codes significantly shaping sensation and delimiting perception and cognition: sociolinguistic, (e.g. social norms, cultural and language codes, ideologies, theories), psychological, (e.g., repressed parental prohibitions which continue to block ways of feeling and acting, personality traits) and epistemic (e.g., learning. Cognitive and intelligence styles, sensory learning preferences, focus on wholes or parts) (p. 42).

More recently, Mezirow (2000) had added several varieties of habits of mind including moral-ethical (conscience, moral norms), philosophical (religious doctrine, philosophy, transcendental world view), and aesthetic (values, tastes, attitudes, standards, and judgments).

A habit of mind becomes expressed as a *point of view*, which comprise clusters of meaning schemes:

Sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments—that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects, and attribute causality. Meaning schemes commonly operate outside of awareness. They arbitrarily determine what we see and how we see it—cause-effect relationships, scenarios of sequences of events, what others will be like, and our idealized self-image. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18)

These meaning schemes “suggest a line of action that we tend to follow automatically unless brought into critical reflection” (p. 18).

Transformations

Mezirow (2000) describes four ways of learning: by elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view, or by transforming habits of mind. Transformation of frames of reference requires critical reflection of assumptions and context and can occur as an epochal event—a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight, or incrementally—involving a progressive series of transformations in related points of view that culminate in a transformation in habit of mind (p. 21).

Mezirow (1991; 1995; 2000) explains that transformations “often follow some variation of the following phases of meaning becoming clarified” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22):

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

Transformative learning may occur through objective and subjective reframing. *Objective reframing* involves critical reflection on the assumptions of others. *Subjective reframing* involves critical self-reflection of one's own assumptions about the following (Mezirow, 2000, p. 23):

- A narrative—applying a reflective insight from someone else's narrative to one's own experience
- A system—economic, cultural, political, educational, communal, or other—as in Freire's (1970) conscientization, consciousness raising in the women's movement and the civil rights movement
- An organization or workplace

- Feelings and interpersonal relations—as in psychological counseling or psychotherapy
- The ways one learns, including one’s own frames of reference, per se, in some adult education programs

For Mezirow, a transformative learning experience involves overcoming situational, emotional, and informational constraints and requires that the learner make an informed and reflective decision to act on his or her reflective insight (p. 23). Quoting Novak: “Perspective transformation represents not only a total change in life perspective, but an actualization of that perspective. In other words, life is not *seen* [italics in original] from a new perspective; it is *lived* [italics in original] from that perspective” (p. 24). A test of transformative learning is

the extent to which it exposes the social and cultural embeddedness and taken-for-granted assumptions in which the self is located; explore[s] the interests served by the continuation of the self thus positioned; incite[s] a refusal to be positioned in this way when the interests served are those of domination and oppression; and encourage[s] alternative readings of the text of experience. (Tenant quoted in Mezirow, 2000, p. 24)

Critiques and expansions of Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning has emerged as a dominant paradigm for adult learning and generated substantial research and also much criticism. The theory has been expanded as it has attracted more adherents. Taylor (2000) groups criticisms and modifications to the theory into broad areas, six of which are pertinent to this study: the linearity of the process, what warrants a perspective transformation, the complexity of the triggering event, the affective dimension of transformative learning, the relational nature of rational discourse, and the role of context.

Mezirow's (1995) original conceptions of the theory was a linear (but not necessarily step-wise) process. Taylor (2000) explains that most studies have found that the process of perspective transformation tends to be individualistic and fluid and "more recursive, evolving, and spiraling in nature" (p. 290). In addition, the phases lose relevance when a transformation occurs over a timeframe that might extend 2 or 3 decades.

Taylor indicates that despite the abundance of studies, it is not clear what warrants a perspective transformation and he posits that the problem lies with how a frame of reference might be constituted, what its boundaries are, and how it might look after it is transformed. The research Taylor cites reiterates the individualistic nature of transformation, but he identifies an overarching characteristic of subjective reframing (critical reflection of one's assumptions) occurring more frequently than objective reframing (critical reflection of others' assumptions) (p. 298). In addition, transformation has a behavioral component to it. Saavedra states that "action, acting upon redefinitions of our perspectives, is the clearest indication of a transformation" (quoted in E. W. Taylor, 2000, p. 297).

Mezirow maintains that perspective transformations begin with a disorienting dilemma. Most studies that Taylor analyzed concurred, but many revealed that triggering the process was much more complex and that generally "[triggers] do not appear as a sudden, life-threatening event; instead they are more subtle and less profound, providing an opportunity for exploration and clarification of past experience" (p. 299). Triggers can be less a singular event and more a cumulative process. Taylor cites Scott's findings that

indicate two types of disorienting dilemma, an external event provoking an internal dilemma along with an internal disillusionment.

A foundational principal of transformative learning theory is the rational emphasis upon critical reflection as a means to effecting a perspective transformation. Although critical reflection has maintained its central importance to the theory, affective learning (the role of emotions and feelings) has emerged as a primary contributor to the process of transformation (E. W. Taylor, 2000). Affect (for example, feelings of anger, fear, shame, and happiness) plays a role in several phases of transformation, including serving as a triggering event and as a premise for reflection. Other discussions of non-rational factors leading to perspective transformation include the roles of image, symbol, ritual, fantasy, and imagination (Dirkx, 2000).

The rational foundation of the theory has also narrowly defined the type of discourse necessary for transformation, and current research is “revealing a picture of discourse that is not only rationally driven but equally dependent on relational ways of knowing” (E. W. Taylor, 2000, p. 306). Indeed, Taylor maintains that there exist ideal conditions for fostering transformation: “It is through building trusting relationships that learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal with learning on an affective level, which is essential for managing the threatening and emotionally charged experience of transformation” (p. 308).

Finally, the early presentations of the theory lacked explorations into how context and culture affect transformations. Recent studies have identified personal contextual factors such as prior life experiences and the readiness and predisposition for change.

Other studies have focused on sociocultural, geographical, and historical factors. Caruth (2000) theorized that African American males who participated in the Million Man March experienced a different disorienting dilemma, a collective versus individual transformation, and experienced spiritual transformations. To Scott (2003b), “Mezirow has decoupled transformative learning from the dimension of societal structures in the mechanisms of transformative learning theory” (p. 265).

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR URBAN SCHOOL REFORM

In order to describe the story of these mothers’ transformation into politically capable citizens, it is necessary to investigate the context in which these transformations took place. This section has several purposes. First, it provides an overview of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), its formulation in Texas as the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (TIAF), and a description of one of its affiliates, Austin Interfaith (AI). This overview will detail the organizational roots, the processes used to work with communities, and some of their successes affecting educational policy. Second, it looks at typical forms of parental involvement and differentiates these from the model employed by the IAF. Finally, it will detail the formal and informal ways that individuals are identified and trained to become community leaders.

Background

University of Chicago sociologist Saul Alinsky founded the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in 1940. Alinsky created a national team of organizers to help low-income communities “*discover* [emphasis added] their own political power” (Greider,

1992, p. 224). In the chapter titled “The Purpose,” in his book *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky (1989) states that

What follows is for those who want to change the world from what it is to what they believe it should be. *The Prince* was written by Machiavelli for the Haves on how to hold power. *Rules for Radicals* is written for the Have-Nots on how to take it away.

In this book we are concerned with how to create mass organizations to seize power and give it to the people; to realize the democratic dream of equality, justice, peace, cooperation, equal and full opportunities for education, full and useful employment, health, and the creation of those circumstances in which man can have the chance to live by values that give meaning to life. (p. 3)

Alinsky was “critical of philanthropists, liberals, and social workers who sought to improve the life situations of the poor without enhancing their political power” (Shirley, 1997). His goal was to create community organizations as political institutions with a variety of characteristics including indigenous leadership and citizen participation, financial independence, a commitment to defend local interests while avoiding divisive issues, and independence from political parties and political endorsements (Warren, 2001, p. 44). As Warren explains, these militant organizations were a “radical” departure in American politics. Alinsky accepted the power politics that were in existence and therefore did not expect a transformation of the political system itself. Instead, he wanted to open up the system to a new interest group consisting of a political organization of the poor based on existing social institutions already in place in a community, such as churches, small businesses, and unions. Although successful in a variety of ways, the IAF lost momentum and became a weak institution by the early seventies. Alinsky’s efforts had provided the philosophical foundations for organizing in urban neighborhoods, but

his methods tended to be confrontational and “rude and crude” (Greider, 1992) and he had not worked to create long-lived institutions. It is his protégé, Edward Chambers, and later, Ernie Cortés, who are credited with growing the IAF into multiple organizations across the country with millions of members.

Shirley (1997) describes how Chambers moved away from Alinsky’s style of assaulting the status quo to a strategy based on patient building of power through collaborations based on mutual interests. He developed long-term relationships with local institutions, increased the available funding, systematized the training for leaders, created an opening for women in the organization, and upgraded the pay for organizers. In addition, he looked more to congregations as a means to sustain participation and to take advantage of their emancipatory values (Warren, 2001). Ernie Cortés worked with Chambers to re-conceptualize the IAF and to export the model to Texas. In his excellent book on the TIAF, *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform*, Dennis Shirley (1997) provides a detailed history and overview of the organization¹. He describes how, while working with the IAF in the North East, Cortés made trips to San Antonio and began working with Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Catholic clergy to create a sponsoring committee to raise funds and to establish the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (TIAF). In 1974, he returned to his native San Antonio and began conversing with hundreds of civic and neighborhood leaders in the poorer West Side to learn about

¹ Most of the history detailed in this section of the IAF, TIAF, and Austin Interfaith is taken liberally from Shirley’s (1997) *Community Organizing for Urban School Reform*. Other sources for overviews on these organizations include Chambers’ and Cowan’s (2003) *Roots for Radicals*, Greider’s (1992) *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy*, McLaughlin’s (1997) *Congregations, Schools, and Social Capital: Can an Interfaith Association Lead School Change?*, and Warren’s (2001) *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*.

public issues that troubled them. Cortés found that residents wanted a variety of issues resolved including sewer systems to prevent flooding, sidewalks so that children could get to school safely, and bank loans to low-income homeowners. They also wanted to know how to challenge the Anglo-American dominated business elite.

Cortés began organizing on a parish-by-parish basis to solve increasingly difficult problems. Initial successes included forcing a hide processing plant to install pollution control equipment to reduce the noxious fumes that polluted the neighborhood, forcing the city to remove a neighborhood junkyard and in its place to build a park, and building sidewalks and walkways over major thoroughfares. These successes both motivated the West Side residents and taught them how to challenge the San Antonio public sector. After dozens of victories, Communities Organized for Public Services (COPS) was convened as the first TIAF organization in 1974. At the founding convention, Bishop Flores spoke to over two thousand working-class Mexican Americans:

You are not here today as supplicants with downcast eyes, not as welfare recipients, not as beggars. You are here as equals, as responsible, law-abiding, tax-paying people. You are a people that with your sweat have helped shape this country, this state, and this particular city. You seek no special favors. You seek a just share of your tax monies to have a decent community. (Shirley, 1997, p. 41)

In few words, Bishop Flores touched on the key elements of the IAF philosophy and galvanized the community. Unlike previous efforts to empower communities such as La Raza Unida, COPS organized around Judeo-Christian values rather than ethnic distinctiveness, making it more difficult for the entrenched San Antonio ruling class to stereotype and dismiss them. Through a variety of efforts including “tie-up” actions to disrupt business at a local bank owned by a powerful San Antonio banker and at a luxury

department store, COPS was able to get the attention of San Antonio's power elite in a matter of days. In subsequent meetings, COPS won over \$100 million in capital expenditures for the West Side. With this victory, the Mexican American community earned both respect and power. COPS also became a role model for other cities across Texas and indeed across the country. Working with local organizers, Cortés spread the COPS model to a variety of cities and rural areas including Houston, the lower Rio Grande Valley, Fort Worth, El Paso, and Austin.

Each of these organizations takes on characteristics from their local contexts making the TIAF a heterogeneous organization but also one that may appear somewhat ambiguous to outsiders. According to Shirley (1997), this ambiguity allows each franchise to stick to the foundational philosophies of working with the poor and universality—the ability to work with diverse constituencies. He explains, “The Texas IAF organizations appear to both foster and benefit from a deliberate ambiguity that eschews traditional political alignments and endeavors to focus on the pragmatics of bringing diverse constituencies together to address practical and immediate problems of poor and working-class citizens” (p. 45). This universality ensures that the work that they do affects change in the poorer communities, but it also allows them to create alliances with “affluent suburbanites” to protect underground aquifers or with corporate chief executive officers and political leaders to craft urban development programs.

Inspired by the success of COPS in San Antonio, a Baptist minister in Fort Worth worked with the TIAF to form a local chapter, the Allied Communities of Tarrant, or ACT, in 1983. ACT began work with winnable issues such as challenging utility rate

hikes and getting city monies for the repair of inner-city streets. As the organization matured, it began work on the community's major concern—the poor performance of its public schools. In 1986, keeping with the tradition of working on winnable issues, organizers targeted Morningside Middle School, a low performing, high-poverty school whose principal recognized the need to work with community stakeholders².

With the goal of dramatically increasing community involvement in the school, ACT leaders, along with Morningside teachers, began by visiting the homes of every parent with a child at the school. In an effort to create more unity among the parents, these individual meetings evolved to meetings of 50 to 100 parents at the school during the first year. These meetings gave the parents an opportunity to talk with one another, identify common concerns, and begin to discuss possible solutions. Parents “shifted from a focus on blaming the school to address their own needs to become more engaged to help their children to learn more effectively” (Shirley, 1997, p. 109). They also exposed teachers to the parents and their neighborhoods in new way. Early changes included the increase of parent participation at the school, the creation of development training programs for parents on how to work more effectively with their children and the creation of a free after-school program so that traditionally unsupervised children could participate in sports, arts, and academic tutoring. The increased visibility of parents at the school tended to help teachers improve their instruction since they knew that a parent might be observing them. ACT also worked with local congregations to recognize and honor childrens’ and parents’ successes at the school. After the first year of organizing,

² For a detailed history of ACT and Morningside Middle School, see Shirley, (1997) Chapter 3.

700 parents attended the fall back-to-school open house. Within 2 years, student scores on the state achievement test had risen from last among all middle schools in Fort Worth to third place. Success with the school empowered the parents to undertake other efforts, such as successfully campaigning to close a liquor store that sold alcohol to underage students.

Challenging Parental Involvement

Implied in the story of the transformation of Morningside Middle School is a new view of how parents can participate in school reform. Using a critical analysis method, López (2000) outlined 12 popular parental involvement typologies (Epstein; Hoover-Dempsey; Chavkin and Williams; Henderson, Marburger, and Oom; Gordon; Delgado-Gaitán; Comer; Henry; Swap; Berger; and Greenwood and Hickman). These typologies, explains López, define the discourse of parental involvement and how “the roles of both parents and schools are engendered in these typologies and suggest patterns of behavior, modes of interaction, and relational ‘scripts’ [quotes in original] parents and schools ought to have in order for parent involvement to be recognized” (p. 49). López list seven commonalities synthesized from the typologies (pp. 49-50):

- Parents as volunteers or paraprofessionals in schools
- Parents as teachers of their own children
- Parents as learners
- Parents as audience and school supporters in school functions
- Parents as providers of basic student needs
- Parents as decision-makers on governance boards

- Parents as interlocutors/conduits for school derived information

López points out that these typologies construct parent involvement in such a way that it represents narrowly defined practices which “mimic, reinforce, and reproduce the culture of the school. In other words, ‘involvement’ [quotes in original] is regulated and viewed only in terms of the benefits schools derive from such practices” (p. 50). A further commonality is that all of these typologies help maintain the institution of school as the locus of power into which parents are invited to participate. The ACT-Morningside partnership provides a stark example of how parents created the agenda and defined the arena in which the school would work with *them*. They did not wait for school staff to invite them to participate. Nor did they try to mimic the norms and behaviors dictated by the traditional parental involvement models outlined above.

A second way in which the Morningside parental involvement differed from traditional models is in the bureaucratic level parents were able to work within. The seven typologies outlined above are all concerned with *school* level interactions; that is, parental involvement is constructed and constrained at the locus of parent-school interactions. In addition, the most influence a parent is allowed (actually, a very select few parents) is to be one of a few voices on some form of site based management, where the opportunity to affect school policy is confined, and the possibility of setting an agenda, is in most cases, impossible. The Morningside story illustrates how parents not only defined the agenda, but that they affected change at the school level as well as at the community, district, and city levels. That is, they redefined parental involvement as

proactive, and showed that parents can affect educational policy that has broader reaches than their community school.

To Shirley (1997), this form of parental engagement is radically different from prevailing paradigms of parental involvement because it is interwoven with the IAF agenda of cultivating political leadership in low income communities. Political leadership “consists of a number of factors, including the ability to identify social problems, skill in translating vague grievances into concrete political issues, and talent in coalition building, implementation of change, and evaluation” (p. 73).

Alliance Schools

The successes that the TIAF experienced with the Morningside school partnership suggested to TIAF leaders that they could “make an impact at the heart of the school rather than just on the periphery” (Shirley, 1997, p. 116). Ernie Cortés and others systematized the concept, securing funding from the Rockefeller Foundation for organizers in other low-income communities in Texas. The TIAF worked with a high school in Houston beginning in 1988, an elementary school in El Paso starting in 1992, and several elementary schools in Austin in the early 1990s. Some of these collaboratives were successful; others failed. Yet each experience gave the TIAF organizers the information they needed to refine the model and in 1991 they formed a relationship with the Texas Education Agency (TEA—the state’s education agency) to designate 21 schools in low-income neighborhoods as “Alliance Schools” (Shirley, 1997).

In a report on the Alliance School initiative, the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning (2000/Fall, pp. 1-2, 6-8) details how the Alliance Schools consist of a

partnership between the Interfaith Education Fund (IEF), the Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation Network, school staff and parents, school district officials, and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). To become a partner school, community stakeholders including parents, teachers, and school leaders formalize relationships by first engaging in a series of meetings and conversations. Next, parents and school leaders make a public and financial commitment to work with the local IAF to improve their school's performance. Through continued meetings at the school and in the communities, outreach efforts to local institutions like congregations, and community walks, community interest grows. The goal is not parental involvement, but parental engagement, where parents are

charged with taking an active role in whatever is needed to attain a specific Alliance School goal, such as confronting civic officials about problems they should solve, holding them accountable for promises made, being persistent with school boards in getting needs met and pushing for increased funding, working with the local business community when necessary to gain their cooperation, and also demanding to be a part of school decision-making that in the past would always have been done by school leadership behind closed doors. (OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, 2000/Fall, p. 2)

In many cases, there is resistance and defensiveness from administrators and teachers as parents begin to ask hard questions. Sometimes, the process fails and a particular school withdraws from the program. In other schools, staff who are unwilling to change leave the school and are replaced by educators interested in creating “something new” (p. 6). The process can take several years before stakeholders work with ease and familiarity. Parent leaders are cultivated by working together on small, achievable goals to gain credibility and grow the group's power base. Eventually, larger issues are tackled at the district, city, and state levels.

No formal studies have been done on the successes of the Alliance School initiative in terms of student achievement, but statistics provided by the IEF (Interfaith Education Fund, 2001) indicate that the initiative is successful at raising scores on the state accountability exams. For the 1999-2000 school year, 129 Alliance Schools (93 elementary, 20 middle, 16 high) served 89,994 students in 20 Texas school districts. Demographically, the students were distributed as follows:

- 79% are economically disadvantaged
- 27% have limited proficiency in English
- 70% are Hispanic
- 23% are African American
- 7% are White
- 1% are Asian

For the 84 schools that were Alliance Schools during both the 1999 and 2000 test administrations of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), passing rates improved at more than double the pace of the state scores for math, reading, and writing “*as well as for students passing all tests [emphasis in original]*” (p. 1). The report points out that pass rates for economically disadvantaged Alliance School students improved at a greater rate than for all Alliance School students and at double the rate of the state.

Funding from the TEA and the IEF provide a variety of support to the schools, such as professional development for teachers; leadership development for parents and teachers; after-school programs; English language classes for parents; and financial and

logistical support for local, state and national parent and teacher trainings and public meetings.

Organizational Structures and Processes

The TIAF is a hierarchical organization, starting with roughly ten “lead organizers,” who have overall responsibility for organizing throughout urban, suburban, and rural areas in Texas. Each of these organizations employs other “organizers” to work on the issues pertinent to that locale (the term *organizer* will be used to denote both lead and non-lead organizers). Organizers are paid by the TIAF with funds raised from dues from member institutions (on a sliding scale from as little as \$500 to \$10,000 a year) and from grants from a variety of institutions. The TIAF terms itself a broad-based organization (BBO), meaning that it works with people who are members of a faith based or secular institution as compared to individual community members. A BBO serves as a mediating institution between civil society (for example, families, congregations, schools, unions) and the state and the market. Member organizations “don’t rely on liberal belief in the welfare state or conservative faith in the invisible hand of the market” (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 14). A primary responsibility for these organizers is to create and maintain relationships with institutions such as congregations, schools, and neighborhood associations.

It is from these institutions that the TIAF draws its members. Organizers do not look for “political radicals” but rather for indigenous community leaders such as individuals who serve on parish councils, organize church events, or conduct fund-raising events (Shirley, 1997, p. 49). Regardless of the level of involvement, these individuals

are called *leaders*. As Father John Korsemar points out, “The genius of this thing is that there truly always is room for more people to become leaders” (quoted in Shirley, 1997, p. 49).

An AI organizer described three “categories” of participation: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Tertiary leaders might bring people to an event and help out with such tasks as setting up tables; they might attend all meetings and actions, but show no leadership leanings and may not want the responsibility. Secondary leaders might have an issue they want to press and may work hard on, but their involvement ends when the particular issue has been dealt with. Secondary leaders might have a beginning understanding of concepts like power, but they are not really interested in personal change and future thinking. Primary leaders are interested in developing self and relationships. Primary leaders understand the need for power, that without power nothing gets done. They would be willing to wait on their own issue and work on others while they build relationships and gain power. Primary leaders identify other leaders and tend to be visionaries.

The organizer pointed out that organizing groups need all three types to be successful and indicated that people might move in and out of different roles, depending on the circumstances of their lives and the context in which they are living. A person also might exhibit different types of leadership in different venues; for example, a principal might be a primary leader in his or her school, but tertiary on some other issue.

The Making of a Leader

The IAF has no formal training manuals, no how-to guides, no videos. The process for leadership development is acculturated in the organizers and the organization and is guided by a set of universals (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, pp. 103-104):

- The iron rule: Never, never do for others what they can do for themselves.
- All action is in the inevitable reaction.
- All change comes about as a result of threat or pressure.
- Every positive has a negative, and every negative a positive.
- Action is to organization as oxygen is to the body.
- Never go to power for a decision, but only with a decision.
- The law of change: Change means movement; movement means friction; friction means heat; heat means controversy, conflict.
- Power precedes program.
- The opposition is your best ally in radicalizing your people.
- Anything that drags along for too long becomes a drag.
- Power without love is tyranny; love without power is sentimental mush.
- Your own dues money is almost sacred; other people's money starts controlling you.
- Power can never be conferred; it must be taken.
- The haves will never give you anything of value.
- Have-nots should not be romanticized; they cheat, lie, steal, doublecross, and play victim just like the haves do.

- Peace and justice are rarely realized in the world as it is; the pursuit, not possession, of happiness takes place amid struggle, conflict, and tension.
- Avoid cynics and ideologues; they have nothing to offer.
- Right things are done for wrong reasons, and bad things are often done for right reasons.
- Given the opportunity, people tend to do the right thing.
- Life force is about natality, plurality, and mortality.

Much of the learning that new leaders experience is assimilated through experience and learn-by-doing. Through repeated exposures to similar events, individuals begin to understand how the IAF expects them to behave and what they need to know in order to be successful at gaining power for themselves and their communities. The first lesson, repeated often but more-often-than-not taught through active participation is an understanding of the iron rule, the IAF's guiding principal: "Never do anything for someone that they can do for themselves." In the words of a leader of the IAF:

Ernie Cortés says to organizers and leaders repeatedly that there is no point in holding house meetings if one intends to present a preestablished agenda to citizens; the point, rather, is to develop citizens' capacities to think out potential solutions to their problems themselves. (Shirley, 1997, p. 274)

Austin Interfaith teaches political skills: how to organize, how to speak, how to work with an agenda and keep to it, how to research, how to make demands clear, and how to reach a decision. Foremost is the concept of building relationships, primarily accomplished with one-on-one conversations. The next part of the process is the house meeting—a small group discussion that tends to start out without a policy agenda, but

ends up by coalescing around a consensus of an issue to tackle. At these meetings, organizers use the Socratic method to “agitate citizens so that they themselves think critically about their legitimate grievances and their latent power as citizens” (Shirley, 1997, p. 62). As Ernie Cortés explains, “We have to take some very ugly realities and confront parents with them and shove them up against what the future could be like for their kids. People have to get angry that they’re getting clobbered” (quoted in Shirley, 1997, p. 62). The third step is a series of “research actions” to gather knowledge by talking to people, reading, and gathering data. Plans are made, and action items delegated. The organizers work with the group to help with speech writing, agenda setting, and goals. Additionally, small groups of parents meet with key policy makers to brief them on the organization’s agenda and plans. The goal at these meetings is to “go to power *with* a decision, never *for* a decision” (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 101). The group then holds an action—an accountability session with people who hold the decision-making power like school board members, city council representatives, and state legislators. The IAF defines action as “a public meeting of leaders of a broad-based organization with political, business, or other officials for the purpose of being recognized and getting them to act on specific proposals put forward by the organization” (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 80). An action is a public drama.

It personalizes and polarizes. "Personalizing" means deliberately making someone the target of the attention of the group.... Polarizing means creating public tension around an issue by confronting the target(s) with a large, diverse, disciplined crowd that plainly expects him or her to respond favorably to their proposals. (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 84)

During these sessions, the parents explain the problem to the policy makers, present research, and demand action. The process is such that the official listens, but does not have much opportunity to discuss (nor to campaign during election periods). After officials speak, a parent will pin them by asking very succinctly if they will support the organizations agenda. By starting out with smaller, winnable issues, leaders gain the confidence they need to tackle larger issues and also the ability to withstand defeat. They learn that they will not win all their fights, but they learn to reflect, regroup, gain power in numbers and facts, and return.

Formal training occurs in a variety of ways including presentations during house meetings, during short and directed training sessions, as part of statewide meetings, and during formal two, three, five, and ten day trainings. For most of these trainings, readings are passed out beforehand (when possible, they are also provided in Spanish) and then discussed in small groups during the meeting. Many of these readings are scholarly chapters extracted from a rich selection of books. A small sample of readings includes Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, a New York Times article by Paul Krugman entitled *For Richer: How Permissive Capitalism of the Boom Destroyed American Equality*, Exodus 18 and 19 from the Old Testament, *Other People's Children* by Lisa Delpit, *The Culture of Education* by Jerome Bruner, *Starting at home: Caring and Social Policy* by Nell Noddings, Bernard Loomer's *Two Conceptions of Power*, *The Grand Inquisitor* from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *Strategic Planning: The Entrepreneurial Skill* by Peter Drucker. At the longer training sessions, speeches are given to large groups during a plenary session, and then smaller groups retire to

individual rooms for a variety of activities. Some of these include conducting one-on-one conversations and being critiqued, acting out a particular reading (like the Exodus story of Moses leading the Jews out of Israel), and an overview of how to conduct a house meeting. Three types of discussion generally occur at these meetings. The first involves understanding the pressures that the modern American family experiences. A stick figure of a child is drawn on the board and a question asked about pressures a child might experience. Broad concepts such as economic, cultural, and social issues are raised and drawn on the board with arrows pointing at the stick figure. The goal of this discussion is to focus on the world as it is and on the received culture we all experience (such as materialism). The second is a power analysis of the institution a potential leader is part of, such as a school or a congregation. Organizers push leaders to think creatively to identify non-obvious power brokers. For example, a school has obvious power bases in the principal, perhaps a teacher clique, and the PTA. Other influences might include the superintendent and district personnel. But the pastor of the church across the street could be very influential, or perhaps a local businessperson. The third pedagogic lesson involves a dialogic process around polarities and may be broken up into several two-hour sessions. The organizer will create a chart on the white board with two opposites on each side and, using a mixture of Socratic questioning and guiding, will fill out the chart. To frame this discussion, the first polarity discussed is The World As It Is and The World As It Should Be (the two worlds). For the IAF, a foundational conviction

is that the fate of human beings [is] to exist *in-between* the world as it is and the world as it should be. Reflective people of conscience are constantly and painfully aware of the gap between our so-called values and the facts of life in the everyday world within which we operate. When

these two worlds collide hard enough and often enough, a fire in the belly is sometimes ignited. The tension between the two worlds is the root of radical action for justice and democracy—not radical as in looting or trashing, but as in going to the root of things. (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 23)

The goal of this discussion is to create tension. “In public life, tension is good. Bureaucrats spend their energy trying to eliminate tension. Big unilateral power avoids it.... Mature organizing requires a commitment to live in-between the two worlds” (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 108). The world as it is and the world as it should be are discussed through several polarities including self-interest—self-sacrifice; power—love; change—unity; imagination—hope; and private relationships—public relationships. The polarity most often discussed is that of unilateral power versus relational power.

Saul Alinsky (1989) asks, “why not use other words—words that mean the same but are peaceful, and do not result in such negative emotional reactions? ... It [power] evokes images of cruelty, dishonesty, selfishness, arrogance, dictatorship, and abject suffering” (p. 49-51). Yet power is part of the daily language of the people involved with the IAF. To move away from the negative images usually associated with the word, the organizations emphasize the meaning of the word, oftentimes stating the word in Spanish to make the point: *poder*—the ability to act. The next philosophical level that the IAF adheres to is how power is exercised. First they address how power is organized:

It is impossible to conceive of a world devoid of power; the only choice of concepts is between organized and unorganized power. Mankind has progressed only through learning how to develop and organize instruments of power in order to achieve order, security, morality, and civilized life itself, instead of a sheer struggle for physical survival. Every organization known to man, from government down, has had one reason for being—that is, organization for power in order to put into practice or promote its common purpose. (Alinsky, 1989, p. 52)

The IAF teaches that there are two routes for people to get enough power to do the things that they think are important, organized people or organized money. As Cortés (1993) points out, the poor have more of the former than the latter (p. 299).

Second, they describe how power is conceptualized. Loomer (1976) differentiates between unilateral and relational power. Unilateral power is “the capacity to influence, guide, adjust, manipulate, shape, control, or transform the human or natural environment in order to advance one’s own purposes” (p. 14). In discussions about power, organizers describe hierarchies as institutionalized unilateral power. On the other hand, relational power is the capacity both to influence and to be influenced by others. According to Loomer, “From this perspective, power is neither the capacity to produce nor to undergo an effect. *Power is the capacity to sustain a mutually internal relationship* [italics in original]” (p. 23). In Cortés’ words: “relational power involves becoming calculatingly vulnerable—understanding that a meaningful exchange involves getting into other people’s subject and allowing them to get into yours—in a word, empathy” (p. 299).

In discussing these polarities, the leaders are constantly reminded that the goal is to keep the two worlds in balance, but also in tension. Chambers and Cowan explain what happens when the tension is lost:

Powerful forces constantly try to undermine the necessary creative tension between the two worlds. When they succeed, we lose our moral compass and are left to choose between two distorted ways to live, so-called realism on one side and so-called idealism on the other. (p. 39)

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AS A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In summary, the process of transformative learning “involves transforming frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discourse, taking action on one’s reflective insight, and critically assessing it” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11). The formal and informal adult learning and the organizing sequence of planning, acting, and evaluating that individual’s experience as they associate with the IAF closely align with Mezirow’s (2000) philosophy of adult education: “Central to this process is helping learners to critically reflect on, appropriately validate, and effectively act on their (and others’) beliefs, interpretations, values, feelings, and ways of thinking” (p. 26). In essence, the success of organizations like the IAF depends on transformation. As Scott (2003a) maintains, “Organizing people is a fertile place for adult transformation as the imagination and psychic structures are agitated to vision society in another way” (p. 1). To describe more fully this fertile place, Scott expands on Mezirow in several important ways. First, even though individuals transform, Scott explains that it is within the context of relationships in an organization that social and personal transformation occurs. That is, transformation is socially constructed in groups and relationships (p. 1). Second,

for transformation to be called transformation it must involve some kind of structural change; i.e. structures in the psyche (using the triad ego, personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious structures) *and* [emphasis added] structures in the social system (institutions in civil society, institutions in city/state/provincial administration, and institutions in the market). (p. 1).

Foundational to Scott's theory is the process of objectification. Scott details the objectification of one's personal history, that is, creating a new relationship to the internal images of the self; the objectification of people's differences; the objectification of an issue, such as housing; and the objectification of power between oppressors and the oppressed. Emphasizing the Habermasian and Freirian roots of Mezirow's theory, Scott describes the subject-to-object relationship that the oppressors have with the oppressed, in which the oppressors hold the power and the oppressed "view themselves as victims with an internalized servile consciousness" (p. 6). According to Freire (1993), this keeps both the oppressors and the oppressed in bondage. Through the process of conscientization, the individuals and groups associated with broad-based organizations develop structural perspectives of society and objective power. According to Scott, "The social construction of transformation shifts the oppressor-to-oppressed relationship from a subject-to-object relationship to a stage where power is built that forces the oppressor to recognize the oppressed as capable, intelligent, and above all, organized" (p. 6).

Community organizing serves as the educational context necessary for individuals such as those that participated in this study to experience a transformative learning experience to become active democratic citizens. Writing to organizers, Chambers and Cowan (2003) touch on the perspective transformations necessary for individuals to "see public life as a vocation" and how this transformation comes about through membership in a mediating organization such as the IAF:

Democracy cannot work without the units essential to its operation—families, congregations, labor unions, and organized collectives of citizens who act in public life for justice and the common good. The organizer's task is to connect those smaller units of civil-society power into

collectives that have the ability to hold elected officials and corporations accountable. The challenge organizers face is that the average American is an individualist who doesn't see public life as a vocation. But religious and democratic values are grounded in the idea and reality of communities of people for whom public life must be part of mission and citizenship. Public life has to be something that people work at and have vocational meetings about, something centered around the issues and values that they feel are important. Organizing means seeing to it that what should happen in accordance our values does happen.

SUMMARY

Broad aspects of political socialization, political participation, democratic theory, activism, and the educational policy system interact to create and modify an individual's civic identity. In addition, civic identity is influenced by contextual, environmental, and experiential factors. For individuals, especially those typically marginalized from the political system, to become politically efficacious—that is, believe that they have some influence over political events and that when one acts, the political system responds—a profound learning experience is necessary. One such experience occurs at the intersection of adult learning and community organizing for school reform.

Transformative learning involves transforming frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discourse, taking action on one's reflective insight, and critically assessing it. Through series of one-on-one and group conversations, community organizers enact this theory by agitating community members to uncover individual hurts to create collective anger and common interests. By collectively mediating disparate interests, individuals work as a group to hold elected officials and others in positions of power accountable. Beginning with small, winnable issues, organizers help individuals questions their assumptions to move them from an

individualistic conception to one in which public life is a responsibility for citizenship. By creating strong relationships between community members and state and economic institutions, community organizing groups are able to create civic capacity, in which diverse citizenry accommodate their differences in order to pursue their common well-being.

In the following chapter, I outline the methodology used to identify the process of transformation exhibited by a group of Latina mothers as they transformed into civically active individuals able to affect educational policy. This methodology includes a brief discussion of the research design, participant and site selection, data collection and data analysis methods, and trustworthiness concerns. It also provides reflections to trouble the relationship between the research findings and such issues as the representation of stories, the categorization of individuals, and the researcher-participant relationship.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the learning that occurs as individuals transform into civically active citizens. An ethnographic approach to qualitative research was used in conducting this study given the need to understand a person's life story, the incremental ways in which people change, and the importance of current and sociohistorical contexts. Elements of portraiture and narrative inquiry were used to more accurately discern and communicate the experiences of the participants.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In *Democratic Citizenship: A Question of Competence?* Marion Smiley (1999) describes three questions that can drive inquiry into political competence: "What kinds of political knowledge are necessary for democratic participation? How can we enable citizens to achieve such knowledge? What kinds of institutions might be necessary?" (p. 373). To answer these questions, Margaret Hermann (2002) explains the need to focus on the individual:

Political psychologists focus on the individual person as the unit of analysis—not the group, not the institution, not the government, not the international system. Of critical importance is how individuals (voters, protesters, opinion makers, leaders) interpret, define, and represent their political environments. The assumption is made that people play an active role in constructing their views of politics; their experiences may lead them to challenge as well as to respect the constraints that the other potential levels of analysis impose on them. They are not merely responsive to their political environments nor are they passive receptacles easily shaped by the milieu in which they are located.... Moreover, it is individuals who seek to give structure to unstructured events and an interpretation to ambiguous and uncertain situations. Although reference groups, institutions, and political systems may influence the kinds of

experiences individuals can have, unless all reinforce one another in lockstep, people are presented with some choice. (p. 47)

However, Kelman (1979) warns about the problems of using the individual as a unit of study for political research:

If we define the problem as the psychological problem of a certain group of people, we [are] more likely to develop policies that involve changing these people, rather than policies that involve changing the structures that help to sustain their powerlessness. (Kelman referenced by Hermann, 2002, p. 53)

Kelman's warning is relevant. However, by keeping his premise in mind during the research process, understanding the individual can help inform ways in which structures can be changed.

In addition to focusing on the individual as the "unit of analysis," it is necessary to understand processes in order to answer Smiley's (1999) questions. Sigel (1989) points out how much of the research is not based on actual observation and therefore is incapable of effectively explaining the *process* of political socialization. To solve this issue, Sigel calls for more ethnographic studies:

To be sure, such studies would not permit us to generalize about all adult Americans but they would have three advantages over the customary mammoth studies: (1) they offer us in-depth information; (2) they free us from having to rely on verbal or written responses to questionnaire-type schedules whose reliability we cannot always assess and whose meaning we frequently misunderstand; and (3) by conducting a number of small but intensive studies of different settings... we may learn a great deal of the role that different structures and settings play in socializing adults. (p. 469)

To Sigel, ethnographic studies combine a developmental perspective with a sociocultural one and take into account the context in which the observations of people are made. More generally, Glesne (1999) defines ethnographic research as the "tradition

of illuminating patterns of culture through long-term immersion in the field, collecting data primarily by participant-observation and interviewing. Analysis of this data focuses on description and interpretation of what people say and do” (p. 9). To Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995),

Close, continuing participation in the lives of others encourages appreciation of social life as constituted by ongoing, fluid processes. Through participation, the field researcher sees first-hand and up close how people grapple with uncertainty and confusion, how meanings emerge through talk and collective action, how understandings and interpretations change over time. In all these ways, the fieldworker’s closeness to others’ daily lives and activities heightens sensitivity to social life as process. (p. 5).

PARTICIPANT AND SITE SELECTION

This study was conducted in Austin, Texas. As elaborated earlier, the central Texas IAF organization, Austin Interfaith, consists of a partnership between IAF organizers, a variety of faith institutions, and 16 Alliance schools. The partnership between the organization and schools and the proximity to district, city, and state governance institutions provided an ideal context in which to observe the transformations I am attempting to explain. Additionally, rapport had already been established with organizers, some parents, and representatives from various schools.

Several scholars (see for example Shirley, 1997; Simon & Gold, 2002) have researched Austin Interfaith at the organizational level. This study focuses on the leaders (from the community, not the organization). The IAF does not collect data as to how many individuals they have identified for training, how many of these people actually attended any type of training, how many became active, and how many persisted in their

political efforts. To gather data that would be useful to describe a transformation learning experience, participants were selected who represented different levels of involvement with Austin Interfaith. Participants were selected from four broad groupings: those who have been heavily involved with the organization for many years and are politically active in influencing educational policy, those who have been identified as leaders and are active with the organization, those who have attended some Austin Interfaith activities but have not been identified as leaders; and those who were involved, but terminated their involvement.

Participation in the study was limited to Latina mothers whom:

- have a child or had a child in an Alliance school,
- are working-class or low-income,
- are not college graduates,
- participated in one or more Austin Interfaith events, and
- had little or no experience in any kind of formal political activism prior to their relationship with Austin Interfaith.

The goal was to identify “information rich” participants to provide detailed information on key and critical experiences (Plummer, 2001) and to allow for contextualized observation in a variety of socio-structural environments (Hritzuk & Park, 2000). Therefore, the selection of individuals was purposeful (Patton, 1990). The participants were identified using snowballing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that manifested itself in one of four ways. First, organizers from Austin Interfaith gave me the names of women they felt would match the criteria for the study. Second, some of these women

gave me the names of individuals to contact. Third, organizers informed me when any of three Alliance schools would be holding some form of meeting in which they would be “looking for leaders, looking for talent.... [to] cultivate” (Austin Interfaith organizer). During these meetings, parents met in small groups to discuss mutual areas of concern. As these discussions proceeded, the organizers took note of individuals who they perceived as having potential leadership skills. The organizers assisted me in identifying individuals who they believed might persist in their association with the organization and grow to become leaders. Fourth, I approached women directly at Austin Interfaith events who seemed to have potential for participation in the study.

Ten women participated in the study. Three had been a part of the organization for over ten years and were heavily involved with multiple educational issues. Three had been involved, in varying degrees, between one and five years. The remaining four had been involved less than a year, had attended few events, and had not been targeted for leadership development. One of these women had worked on several events and decided not to continue her involvement with the organization.

DATA COLLECTION

The ethnographic portion of this research was conducted in two phases. A pilot study (for which the data is included in the final analysis) was conducted in the fall of 2001 while the full study occurred between November 2002 and January 2004. Data was gathered through interviews, through participant observations, and through the collection

of documents (often called artifacts, see for example Glesne, 1999) such as letters, diaries, memoranda, notes, scrapbooks, newsletters, agendas, and newspaper articles.

All interviews followed Patton's (1990) general interview guide approach (similar to semi-structured interviewing, see Davies, 1999, for example). Instead of a rigid set of pre-determined questions, each interview was guided by a set of topics to be covered, allowing for a free-flowing conversation that, in turn, allowed for in-depth probes when necessary. Some topics were added or omitted, and participants were encouraged to expand on a response, digress, or go off a particular topic to introduce their own concerns. Participants' responses were "in their own words and not restricted to the preconceived notions of the ethnographer" (Davies, 1999, p. 95). The interviews were conducted in the language chosen by the participant, either Spanish, English, or both. Four women spoke in English (with an occasional word in Spanish), one went back and forth between Spanish and English, and the remaining five spoke entirely in Spanish (several of them claimed to know some limited English, but chose to participate in Spanish). All interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed. In addition, fieldnotes were taken to augment the recorded interviews.

Depending on their level of participation with AI, participants were formally interviewed between one and three times. Life histories were uncovered during the first interview in order to develop a contextualized understanding of the participant's human phenomena and experience (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Topics covered during these conversations were the participant's views on democracy, politics, participation, and their democratic theories. In addition, the conversations were used to help uncover their

experiences with direct and indirect forms of political socialization and any skills, knowledge, and strategies they might have that transferred into their new civic identities. By necessity, these interviews were personal, intrusive, and evoked memories of difficult experiences and events in the participant's life (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Follow-up interviews occurred in an ongoing and as-needed basis. Some of these interviews were formal, while others were conducted after particularly meaningful events such as a training session or an interaction with a decision-making body such as the school board. Throughout these conversations, relationships went through phases of openness, withdrawal, trust, secrecy, and embarrassment; however, through continued conversations, a "shared language of discourse" was created (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 110). Observations were conducted in the participants' homes; their communities; and at Austin Interfaith activities including house meetings, committee meetings, accountability sessions, and public meetings. These observations were recorded in a regular and systematic fashion in order to create an accumulated written record (Emerson et al., 1995). Additionally, I attended one five day and one three day training session which provided observation time as well as the opportunity to gather further data on formal training methods.

Finally, I kept a personal log. Plummer (2001) mentions a variety of benefits that a researcher's personal log can contribute to the findings. Such a log can be used to capture a researcher's changing impressions of the participants and of the situations that may be encountered. This log can also chronicle the researcher's own worries and anxieties about the research such as ethical concerns and personal problems.

DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out,

Data analysis is not an inclusive phase that can be marked out as occurring at some singular time during the inquiry (for instance, following data collection and preceding report writing). Data analysis must begin with the very first data collection, in order to facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases. (pp. 241-242)

To facilitate this ongoing analysis, the gathered data was processed by using memos. As suggested by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), several types of memos can be used to organize the data and provide a structure for the elaboration of themes and theories. *Initial* memos were written on discrete phenomena, such as an interview or observation; on particular topics, for example, the patriarchy these women experienced; or on particular categories such as forms of direct political socialization. Throughout data collection, patterns began to emerge. *Theoretical memos* were used to document these ideas, insights, and connections. As the project proceeded, transcripts, fieldnotes, documents, and initial and theoretical memos became more focused and it became possible to integrate the separate pieces of data into *integrative memos* which helped clarify and link analytic themes and categories.

More formal analysis occurred through the processes of sorting and organizing the data. To begin sorting and organizing the data, guiding questions were used to illuminate the process of culture acquisition (Wolcott, 2001):

What is going on here? How do things happen as they do? What do people in this setting have to know (individually, collectively) in order to do what they are doing? And, in the absence of explicit instruction, how are necessary skills and requisite attitudes transmitted and acquired? (p. 41)

To “generate concepts from and with [my]data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26) I used the process of open coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Davies, 1999; Emerson et al., 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Weiss, 1994). Coding involved three kinds of operations: noticing relevant phenomena, collecting examples of those phenomena, and analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalties, differences, patterns, and structures (Siedel and Kelle quoted in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 29). Coding was an ongoing process. Using Nvivo 2.0, a qualitative analysis software program, concepts that were identified through an initial coding were refined, modified, extended, challenged, and rejected (Davies, 1999). Eventually, coding of initial sources of data, such as interview transcripts and fieldnotes, gave way to the reading and coding of excerpt files—collections from a variety of sources dealing with the same issue (Weiss, 1994). This “continually moving back and forth between the data and a gradually refined set of theoretical categories” (Davies, 1999, p. 198) is the foundation of grounded theory and has been termed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The goal was to create theory that consists of plausible relationships proposed among concepts and sets of concepts by discovering patterns and processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The next step in the process involved generating a matrix intersection of coded narratives with each participant in order to create a repository of participant vignettes (as well as coded data from fieldnotes, conversations with other leaders and organizers, and references to the individuals in published materials such as books and newspaper articles) organized by the themes discovered through the open coding process. These files became the repository for data used to elaborate the findings. The process I used to construct the

narratives from these files is described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) as follows:

She gathers, organizes, and scrutinizes the data, searching for convergent threads, illuminating metaphors, and overarching symbols, and often constructing a coherence out of themes that the actors might experience as unrelated or incoherent. This is a disciplined, empirical process—of description, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis—and an aesthetic process of narrative development. (p. 185)

The portraiture methodology was used to present the findings.

Portraiture

For Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), portraiture combines systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, “blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor” (p. 3). The authors explain how “portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (p. 3). Like ethnography, portraiture depends on watching, listening, and acting with participants over an extended period of time. It is unique, however, in that portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject. As explained above, data for this study was gathered through traditional ethnographic methodology in which the participants shared their stories with me rather than engaging in a dialogic process. However, portraiture provides a methodology well suited to describing the findings of narrative based inquiry as well as a strong ethical base to share a person’s story, what the authors call *authenticity*—“capturing the essence and resonance of the

actors' experience and perspective through the details of action and thought revealed in context" (p. 12). Describing the "aesthetic whole" is like

weaving a tapestry or piecing together a quilt. Looking for points of thematic convergence is like searching for the patterns of texture and color in a weaving. In creating the text, the portraitist is alert to the aesthetic principles of composition and form, rhythm, sequence, and metaphor. (p. 12)

To weave these portraits (what the authors also call *illumination*), I was mindful to attend to the four dimensions that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997, p. 247) lay out: conception, which refers to the development of the overarching story; structure, which refers to the sequencing and layering of emergent themes that scaffold the story; form, which reflects the movement of the narrative, the spinning of the tale; and cohesion, which speaks about the unity and integrity of the piece. To scrutinize the aesthetic whole and the balance between aesthetic and empirical requirements, the following questions guided the creation of the portraits (p. 265):

- Has contextual information been included as clarifying introduction to and edifying backdrop throughout the portrait?
- Has voice been sufficiently revealed and modulated so that it will inform but not distort the interpretation presented in the portrait?
- Have relationships been respected and faith kept with the actors on the scene throughout the shaping of the final whole?
- Do the identified emergent themes resonate throughout the language and culture of the actors on the site and do they adequately scaffold the interpretation presented in the portrait?

The authors elaborate the first point in depth, explaining that for the portraitist, context is “crucial to their documentation of human experience and organizational culture....Context becomes the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for understanding what they say and do” (p. 41). Some latitude has been taken in presenting context. In general, the portraits incorporate language and structure to describe the contexts, but some context has been presented in other places within the manuscript. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis detail five ways in which portraiture employs context (p. 44).

The first depicts a detailed description of what they call the ecological setting. For the purpose of this study, the ecological setting will consist of the world of community organizing; specifically that created by the participant’s involvement with AI. This context has been explored in chapter 2, and several of the profiles present thick descriptions in order to provide the reader with the feeling of being present during important transformational and learning events. The second refers to the researcher’s perspective which will not be present within the portraits, but is elaborated later in this chapter. The third underscores the history, culture, and ideology of the “place” which, like the first context, will be construed as the community-organizing world as well as the educational policy context, detailed in chapter 2. The fourth identifies central metaphors and symbols that shape the narrative. These metaphors emerge in the portraits, and “serve as overarching themes and rich undercurrents that resound throughout the portrait” (p. 55). The fifth speaks to the actor’s role in shaping and defining context. Again, through

thick description, the portraits show that the contexts are not static—“the actors are not only shaped by the context, but...they also give it shape” (p. 57). In summary,

the portraitist views the context as a dynamic framework—changing and evolving, shaping and being shaped by the actors. The context is not only a frame for the action, it is also a rich resource for the researcher’s interpretations of the actors’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. (p. 59)

CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Portraiture provides an approach to ensure authenticity. I used the techniques that Lincoln & Guba (1985) outline to ensure that the findings of this study are also credible and trustworthy. First, through prolonged engagement, I invested sufficient time to build trust, learn the culture, and be aware of possible distortions that might exist in the data. Through persistent observation, I was able to identify the characteristics and elements in each situation that were most relevant to the issue being pursued. Credibility was further enhanced through triangulation—the use of multiple sources and varied methods to gather data. Second, I used colleagues, friends, and advisors to serve as peer debriefers to keep me honest, to test working hypotheses, and for catharsis. Third, through negative case analysis, I continually refined my theory by ensuring that it accounted for all known cases (within my data). The fourth technique, referential adequacy, was used in a limited way. All ten cases were used for analysis, but the portraits of four of the mothers were used as the foundation to build theory. Therefore, the remaining cases served the purpose of testing the theory at a later time. In addition, not all participants were in the same “phase” of their personal transformation, giving me the opportunity to test tentative theories learned from one participant’s experiences on that of another’s. Finally, I

performed member checks with two lead organizers to provide the opportunity to interact with and comment on categories, interpretations, and conclusions.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The researcher does not come as an empty slate to the job of interpreting the subject of the portrait. Individual characteristics and experiences shape the portraitist's voice. Preliminary research into or prior experience with the broader field of which the portrait is representative generates theoretical expectations that contribute to the researcher's personal context entering the work. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 66)

Although my presence is not explicit within the portraits themselves, it is implicit throughout this manuscript, and needs to be made explicit so that "the reader can better interpret the process and product of [my] vision" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 50). Some of this has been accomplished in the *Background of the Researcher* in the first chapter. The following reflections on representation, translation, racial/ethnic categorizations, researcher-participant relationships, and the presentations of narratives are more specific in troubling the effects of my personal contexts on the research process and on the participants. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis explain, "from where I sit, this is what I see; these are the perspectives and biases I bring; this is the scene I select; this is how people seem to be responding to my presence" (p. 50).

On Representation

All of these women are storytellers, and they used stories in order to help me understand their life histories as well as to highlight the essence of their thoughts and experiences and to explain the world around them. As Aptheker (1989) explains, "Stories are one of the ways in which women give meaning to the things that happen in a lifetime,

and the dailiness of life also structures the telling, the ordering of thought, the significance allocated to different pieces of the story" (p. 44). As these women shared their stories, they also enacted experiences as they described them (Wortham, 2001). They would lean forward and look at me intently to make sure I understood a key point. They would cry when sharing a disturbing moment. They would touch my arm to emphasize a statement. Some of the conversations we had were over two hours long, but these women maintained an intensity and a desire to make me understand. Finally, these women all had a tremendous sense of humor, laughing often, even when describing very difficult situations. It is this sense of humor combined with their passion for social justice that makes these women stand out as leaders in their respective communities.

In using their stories to describe the risks they incurred as they gained power, I, like Behar (1993), am being violent. Quoting Edward Said, Behar explains that "Even more subtly, the act of representing 'almost always involves violence of some sort to the subject of the representation,' using as it must some degree of reduction, decontextualization, and miniaturization" (p. 271). As Plummer (2001) states, the importance of a story lies in the text; no summary can do it justice (p. 22). The stories told to me were beautiful, eloquent, and poignant. They deserve to be presented in their entirety and as Aptheker (1989) points out, "Many of women's stories have never been written" (p. 40). I hope this summary can do some justice in presenting a concrete case that will portray my respondents' experiences within the context of their lives (Weiss, 1994) and help illuminate the lived experiences of Latina mothers as they gain power and work to affect change in the educational arena.

On Translation

I commit further violence by translating the words spoken in Spanish into English. However, between the multiple conversations I had with these women and the opportunity to observe them in a variety of locales, my efforts to translate the meaning of these women's words is comprehensive.³ There are a few words that Aurora used that do not have direct translation into English. In these situations, English words were used that made clear the context and the meaning. In addition, by including their words in their language, the translation process is transparent. Alicia and Marina spoke almost entirely in English, only occasionally using Spanish either to quote someone else or to explain some colloquialism. Aurora and Rebecca spoke entirely in Spanish.

The objective was not to provide a grammatically pure English version of their words, but to write in English as closely as possible to the way they spoke in Spanish. This was done to provide the reader a further mechanism (along with stories themselves) to get a feel for the person talking, and to understand their narrative styles and the ways in which they interacted with me during the interviews.

On Racial/Ethnic Categorization

Determining a common label to use throughout this manuscript was difficult. I used "Latina" realizing that this label, like all identity labels, is highly problematic and complex. Luis Urrieta Jr.(2003) notes that

The term "Latino" is often used to include several other panethnic identity labels such as Hispanic, Chicano, or Mexican-American, often ignoring

³ For a discussion on translation issues, see Delgado-Gaitán (1994).

that Latinos inherit painful identity amalgamations from indigenous, European, and African worlds joined into a complex arrangement within Latin American and now Anglo-American society. (p. 149)

Urrieta goes on to question his own attempts at labeling:

Maybe we should not try to make ourselves uncritically homogeneous given our great diversity. Is it not part of the myth that we are one, or that we should be one? Maybe in trying so hard to see ourselves as a whole, whether it is as *Mestizos*, Chicanos, or Mexicanos, Latinos, and especially Hispanics, we have missed the whole point. (p. 165)

I agree that we have missed the point, but in order to write about the women who participated in this study, I, like Urrieta did in his own writing, will use the term “Latina” even though “the term is ... problematic because although it was created in response to ‘Hispanic,’ it too, homogenizes uncritically the many multicultural, multiracial experiences of people of Latin American and Chicana/o descent” (p. 165). Urrieta urges self-reflection and self-awareness in this endeavor of creating identity labels to ensure that we [academics] understand that we are complicit in creating a hegemonic discourse, that these “identity labels are all hurtful and oppressive, especially when dissenting discourses are supposed to be liberating...” (p. 157).

In many ways, I am complicit. My “schizophrenic self” (Urrieta, 2003, p. 162) was born and raised in Mexico City to White, middle-class, U.S. ex-patriots. In some ways I am “American” but, at the same time, in some ways I am “Mexican,” and therefore “exist in multiple identities” (p. 162). For the reasons that Urrieta states, the Mexican part of my identity, influenced by my academic identity, is very sensitive to the term “Hispanic.” This sensitivity is the reason that I have chosen to use the term Latina, even though all of the women who participated in the study most often called themselves

Hispanic. For this, I ask their forgiveness. I hope they understand both my personal motivations for using the term Latina and the processes of self-reflection and self-awareness that I went through to reach this decision.

On the Researcher-Participant Relationship

However, I believe it is my schizophrenic self that enabled these women to trust me with their stories. Certainly, being able to speak in Spanish with some of these women, understanding the idiosyncrasies of their speech, and identifying with and understanding their references to cultural and social aspects of growing up in Mexico created for us a space to in which to meet. But when meeting these women for each of their first interviews, which were personal, intrusive, and evoked memories of difficult experiences and events in each of their lives (Cole & Knowles, 2001), I was an unknown to them. I believe they all agreed to participate because my interest in their transformation into politically active citizens implied they were women with power. As Wortham (2001) explains, the opportunity to share their autobiographical narratives gives each woman the power to construct the self as an active, assertive woman who has triumphed over adversity (p. 6). Quoting several narrative theoreticians, Wortham continues: "... autobiographical narratives provide a powerful vehicle for resisting oppressive social orders. People can construct their life stories against the grain of accepted patterns, to overcome oppression and to foreground alternative directions for their own and others' lives" (p. 6).

These women also related to me in what Wortham calls *interactional positioning*, in which the narrators and the audience (myself) are positioned in various and variable ways. Like Jane's narrative in Wortham's text, in sharing horrible experiences the women involved with this study position themselves as women who have been victimized and can appropriately receive sympathy from me (the interviewer) (p. 9). But this positioning is "ongoing because in everyday life individuals position themselves in response to how others position them, then the others reposition themselves in response to this positioning, and the process has no end" (Crapanzano quoted in Wortham, 2001, p. 151).

Through the ebb and flow of our interactions, these women positioned and repositioned themselves depending on the narrative they were sharing and the audience it was directed at. Although I perceived and attempted to position myself as a researcher intent on being an active and sensitive listener, these women positioned me (and I them) in myriad ways. At times I was the sympathetic listener, but I was also the giver of validation, the teacher listening to the student, the student listening to the teacher, the academic, the ex-elementary school teacher. But at times during the interviews, I was middle class (or even rich), sometimes White, often male. Although these cultural patterns and social positions influenced our exchanges, and as mentioned above, this process has no end, Wortham citing Crapanzano continues: "People bring order to the flow of reciprocal positioning in everyday life by 'arresting' it 'through desired characterizations and typifications of the other (and therefore the self)'" (p. 151). Through our multiple conversations and interactions, we were able to arrest our positioning and develop relationships that encouraged trust and reciprocity.

On the Presentation of Narratives

The objective of this study is to describe the transformation of individuals into civically active citizens. As detailed in the portraiture section, the objective of a portraitist is to “record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). A variety of choices were made in order to fulfill these two objectives.

First, of the ten women who participated in the study, only four are represented in the portraits. The decision to not use every mothers story was a tremendously difficult one. Their stories were gifts to me (not to mention their time) and I feel that by not using their words, I am unappreciative of what they have given me. Some small consolation comes from the knowledge that their contributions were invaluable to the initial analysis, and that their stories will be shared in the future in other venues and publications. However, I feel that the decision is justified by the need to most effectively present the conclusions reached in this study. In order to select which narratives to represent, I created a table with the ten participants along one axis and Mezirow’s ten phases of meaning along the other. This provided a way in which to select a subset of individuals who could provide credible data with which to describe findings and build theory. The women who in some fashion or another “met” most of Mezirow’s criteria I placed towards the transformed end of a continuum, while the women who showed little evidence of transformative learning I placed at the other end—just starting out on their journeys. To describe the process of transformation into civically active women in

educational policy, I decided to use four voices that cover the spectrum, provided good data, and were representative of the six participant stories not used. I selected two women who could be considered to have experienced a transformative learning experience and were civically active. One woman had been active for many years, but had not satisfied criteria to be considered as having experienced a transformation. One woman had attended only a few meetings and had not had contact with an organizer.

One final note on the presentation of narratives: I have judiciously edited quotations to remove or retain unconscious patterns of speech (e.g. “umm,” “you know,” short and long pauses, misspoken words). My objective is to “leave in enough of such sounds and words to capture the person’s speech, authentically but not so much as to impose on a readers patience” (Glesne, 1999, p. 171).

IN CONCLUSION

This section provided an overview of the methodology used to explore the learning that transforms some individuals into civically active citizens able to influence educational policy. In addition to the description of the ethnographic approach used to identify participants and sites, gather and analyze data, and establish trustworthiness, an argument was made for using portraits as a representational vehicle. Portraits provide the reader with a mechanism to understand the participant’s life stories, the incremental way in which people change, and the importance of current and sociohistorical contexts. Although the above describes the processes and procedures used to complete this study, this section would be incomplete without providing an understanding of who I am and

what I bring to the story. By reflecting on representation, translation, racial/ethnic categorizations, researcher-participant relationships, and the presentations of narratives, I expose what I see, my perspectives and biases, how I chose how to paint the portraits, and my relationships with the participants.

The objective for combining a methodological section with a reflective one is to provide the reader a framework to interpret my vision as well as a mindset in which to read the following portraits. By understanding how the stories were gathered, how they influenced me and I them, and how I chose to present them, it is hoped that the reader can understand these women's lives and the nature of their transformations, and vicariously, know them and hopefully, be inspired by their stories to become more civically active.

CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

By immersing myself in the text generated by the matrix intersection described above, a unique aesthetic whole developed for each woman. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain, the process is deliberative yet creative. The data is carefully scrutinized to search for an emerging storyline. They point out, though, that “there is never a single story—many could be told” (p. 12). Therefore, the portraitist is “active in selecting the themes that will be used to tell the story, strategic in deciding on points of focus and emphasis, and creative in defining the sequence and rhythm of the narrative” (p. 12).

The stories of full and emerging transformation will be told in some detail and often using each woman’s own words. The detail in which the more transformed women shared their experiences provides a window into how constant and daily their transformations were. They also provide an example of how adult learning differs when it happens through a process embedded in daily life, as compared to a person transforming in a constrained environment, such as a college class. Although their stories will be presented in such a way that they may appear linear and chronological, neither the telling nor the lived experiences occurred that way. I will attempt to bring some order to multiple threads of thought that occurred during a variety of storytelling sessions, observations, and informal conversations.

MARINA LOPEZ

In some senses, it would be difficult to find a clear disorienting dilemma in Marina's life, but the certainty with which she expresses the following words seem to delineate a line between a clear past and a much different future: "But it would of never happened had the organizer [not] challenged me with that simple question, 'What do you think?'"

Before this moment, Marina described herself as timid and quiet, her life dominated by the dailiness of marriage, family, and work. Marina, now is an active leader with Austin Interfaith, sits on a variety of boards, works to transform the people and the context surrounding her, and was recognized as the National Community Leader of the Year. She may appear timid and quiet when she is intently listening to someone speak, or sitting in a meeting, but when Marina stands and takes the microphone, it is clear that she no longer the person she feels she was in the past. She knows what power is and where it exists, she knows she has power, and she knows how to mobilize for change. She acts with purpose, and her behavior matches the conviction in her words. Emotionally, she shares how: "it's my responsibility to do, to not sit back and just let, people, not let people or families be mistreated or allow any injustice around us to continue." She believes strongly that "because we live in a, we are economically disadvantaged, and we live in a community that is low income, that doesn't mean that we don't deserve the same quality of education."

Marina's life before transformation was filled with difficulties and constrained by a variety of barriers. But her story of transformation makes it clear that there is not a

moment of coming out of the darkness into the light. In addition to an incredible amount of hard work requiring her to use the scant resource of time, Marina has experienced deep emotional upheavals, was forced to question fundamental beliefs and norms, and learned that some individuals and institutions would not welcome her new and powerful persona. Indeed, her story of transformation is punctuated by instances of retribution. However, Marina has emerged as a woman with purpose, energy, a strong political understanding, and imagination, working to increase civic capacity so that people can themselves fight the injustices they experience.

Marina connects her story to her identity as she starts her account, “This is my story. This is me.”

Sociohistorical Context

Although growing up in a life of poverty, and acknowledging a variety of factors that are commonly associated with the context of poor families, Marina does not use poverty as a primary aspect of her identity. She shares stories of her life, albeit emotionally, as things that have happened to her, but she does not dwell on her experiences, nor does she make herself the victim or the hero. However, she does position herself as an ugly outsider:

But, no I was, I never really hung around with nobody, at all. I was just, always afraid, I felt like I was ugly, and I felt like, - - see there was a lot of name calling, when I was growing up. And so I, I guess I believed I was all those things, and so I just, I just never really, - - um thought I was, I I was worth looking at, or anything like that, confident. Forget it. Didn't know the, the meaning of the word or that word.

In elementary school, “they put me in Special, in Special Ed, - in Speech Therapy, - because I wouldn’t talk, I was terrified, I was terrified of talking, I was terrified of people.” Remembering a high school speech class, Marina shares how “I hated it. Oh I hated that class! I cried every time I had to do a presentation. Oh, I hated that class with a passion. Just being in front of people just made me, would make me feel so ashamed and embarrassed. - And I said, I felt that way every time I got up there.” She did not find a community of other children she felt were like her. Her low self-image and self-worth tended to isolate her. When asked if she would stand up for others when she was a kid, she interrupted to say, “Never. Never. Never, never.” Marina positions her mother as a prominent factor in her early personality development. The fear she feels towards her mother affected her life outside of her home:

I was just very, very timid and quiet all the time, if the teacher asked me anything, because I didn’t want to say the wrong thing or, or thought they would tell my mother if I said the wrong thing. I, I was just very afraid.

Marina remembers how “My mother didn’t give me hugs; my mother didn’t say I love you everyday.” She also remembers being hit by her mother and how her mother would say, “you better not tell your father I hit you... when you’re father comes home you tell him you fell off the couch, or you fell off the chair, or you fell.”

Marina is aware that that, in her own way, her mother gave her many lessons that she now values. The self-reliance that she values as an adult (and that exemplifies the IAF’s iron rule) she traces back to her mother’s influence: “I guess that’s, that’s what comes from my mom’s side. I wasn’t the type to call and say I need your help.” She also understands the patriarchal hegemony her mother experienced:

So even though my mother didn't, wasn't allowed to work out of the house, she was always working, because she babysat eight other kids. And she would do washing for other people, she would do their ironing, she would sell tortillas. So my mother was always doing, working, how she, how she found that energy and time to do it, you know, it's just amazing to me.

Marina is the fifth of eight children and feels that she was treated differently than her siblings, especially her older sister:

Because, my oldest sister was, was given her space to do everything for school... I, I got stuck cooking, and if something didn't get cleaned, I felt like I was told, why didn't this get clean, I had to be in charge of the, the house.

But this, too, made Marina stronger and helped her deal with later experiences in life: "I'm a stronger person because of the way she was with me, you know. Uh, I ended up being a widow just like her. Everything I've gone through my mother's gone through herself."

Through conversations with her mother, Marina has learned that her father was not entirely the person she thought he was when she was growing up. She remembers him as a caring and providing father, bringing normalcy and stability to the family.

My father always, - was very family. We had, our routine was that we would wake up, everybody wake up early, have breakfast together, and everybody leave together, and my, my mother was not allowed to work. She was, her job was to stay home and receive us, and, and be there for us all the time.

Marina "felt really proud, that I made money and I, I could help my father pay the rent. It made me feel good that I could do that for my dad." At 15, her father started his own carpet-laying business and bought the family a new house. He motivated Marina by both his actions and the expression of educational values:

My father started his business, and my father always stressed to us the importance of our education. And he, I remember him going to “Simpson High School,” he was going for his GED, and, and him coming home and my older sister helping him with the [homework], - But he was always saying how important it was for him to, for us to get our education.

In that same year, her father was run over and killed walking on the highway after his truck had stalled. The family lost the new house and Marina’s mother began cleaning houses with the help of some of the children. Marina began working at 14 but she stayed in school and graduated. Looking back on her education, she feels that “I would sit in the very back, and try to hide, and not let anybody know that I was there. I graduated because I was a good kid, - not because I was challenged to do anything.” But her family norms did not include those of higher education. Marina says, “That wasn’t something that was, we didn’t know we could go to college.” Her high school education did provide her with the skill of “typing 100 words a minute, shorthand 100 words a minute” which allowed her to work in secretarial positions for much of her life. “After I graduated you know, I felt like, well, now I’ve got to get married,” although like her siblings, “everybody ended up getting pregnant before they got married, everybody.” When Marina began experiencing unhappiness in her marriage and wanted to come home, her mother said, “No, there’s no coming home. You chose to get married, now you deal with it, and if you don’t like it you go somewhere, you go, hide somewhere. But you can’t come home.” Marina continues, crying while she shares her story:

She said that, - your husband is your, your voice, - you do what he says, and, - and that’s your job, you just take care of the house, and the kids, and that’s all you do. And he, he’s the one that makes all the decisions, and everything, so, - - so that’s the way my marriage was. You know. - I was a very, faithful wife, went to work, came home, took care of my girls.

Five years into her first marriage, her husband had a public affair. Marina hired a private investigator, met with the woman, and confronted her husband. She sought advice as to what she should do. The pastor at her church told her “What he did was wrong, so it’s your choice, what you want to do. The church is not going to say it’s o.k. to stay with him when he’s done that. But it’s, it’s up to you what you want to do.” Marina’s religious beliefs are deep and important to her, yet the pressures of patriarchy, culture, and family intersect with her faith and create tension. She ended up not separating from her husband because:

And I didn’t because I was afraid, because my whole family was angry that I was getting married, - so I didn’t want them to say, well I told you so, you shouldn’t of, see what you did, and all this, so I stayed with him.

Like her mother, “I became a widow in ’87. My husband was killed in a car accident.” Although her first experience with marriage was extremely negative, Marina lived in a world that dictated to her that a woman is not complete without a man, that she must be subservient to him, and that a woman needs to have someone take care of her.

That kind of closed the book on that one, that part of my life, finally. Then I remarried, - - and because me thinking well, I need a man to take care of me, I needed this man that’s supposed to, to tell me what to do when to do it how to do it. The first guy I met, I married him, and, for all the wrong reasons, you know.... It was awful marriage, he was very, this relationship was an abusive relationship. He was so jealous that, it was a fight, if I was late from work 5 minutes, I must have been sleeping with one of my auditors [at work], I should have been sleeping with so and so, and he was physical fight, - all the time.

Marina was beginning her involvement with AI during this marriage, and the organizer she worked with was a man: “My, this husband was jealous, when he saw me going to all these meetings and I was meeting with this guy organizer, - to get ready for

meetings and, - they were jealous.” Marina eventually divorced and soon after found out a man she used to know was in prison in Florida:

My [third] husband came into an already made family. So, - his dream was, he had been divorced 13 years, and he had a spiritual renewal but, and uh, he says, he prayed for, a family that would love him, and someone he could be a father to. And so when um, when I wrote him, he was in prison when I met him.

Convinced that this man would treat her well, be more of a partner in a relationship, and be good to her children, Marina worked to get him released to her. Marina’s third marriage is in its tenth year. In some senses, this time has been stable, yet as Marina grows as a person in transformation, she is beginning to question if this relationship is satisfying her needs.

So, he’s veery patient, very, - you know. - I was like, - o.k. this is very different, you know. No yelling, no - shouting, no rushing and, - - - And so he brought a lot of peace in our house. And I think it made it, the girls felt like, now we have a Dad, and, this is someone they can really trust and, go through with anything.... One down, down, I guess, one thing that, has, has hurt our marriage, in this relationship, is that he is an alcoholic. And I didn’t know he was an alcoholic - until the day that we married that he, you know, everybody was drinking why I didn’t think nothing of it. But after that, he, he did, we were together a year before we got married. And uh, after that it didn’t stop. And, so that’s been his struggle and now, uh, when he’s down, he’s down, but when he’s - - when he’s, when he’s sober, you know, he’s he’s the best person, you know, - in the world. And so um, - but I was getting tired of that too. Because I need stability.

Marina’s stories position her as victim to the capitalist system she lives in, the Mexicano-Texan culture that surrounds her, the embedded patriarchal system, and to a Kantian sense of duty to work, to her faith, and to care for her family. Yet, she also shows an immense strength in persevering. She shows agency throughout her life and acts on her own behalf. In little ways, she pushes back against the hegemonies that oppress her.

Her life story is made more impressive by the fact that she has slowly been going blind since childhood. Her disability was not diagnosed well into adulthood although Marina was aware of problems seeing the chalkboard in school. Learning to cope with the disability required a major change in Marina's lifestyle. She shares a story about driving after it was too dark to see and her daughter offering to help: "My daughter, my oldest daughter would say, 'mamá, it's o.k. mom, it's ok. I'll steer, and you press the gas.'" Marina sporadically took advantage of programs to work with the blind and visually impaired.

I think it was in 1990 they declared me legally blind. And so, for that year, I quit driving, I just thought, I can't see anymore. I, I just, my mind, I thought I was blind, I relied on special transit, - I relied a lot on my kids to read everything for me, um, - - until my counselor told me, you know, your kids need to rely on you, you're the adult. You don't, rely on your kids, you got to learn, - - how to get, how to, a new lifestyle. You got to learn how to live differently.

And she did. She worked longer hours to compensate for the difficulty she had reading. She used a support network of friends and family to help her with transportation needs. As she says, "I still had a brain; I can still do things you know." Her disability does hinder her in one important respect. She feels that it would be difficult to become an organizer without being able to drive, although she has considered a scenario in which her husband would work with her.

Foreshadowing her transformation and exposing a basic desire to affect change, Marina explains how she felt working in a church kitchen:

And I was Pan Dulce [Pastries]. "There comes Miss Pan Dulce." You know, that wasn't my name. How was I changing people? How was that showing, them that God loves them?

Transformation

Some of the research that has been done in the guise of transformative learning has been criticized because individuals had not transformed. Their learning was instrumental—adding to what they already knew, but not having a change of perspective and in the end, not exhibiting a change in behavior. Marina’s learning is a sound example of transformative learning. She is not the same person she used to be with only slight alterations to what she knows and how much she knows, and how she comes to know things. Her way of looking at the world has changed; her way of learning about the world has changed; and the way she behaves has changed. However, her transformation has not neatly stepped along from phase to phase, in a nice orderly manner. There is no clear disorienting dilemma. She perceives some of her transformation as joyful, some as painful. But she has self-examined. She has explored a variety of new roles. She has honestly and constantly assessed her own assumptions. Marina’s transformation began with the intersection of three contexts of her life: her church, the school her daughter attended, and her relationship with Austin Interfaith.

Church and God are common topics in Marina’s narrative. As we have seen, she sought her pastor’s advice and permission regarding her husband’s adultery. We shall see later that as Marina learned to question her assumptions, she became critical of some aspects of her church. Three quotes illustrate the effect that religion had on her transformation. In the first, Marina has an experience that validates her as a human being, centers her feelings of self and self-worth, and removes fear as a barrier to action:

I see it as just God's work. You know, because, I lived my cursillo, which is a spiritual retreat, that was about the same time I got involved, about a year later after I got involved with Interfaith, and, I think one thing that I was always, worried about was, being loved. And when I learned about God's love for me, - - I didn't, I didn't feel afraid anymore. It didn't matter who loved me or didn't love me, - what mattered now that I know that the person I needed to love me, loved me.

Coincidentally, her budding experience with AI provided her a venue in which to celebrate this love: "Because I loved everybody and I didn't know what my calling was. And when I went to the Interfaith meeting, - I felt, this is what I want to do. This is what I feel; I'm really doing God's work." The intersection between church and organizing was further cemented by the confidence her priest had in her:

I mean you have a priest who gave me all this support when I got married. He says, "because you're doing Austin Interfaith, you know, first of all, when anyone gets married in my church, everyone should join in ministry. And because you've been involved with Austin Interfaith, I, just want, I officially assign you as the leader with Austin Interfaith. So I felt, oh, thank you, because I love doing that, you know. So he was one that supported you, and, you know, we had strong leadership. He paid for my national training, you know, that was a thousand dollars, you know, so this is someone who really, supported, the work.

Marina describes her initial contacts with a school as being driven by the insistence of her daughter: "she kept telling me everyday momma don't forget the meeting" because "my class might win an ice cream party or a pizza party." At these meetings, Marina would sit in back and hope that nobody would notice her, but she was attracted to a Title I initiative to work with parents on a variety of life and parenting skills. She became active in the program and "we would all start sharing with each other what we learned out of it and, we should do some more, then because we were doing it so

often the principal starting sending me with some other parents to conferences to talk about [the program].”

Because of her participation in the program and her visibility while making presentations, the principal of the school approached Marina to run for the PTA presidency. Marina does not view this event with pride but rather with a critical eye: “First I think Kevin [the principal] saw me there because I was there all the time, and I was quiet, - never said much, - always agreed with him and - - that’s what he was looking for.” She also feels pressured by the norms of patriarchy, institutional power, and duty:

And so, that, that I would be another reason why I said yes. He was male, and I always felt the male had, you know my mother said you’ve got to do what they say, and this is, he was male, he was a principal, had a title, and, I felt, I couldn’t say no to him.

During the same time, Marina began her association with AI through her church. Initially, she had a vague understanding of the organization: “I was kind of involved with Interfaith but I didn’t really know, that I was a member of the organization yet because, well, [the church] was a member, but I just didn’t understand all that, that part.”

Marina attended several meetings, but one in particular was a turning point for her. In her story about this meeting, Marina touches on a variety of key themes that are important to her story of transformation.

So then [the church] was, I was a member at [the church] during that time, and I saw on, they did an announcement that there was an education meeting going on. So because it said education well, you know, I said I got to go maybe they’ll teach me how to be the PTA president. So I went, and - - it was nothing about being a PTA president [lightly laughing]. At that meeting I learned about, they were talking about, what do the TAAS [Texas Assessment of Academic Standards] scores mean, and that, there was this funding of the account, I mean priority school funding and that 6

million dollars was being considered to be cut. Which at that time there was 16 schools, mine was one of those which 90 percent, at least 90 percent of these schools, student population, were on free or reduced lunch. So these were the poor schools in the district. And we were going to be cut 3 hundred thousand dollars each. - - So, me again sitting in the very back hoping nobody would notice me there. I was like, just to myself, how could that be? How is my child going to learn, - without that kind of money that our schools need? Does that mean they're not going to have books? Does that mean, they're not going to have a desk? That they're not going to have, the teachers? You know, that's a lot of money. So after the meeting the organizer asked us all to stay and evaluate and asked us what we thought, and what we were willing to do. And so people spoke and, then we were leaving and he approaches me and says that, "What did you think about this meeting?" And, excuse me? As simple, that that question was, what I thought, - that was the first time in my whole life anybody had asked me what I thought. So, I was like, I don't know. I don't know nothing. I went to school. I got a high school diploma, but I didn't learn nothing. I know nobody. - I don't know. He goes, "Well, what did, what did, what did you think about what happened tonight? I mean, what did you learn?" I said well it's not right, it's not right because, I didn't know; I never knew what those test scores meant. And, I would like to know, what that means when my daughter gets her report card, you know, so, um, and he goes, "well what are you willing to do?" I said, there's nothing I can do, I'm just a parent. I said, I think you need to go tell my principal what's going on, and he says. "Well we have an iron rule, - and that is we never do for others what they can do for themselves."

Sharing her story, Marina gives glimpses of both her pre-transformation self and her new self. The knowledge she has now allows her to give a well-organized account of her first real engagement with AI and its processes and procedures. She explains how people are recruited to attend meetings, what language is used to motivate attendance, how information is presented at the meetings, how people are engaged through validation both to give their opinions and to act on them, how reflection is integral to organizing, and how organizers ensure that the individuals themselves act rather than be dependent on others. She understands how the process was used with her and how she can use the

process with others. She understands the under-girding philosophies of the IAF and how they came to be. A variety of traits Alinsky found important are embedded in her language: curiosity, anger, compassion, and humor.

But this mature account also allows us to envision Marina at the beginning of her engagement. Although she jokes about learning how to be a PTA president being the hook that attracted her to the meeting, she clearly values education and doing what is right for her own children. She reiterates how she felt about herself at that time by explaining how she sat at the back of the room hoping not to be noticed. When she is noticed, her reaction is to say that she “knows nothing,” that she went to school but did not learn anything. That she does not know anybody. But the information that is presented causes its intended effect, to anger potential leaders in the audience. Marina uses language that indicates her understanding of the world being classified as the have and have-nots—those students on free or reduced price lunches and in the poor schools in the district, as compared to those who do not live in that context. Her anger at losing the funding comes from a deep sense of social justice for all students in the poor schools. But the presentation effectively forces Marina to look at the effects on her own children’s education by asking questions about how their day-to-day learning will be affected by decisions that were foreign to her before coming to the meeting. It seems probable that Marina stayed for the evaluation because someone asked her to attend; perhaps she was hoping that no one would notice her. But the moment that she is asked for her opinion, something happens. By being recognized, Marina immediately feels that she has more power and that she matters. Although she tries to hide and to escape notice by pointing

out her educational deficits, the organizer encourages her to reflect on what she heard and to express her anger and to understand that “it’s just not right.” However, even this sudden sense of power and anger were not enough to erase a lifetime of oppression, causing Marina to position herself in the power hierarchy as “just a parent,” unable to act. At this moment, she learns the IAF’s most important norm—she must act for herself rather than depend on others.

Telling her narrative, Marina understands how she did not have the relationships necessary to mobilize others and attempts to use this as a final exit. But she is finally convinced. As with the school principal, Marina explains that part of her reason for accepting that she had to do something was because of the organizer’s gender.

I said, the iron rule. Oh no, this, I said, I can’t, I don’t know nobody, I don’t know, I don’t even know my neighbors, because even through I was doing these things, I, there wasn’t really a relationship with parents. We were just doing presentations to do presentations [for the parenting program]. So, ‘because I wanted to go home and because he was a male, I thought I couldn’t say no, and I said, okay I’ll do it.

When asked if other parents should know about the test scores, Marina agrees but feels that it is the principal’s responsibility. When she asks who should talk to the principal, she “learned when you ask a question to an organizer, it’s going to come right back, ‘Well what do you think? Who do you think needs to go tell them?’ Okay, I guess that’s me.” The organizer responded with, ‘We’ll teach you, we’ll work with you.’ And he did. I mean, he worked with me day and night.” This initial training was informal and involved just Marina and the organizer.

The informal training was, the organizer coming to my house, - and, just, challenging me to think about what I wanted to say, what I wanted

parents, - - what I wanted parents to learn out of the meeting I was going to organize. And that was such hard, I was, I would be like exhausted because you know, I had never - - He never gave me ideas. - He kept saying [in fast, bulleted statements], “So. So how would you do that? And, and why do you want to do that?” And you know, so it was never, a picture, I was like creating the whole thing, and not realizing it. - - so that, that was a lot of those kinds of meetings, and then once I wrote it down, - then it was, you know, saying it. Learning it. Learning how to present it. - So it was doing little steps to, to lead to doing a big presentation. - - - So a lot if it was meeting at the church, meeting at my house, um, - meeting at my job, for lunch, before, before, before work, - so those were the informals.

Marina remembers that she was doing the work, asking the questions, deciding what to say while the organizer challenged, questioned, prodded, and gave suggestions.

No, it’s just kind of like, well what do you want people to learn? What helped you when I did the workshop? Every thing was a question? Okay, you want them to learn about the TAAS scores, okay, what do you want them to know? What was easy? What, what is, you know this is, you said it was very hard for you. What was hard about it? Do you think other parents see it that way? How, how can we make it in a way that they can understand it? So it’s helping you figure it out. That everything that organizing is helping us figuring out. It’s never, this is a paper, this is how you do this, step 1, step 2, step 3. It’s always a conversation, which is good, because I don’t have to read a bunch of rules and criteria and guidelines, you know?

Learning happens through conversation, neither in a didactic manner nor in a fashion that depends on a power dynamic between the organizer and the leader (although this is problematic and will be discussed in the implications section of this manuscript). Marina also expresses an understanding of another fundamental IAF norm: that of imagination.

It’s just about conversation and just challenge you to, to imagine, and to be creative, and those are new words, you know, but, I began to, okay, I need to imagine what, you know, what can we imagine you know. You say you want your kids to be in a safe place. What would that look like?

Imagine what that would look like. Close your eyes and think about, what would that look like? You want them to keep continue learning? You want them to be in a safe place? You want there to be teachers, adults, you know?

Along with learning how to imagine, Marina had to learn how to connect what she was saying with her own story. She likens the preparation to doing homework, but when she able to connect her story with what she is saying, thereby creating a community story, she is able to bring passion to her action and validation to herself as a human being.

Up to the day that you actually do the presentation. And even then, you would still, I would still get, SO nervous and, and so um, it was just really, and I think, thinking back that - - I was, I was, it was like doing homework, - where, I was writing things down, but not really, - it was hard for me to own it. Because, even though I was creating it, it was like a project, - so I had to really learn how to connect with that, this is my story. This is me.

Marina speaks with obvious pride as she recounts her first action promoting and running the meeting:

I organized my first meeting. I remember it was a Saturday morning, and I did a lot of announcements. - I just started announcing, just telling people, giving them papers, you know, there's this important meeting, we're going to lose a lot of money, and I had a hundred parents show up. On a Saturday morning.

That first meeting was a profound experience for Marina:

When I got up there and I saw all those parents, and after the meeting was over, I was, I was exhausted. I felt exhausted, but I felt, - I felt, - - the first, I did, I didn't really use the word energy, but I felt like more motivated. - - - I felt like WOW, I've got to do this some more. I've got to do. I liked it! - I like feeling, - - I like feeling, I liked feeling uh, - - that I knew what I was talking about and it was, - and that people listened to me, uh, it was just a total different me.

While not technically a disorienting dilemma, this experience was profound for Marina. She is able to access the feelings of power she felt as she facilitated the meeting.

But she also feels that she has knowledge, that she is smart, that she knows things that are important for other people to hear, and that they actually want to listen to her. Although this experience happens at the beginning of her transformation, looking back, she sees this moment as a major life event that delineates a past and a “total different me.” She shares how

that first action, was the first time made me feel like, you know, it didn't matter that I don't have a degree. It doesn't matter that, that I don't have the money, that I can still have, I can still make a difference, my voice counts.... I felt like I was somebody, who not only needed me, but I felt like I was making a difference.

The feeling of satisfaction combined with the understanding that she had the power to make changes was enough for Marina to begin a long involvement with AI: “I liked what I learned and I wanted to learn more. I wanted to learn what else can we do with parents. I was just real excited about learning more and out of that we kept continuing the conversations.” Looking back at when she began organizing, Marina describes the time she and the organizer spent together “I think, when I was organizing for that first time, I would say it was at least, - - - gosh, a lot of time. I would say it was at least 5, 6 times, a week. - Constant checking, ‘How are you doing? How are things coming along?’.” She continues, “I think back about the time, length of time, that [the organizer] spent with me, it was years, - you know, it was months, HOURS, and hours and hours.” Although she quickly became a leader with AI, Marina understands that her growth happened over many years:

It was, it was gradual. - - - Cause now I can get up there and and I feel the question. I feel the story. And, - and we're so tense and so afraid at the beginning thinking what people are going to say am I going to say it right?

And all these other things that making us so nervous that, it's hard to feel it.

She also has an intuitive understanding of the norms of social capital that are part of organizing; how relationships and trust are necessary to create an effective institution.

It's like people don't trust you... I recognize and and realize, why Interfaith does it in the way they do it. You know, it's about doing your one-on-one first. - You know, initiate that conversation. Then do another conversation. And then kind of begin to feel what people's interests is. And if there's something that they say they want to do and not something that suggest them to do. And that's why it's, it takes, it's a process. I mean, - the organizer asked me at that meeting, that first time, - but it didn't happen the next day, it happened like 3 months later. You know that I, I did a meeting, so, they take a lot of time, to work with us, to make us feel, like it's safe and that we can trust them, and, and nobody else does that.

Marina has also critically reflected on both the concept and the word "power" and understands the central importance of organized power to the work she does as a leader in her community.

I didn't used to like it when they would say we, you have to be about power, there's something about that word that just, you know "power," you know, I don't - - but - - now, I feel like that's, that's the only way. If you have, if you're not part of an organization with power, then you will be ignored.... And, and it's all a power, it's all about power.

She understands the dichotomy of personal and organizational power and how her public persona is tied to the identity of Austin Interfaith. Describing how elected officials see her, Marina explains:

I think they see me as both. I think the politicians see me - - as, maybe they do see me as a leader, with, associated with a powerful organization. - - Uh, so there's, there's respect - - - - oh, let me think - - - - I think, - that - if I was not part of Austin Interfaith, and I would meet, all of the, with the Council, - first of all, I don't think they would meet with me because I was an individual, - just a citizen, and they would try and put me in whenever they could. I mean now they have this Tuesday thing where you just drop

by, and you'll be seen if, if they have time. - When I call, and I say, I'm with Austin Interfaith, I'm getting a meeting. Because they see me as part of an organization, with power. I don't think they meet with us because, - they meet with every nonprofit, other groups. But I think they meet with us because we have, we have made things happen, and we bring things to the table.

Transforming Others

Indications of Marina's transformation to a new life world are her efforts to transform others. She has had an effect on many individuals including her children, her current husband, her neighbors, her co-workers, school staff, and countless teenage and adult students she has worked with in a variety of job and language training capacities. In the following vignette, Marina describes how she is viewed by others while at the same time narrating in a voice that is confident and sure of how to organize for a particular issue.

They weren't involved. Ah, at all, and, and Ms. "Gutiérrez", approached me, and said, when I first, she saw me at [the high school] she says, "I want you to teach me how I can be like you." And I go, what do you mean? She goes, "You're a teacher or somebody around here? [Marina is a parent specialist] I mean you come, I mean, I see how people really listen to you. And, and you, you're, tienes respeto [people respect you], you know, and all." And I said, really?... She says, - "I want to learn English. She goes, in Mexico I was a teacher, and I want to learn English, and, I want to know who can, where I can go learn English." And I said, well, can you find other people here, that want, you think there's other custodians that want to learn English? And she says, "Yeah, I'll do that." I said, [if] you can get me a list of about 10 people, that would want to learn English, then we'll sit down and talk again. That afternoon she came and brought me her list. And so then we organized to get ESL classes for custodians, and we got them. - And ah, and it was through her, - you know working with her.

Although Marina is a seasoned leader, she has to be constantly reflective about her behavior to ensure that she is not contradicting IAF norms. The IAF teaches that to

affect reform, it is important first to get power, sometimes being willing to build relationships quietly for years before acting. Getting power involves developing new leaders and ensuring that the iron rule is not being ignored:

I guess because I'm part of, - the house meetings and just creating it, that I just want to hang on to it, and it's hard for me, - when they say who are we mentoring? Well, I forget about the mentoring piece because I just want to make sure everything's just right, for the students and I, and we get, - we get sucked in to the program, verses power. And we talk about power - before program, power before program, and sometimes, because of the people we work with, they're so programmatic that, it's easy to get sucked into thinking like that again. And thinking about the guidelines and thinking about this paperwork and like that, it's not about that, but who, who are we developing as leaders, - who can serve on this committee as a chair, with me, so I can step down and feel confident that, people are not going to start, - that the program's not going to start shifting in the direction, of the, the bureaucrat direction, that it's already moving to.

Creating leaders and building organizational power is a matter of social justice for Marina and a way to unite a divided society. It is also the only avenue for the disenfranchised to make changes. Marina has deep respect for the organization she is an integral part of:

I just think everybody needs to have an organization. Because, this is the only organization, you know, I have sat on many, many boards, - and this is the only organization, where you are diverse, in so many ways, - race, economic background, what parts of the city you live, and you're together. You're unified. You work on things, you stay focused, and you get things done. And, there's nobody else that works this way. I have yet to find anybody else to work, work this way. You're respected, and it didn't matter that, the level of, of education you have, how much money you don't have. You're still respected equally.

Finally, Marina understands that relationships are built on shared stories and that these relationships are part of every aspect of her life: "So the skills that they teach you about learning how to be, have a voice, not only about, - the issues, it even helped me, at

my own personal life, it helped me at my work.” Sharing her story creates a bond to those she is trying to develop as future leaders. Her energy comes from the constant requirement to share her story, so that she is reminded of the anger that motivates her actions.

I can see that, when I share the story about how I used to be, and how I used to think, that, that’s not the way it is, and that, probably many of us think that way that we have no say so because we are, we lack the, education or, or because we’re not from here, or, but that, that - that we are the place where, we, we do have a voice and we count. And, it’s up to us, to, to step up and say, this is not acceptable. When you see something that’s not right, it doesn’t matter, if you don’t speak English, or whatever language. But you still have a right as a human person, a human being, to do something about it. And that, and that you should be heard.

Marina has come full circle. From the moment that an organizer opened up the world for her by asking what she thought, to “You know, and so now I’m able to ask parents, ‘What do you think? Why do you think that?’”

I Am a Parent

By gaining her voice and understanding she had power, Marina was able to identify ways in which people and institutions manifested power. With this understanding, her self-image began to change as she considered herself an equal. One way in which Marina took ownership of equality was by taking ownership of a title.

Marina asked “Why do we have to have a title?” to explain her positionality in the world in which she lives. While describing an incident at a place she used to work, she described herself as “just a secretary” and felt that those in power—those with titles such as the Human Resources Specialist at her office, the principal at her daughter’s school, the priest at her church—had power and influence over her.

Because my thinking and upbringing is, - you know you've got to respect people with the titles, you know, they're the people you've got to listen to. They're the people that are, that know what's, what's going on. And the teacher, you know, they were like goddesses. You got to do what the teacher says.

While explaining how the principal at her daughter's school was successful in asking her to be PTA president, she says, "He was a principal, had a title, and I felt, I couldn't say no to him." IA organizers understand how individuals like Marina interpret the concept of title and the power that comes from taking ownership of a title and incorporate this into conversations:

When we first created the after school program, you know, people would say stuff and I always felt like, I wasn't supposed to be there, but, the organizer would always say, remember you're the parent, you are just as important, as they are. And, that is your title. You are the parent, so you, if you don't agree with something you let them know.

Taking ownership of a title was a process. Describing an incident at her workplace, in which Marina had logged a complaint related to her disability but the decision had been made with her bosses' input and not her own, Marina says, "So why did you listen to her, and not to me? Because she has the title? When she walks off this building, she's equal, like me. She has no title." In this case, title is dependent on location—that is, people hold power in the institutions of which they are a part. But as Marina begins to understand the world as it is, she begins to use her title more forcefully:

It doesn't matter that we don't, we don't have the money, or that, or the degree, the knowledge, that we didn't, I didn't go to college, but, but I, I'm someone they still need to, to listen to, you know, because I am a parent.

When Marina organized a meeting outside of the purview of the PTA at a high school where she was working as a parent specialist, the PTA president said, "How dare

you think that you have the right to call a meeting with our administrators, when you have not been elected to be, an official of any sort?" At this point in her transformation, Marina has taken complete ownership of the word and emails the president: "I wrote her back and I said, look I'm sorry you feel that way, but you know, I do have a title, and I put in quotes, Parent."

Eventually, Marina begins to understand that sometimes titles can be problematic, divisive, and counterproductive:

I don't understand, - the politics of being Democratic and Republican. And I don't understand why that should even be. - Because if we're about, - creating a, - a city or a world, - where there's peace and hope, and, - - - all these things then, why are we dividing ourselves? Why do we have to have a title? - - - If we're for the same cause, let's just do the work.

There are certain labels that Marina will not wear. She bristled when I implied she was a community activist. She describes her neighbors whom she confronted above as not interested in the common good:

Everybody's there representing their own selves. So I see that as community activism, because everybody is fighting [bangs desk twice] for their own, and it's not, - they can't understand, that, - they can't be focused on why we're together, and, even though as many times as I would tell them that, you know, we were created because we're residents here and we want to come, identify ways to help our youth be successful in this neighborhood.

Although she says "I am a parent" with force and pride, the title that most characterizes her and the one she uses most often is "leader":

I don't even know if community activist, has a negative, side to it. - I would say community activist is people that were, up there with their signs, and, and shouting, and, you know, that's what I thought community activist was, so I never saw myself as a community activist, because Austin Interfaith, - tells us we're leaders."

Private and Public Relationships

Marina exhibits a strong understanding of separating the private from the public—another key norm of the IAF. In her first years as a leader, she found it difficult to interact with other people on a professional level. She found confrontation and disagreement difficult.

And it was really hard to disagree with people, you felt like, they aren't going to like you, or they're going to think you're a bad person [if] you don't agree with them, or, you know, all these things that you, that, reasons why that you shouldn't disagree with them.

A key tenet of the IAF is to hold each other accountable as well as individuals and organizations that agree to work on issues. Marina clearly feels a deep and personal responsibility for the perceived insult and injury she inflicted on another person:

And so then, we had to have a meeting with them and tell them, "You said you were going to do this but you didn't do it." And I know that the director, was, he turned as red as an apple. I could see him only because he turned so red. He was so angry. And I, I felt so bad. Oh I felt awful, because, I thought this guy has been so good with us, he's worked with us, and I, I, I just felt like we shouldn't have gotten mad at him, you know.

Marina explains how IA worked with her to understand this facet of community organizing: "You know, it's not about me, it's just not, it's about, you know Interfaith teaches us about, public and private relationships. And you have to know when to separate that.... And, and they helped us think that it's not, about making friends, - it's about, you, you representing the parents and the community." As a strong leader, Marina has internalized this norm and made it a part of her public identity. She uses the language of accountability, both for others and for herself:

Now I understand, that we have to be willing, we have to be ready, to also confront people. When, you can't just see us and, you know, we've got to

be nice to Marina because, we've got to be nice, but that they understand that there's this, responsibility, and accountability, that it's not about building friendships, it's about holding each other accountable and working as public people.

Throughout her narrative, Marina gave a variety of examples of how her behavior was affected by her understanding of separating the private from the public. When a teacher with whom Marina had a good relationship called her daughter a dummy in jest, Marina successfully challenged the teacher as a public figure without jeopardizing her private relationship with the man:

And I don't appreciate you ever, I don't appreciate you calling her dummy. I don't want it to slip, I don't it, you to mention it, to not only to her, but to any student here at this high school. - - And if there isn't nothing nice you can say, then don't say it. And he goes, "Oh, I understand. I'm sorry. You know." And so, - he, I, I came across, firm to the point, but, still I know that he can still talk with me. You know, I didn't come and, - and my daughter says, "You know mom, that was really good how you handled that. You know, you didn't cuss at him, like you see parents doing. And, ah, you just, - tell him how it was, and, and I know that Mr. 'Collins' likes you." You know. So this work had really helped me to really think about, how you have a conversation, how, how to confront somebody, because confrontation is the worst, I used to hate it.

In a much more public setting, Marina was forced to reflect on separating the personal from the public. In a lengthy narrative, she shares how she was on a committee to decide on which schools were to receive funding that IA had helped secure: "I was on that committee, and we had AISD [school district] on that committee, we had the city on the committee, so everybody agreed on this." The principal who had nominated her to the PTA and later had her impeached, who had barred her children from attending school, who had humiliated her in public and privately, and had barred AI from his campus in a separate matter had used personal connections with a council member to receive some of

the funding without going through the application process. Marina had to have a conversation with him, explain to him the process, and, in the end, place a deadline for his compliance (which he met at the last moment when he understood that Marina had the power and authority to make the decision). Marina had the power to act vindictively: “And so it was like, I felt like, you know, what goes around comes around, you know, - I could have, - I could have taken personal, and said disapprove,” but her behavior was governed by the lessons she learned:

That even though, there was this private, situation I saw between me and Mr. “Frank”, I couldn’t, I couldn’t let that get in the way of my decision making as representing and organization in a public arena. And that was my first, I guess, my first time really understanding what private and public was.

The private/public dichotomy has created tension in other areas of Marina’s life. Her public persona was required to be accountable to others, which necessitated a commitment to time and effort. But this public commitment challenged the norms under which she operated as a wife and a mother:

I felt so strong about, being at the home to receive my husband, having dinner for him, and with my kids, and I think it would have just, - - I wouldn’t, it would have just been, - harder for me to really understand it [being a leader] because I felt like, I would have felt like, I was not doing my obligation as a housewife.

Reflecting on trying to balance the two, Marina explains how “I don’t think it’s difficult. I think it’s what’s, - I don’t think it’s difficult to do, it’s just difficult to understand that we can do it.” This understanding has come at a cost to Marina. She has had to let go of some of her most integral values—those of wifehood and motherhood—to work in the public realm. But she also understands that working on the greater good

will have a positive impact on her family. Quietly she shares that, “I’m willing to sacrifice uh, - - - my family for it. You know. Because I know in the long run, it’s going to be, it’s helping, it’s, to help them.

Thinking Differently

Integral to transformative learning theory is the capacity for an individual to critically assess assumptions. For Marina, this is an ongoing process and occurs in all areas of her life. She can be both critical of her home, work, community, religious, educational, and civic contexts, while at the same time, she has the capacity to imagine a better world for herself, her family, and her community. Looking at a series of vignettes provides a mechanism to appreciate the variety of assumptions Marina has challenged.

For Marina, growing up with a grand narrative in which women were to be married, men were the authority figures, and taking care of family was the primary responsibility, questioning these deeply held norms involved a critical look at key aspects of her identity. When she is faced with the threat of having her children taken from her, Marina is forced to “think differently” about what marriage means to her, her relationship with a man, divorce within the church, and a moving from a dominated self to a self-authored self.

And it was happening so often that, it made me, - and this is when I started getting involved with Interfaith. As I got to know more about, having a voice, and once I did that first, organizing, with Interfaith, it was in '90, - - it was in '90, - slowly, I mean I think 3 years later, I learned that I didn't have to put up with this kind of relationship. And when an officer told me, if you call us here one more time, we're taking your kids, - well that was when I said, there's nobody taking my kids. And, had I not known how, about, - that I have a voice and that I can do something, and and someone

is trying to teach me, what my role as a parent and, is for my children and, - and their safety and it that it wasn't about me, it was about, what am I showing my kids, you know, this, the whole thinking, thinking different that, - um, - - than, - I started, I, I looked up, on the, I think it was the Greensheet [a local advertisement weekly], there was this, divorce for 50 dollars and, I would set an appointment, met with them, and, - filed my own divorce, and got out of that relationship. - But that was, - 3 years, that was, very awful. Even after that, it was still 3 years that this guy would not leave and so I had to really, - - do something to get him, away from me. Because he could not, he could not accept that we were divorced, you know.

As we see in her words, these critical processes are not short, cataclysmic events. Deciding to leave her husband took years leading up to an act of agency. Although this act took tremendous courage, we have seen previously that Marina married a second time. Although she was able to critically look at her assumptions, she was not able to modify her behavior. However, when she marries her third husband, she tells him:

This husband, before we got married, I said, "You know, these are the things I'm part of. This is my life. When we get married, this is not going to change. - And you have to accept it or, we just don't get married. Because, I'm going to do the things that I believe are the things I'm supposed to be doing."

When "even my kids" question her about the time she spends away from home to work on community issues, Marina responds "You can dream about me not being at meetings, - but you know what, this is God's work." Indeed, comparing her organizing efforts to a religious conversation, she shares how "it's true, they say when you come into, you know... a lot of people become holy rollers or they're all into the church, that it's going to be your family that's going to be first to go against you." For Marina, the sacrifice she makes by not being the mother her world has told her to be is necessary for the common good and for social justice. She understands that she is not being the parent

she should be, but that working for the common good will also be good for her own family. She tells her daughters:

And so that's not just always thinking about just us, - but I said, yeah, I care about my, my, you and getting your education. But what about your friends, who you say whose parents can't be there, whose parents aren't there? And, you know, so it has be things that's going to help not only you, but for your friends, and, and you're, now your nephew, my grandkids, are going to be coming to these schools, you know, what are we doing to make things better for them?

In telling her story, Marina speaks little of social issues before her relationship with Austin Interfaith. But her new worldview gives her the tools she needs to analyze the established structures that are in place that create inequities. For example, she understands that racism at the individual level may not exist anymore, but that racism still persists at the social level.

You know, I used to think, that racism, didn't exist anymore. But there's racism in other, other ways. There's racism in the part of, if you live in this part or that part of town. - - And there's racism, if, if you make this much money or this low money, So it's, and it's still very thick, you know. - And why, why should it be that way?

She also questions institutionalized sexism and posits a cause-and-effect relationship between girls' opportunities for engagement and social problems.

I was coaching, coaching softball; they created the East Austin Youth League. It was for boys only. And that's the way it's going to be. And, and that's the way it's always been. And so, we got some, ladies together, we met with them, and said, you know, there's a lot of girls who we're concerned about them getting pregnant, and we have to allow, some changes, so that they can have some fun things to do and alternative things to do.

Although Marina has a new worldview, she retains the memory of her old assumptions. Being able to understand her new views as well as how she came to a new

understanding gives her the capacity to assess other people's assumptions and understand the amount that they have self-analyzed. In discussing competing views of the value "quality," Marina differentiates her beliefs from those of the board members.

In the schools, all of our kids deserve, quality education, and what does that mean? You know. I think, I think, there's a perception that, when we say quality, that, we think it's our level, our understanding of quality, and, and it's not the same thinking, the same definition. - - Because in the meetings with the school board members, this is what I learned at the school finance meeting is the quality, quality to them is making sure all the resources are there for everybody. But it's not just that, - you know, equal distribution does not mean quality distribution.

Her old way of thinking about parent involvement is in clear contrast with the responsibility she now feels to be involved in ways that are directly related to student achievement and to hold herself and the educational community accountable.

Even when I would have conversations with parents about, - the PTA budget. You know, what are we doing to help student achievement? I don't see nothing on here. It was all about, let's do a fundraiser, let's have an ice cream social, let's create booster clubs, let's do all this, social things, but there wasn't anything around student achievement. And they, and, and to them, it was like, that's the school's job. Well, what are we as parents doing, - to help the school make sure that it's, that it's doing that?

When a parent suggested a handshake day as a way to alleviate racial tensions at a high school she was working at, Marina feels that this is a naïve idea: "Well they didn't have that day, but, she wanted to do a hand shake day, you know? I was like, you need to do something more than just a hand shake."

Moving from a feeling of insignificance as a parent, Marina now feels a sense of equality with the establishment that brings with it certain rights, responsibilities, and power:

And I said, you know what Mr. Frank, I have learned, because of Interfaith, I have learned, that I have a brain, and as a parent, I have a right to know, and these parents have a right to know, what's going on at school, and that we should be part of that solution.

As parents, you also have a, you also have a right, and I think that's something that we never, really understand as our right as a parent. That we have a right to challenge, and hold the teacher accountable, to what our kids are supposed to be learning.

In another story, Marina touches on the subjugation of parents again as well as class. A group of parents used the school facilities on weekends and routinely the front door was not opened and the bathrooms were locked. When a west-side school (from the wealthy part of town) used the school for a special event, they were well taken care of. Marina questions both the inequitable treatment and the typical response that the parents she was working with would generally enact. Marina explains how:

They had all the custodians working, I mean it was organized. And that really pissed me off. Because their, all their area was opened but our doors were still locked. So I told the parents, I said, we had a meeting I said, what have you noticed? Every Saturday we've been coming that these things have not been available for us. How do you feel as parents? Why should another school get the royal treatment when this is our school? And so, they say, "This is not right Ms. Lopez." So I say what are we willing to do about it? "Well I think we should talk to the principal, we should talk to the administrators." And I said, well who's willing to do that? So we had, we had like, 10 parents.

An early assumption for Marina was that she should remain quiet about her disability and get by as best she could. As she grew, Marina began to challenge this assumption by being upfront about her disability and learning about laws in place to protect her. When her work place attempted to move her parking spot to a dark and narrow part of the building that would have been difficult for Marina to use because of her limited vision, she took action instead of quietly going along as she might have in the

past. She discovered that the company was not compliant with a variety of legal provisions (including not posting information on the rights of the disabled on their bulletin boards):

So, I wrote this letter to Washington, I had them all ready, and I explained everything, I got the copies of the emails, everything he said [a company executive]. And then I took my boss her letter, and I said, I just want to let you know, it was 5 o'clock and I said, I'm going to mail this out and I had all of them sealed ready to be mailed, - and so, she goes oh o.k. so she got it she started reading it. She dropped it, and she jumped up, literally jumped, out of her seat she goes, "No, don't do that!" and she ran out and, "I'll be right back." She ran out of there, came back, and said, you don't have to move your parking; your parking is yours still. - So I never mailed them. I should've mailed them. I regret that I didn't mail them.

One of the most difficult areas in which Marina reflects critically is her connection to the church. God and the church had been a prominent influence throughout her life, and she had always been involved with church affairs. But as her capacity for questioning increased, the power structures embedded in the institution become clearer to her.

Marina's criticisms fall into two areas: the politicalness of the church and the emptiness of its message. She touches on a variety of themes that explains for her how "the church can be so political." At a basic level, the hierarchy frustrates Marina:

But anytime we had to do something to meet with our priest, - we had to go through three people. I could never go straight to him. And, and, to me I began connecting the politics in the church... I was like so happy when they said I'd be the liaison for Austin Interfaith. - For, for San Francisco [church], you know, I was really happy. But, it was not easy, getting things, you know, it was like, it's, - talk to this person because that's her building. She's in charge of Religious education. Or talk to this person because that's their [area]. It didn't belong to the members. You know, so it was - it was very, - I felt really awful. I felt like, you know, how can this be? How can we say all this what we're saying in church, and then, when

it comes to working with you, the, your lay people, your priests, it's not, what they're saying in church?

For Marina, social justice and action are integral to church teaching. Conversing with a leader from another city, Marina is frustrated by the priests she is involved with: "Why is your clergy, why is your priest, interested in this? Why? And he said, 'because, unfairness, and injustice.' And I'm like, why can't the priests in Austin understand that."

She feels that what is said at the pulpit is not what is practiced, and makes a strong connection between religious norms and values and democracy in the U.S.:

To me, it's like, how can you be a Christian and not, not live your Christian, values, - and take them with you, and practice them, wherever you go? That they're not just for Sunday, and they're not just when you're in the church. - - - And I would say that would be democracy.

She became so disillusioned that "I, I got turned off, as far as, I, I when I would go to church I wouldn't listen anymore, I'd try to listen but, I felt like those were just empty words coming out of their mouths." Marina remained faithful and active in the church; she is steadfast with her message and understands the need for church leaders to hear it. Because the IAF primarily consists of congregations, she understands the importance for church leaders and members to understand the imperative to act for social justice. They, like her, need to critically assess their assumptions, which she equates to "thinking outside your box."

To me it's like, just like a principal, - you know, he's the principal of the church, - and you have to think outside your box. Is this your church? Or is this the people's church? Is this your school? Or is it the parent's school? - And until you can begin thinking, the broad picture, all the areas of how you want to, - - help your members, your parents or your community, whether it's a congregation or school, - that, you have to think outside your box.

Countering Hegemony

Well, and I think, and I think I've changed because I recognize that, I don't have to be with people to tell me I have to do, that that's what I should be doing because that's what they say is the right thing to do.

The people Marina is talking about include her mother, her husband, her boss, her priest, various community members, and several school administrators. As we have seen, as Marina gained power throughout her transformation by questioning her assumptions she began to act with agency. However, pushing against existing hegemonies did not come without a cost. As Marina exhibited power, the people who generally were able to dominate her reacted by pushing back. Husbands reacted jealousy and abusively. When she was successful in getting a group of people to show up to vote for her to become a parish leader, the priest reprimanded her and kept her from other church activities. However, the most extreme retribution came from the principal at her children's school. After successfully organizing a meeting to discuss the meaning of the accountability system scores with parents, those parents began to hold the school staff accountable:

There was lot of tension after that because, - parents did start blaming staff. The principal, - right? Why didn't you tell us? You know, and that, of course that wasn't the intention, just to kind of, kind of begin, agitating parents about what are we going to do about it, - as parents.

The principal called Marina at work, demanded that she come to the school immediately, and confronted her.

"Parents have been coming in here everyday, and getting angry with me because they said that I have lied to them about their child's learning and, and on and on and on and I'm fed up all these parents coming in and, and putting the blame on me," and I was like, Mr. Frank, that was never my intention. Please tell me who those parents are and I will talk with them, - because those are the parents that I want to, to work with me to figure out how WE as parents are going to help "Chavez" [Elementary]. "I don't

want to do any more meetings and Interfaith is not allowed on my campus anymore, and you're not allowed to do Interfaith, and if you want to do anything else here at Sanchez, you can bring cookies and punch to our meetings." He said it that way and I was like, and I stood up and I said, you know what Mr. Frank, - and I was trembling because this was the first time that I would speak up to the principal, I was terrified. And I said, you know what Mr. Frank, I have learned, because of Interfaith, I have learned, that I have a brain, and I'm a, as a parent, I have a right to know, and these parents have a right to know, what, what's going on at school, and that we should be part of that solution. I am not going to bring cookies and punch to your meetings and if you want cookies and punch you take them yourself. And, and I said, and you can not keep me from doing anything with Austin Interfaith. And I left, and I thought, oh God this guy's going to pull my hair or something, you know, and I walked away. And I was terrified, when I left I was crying because I was so scared I didn't know what he was going to do to me, you know, he a principal. I felt like he was going to do something to me. And he did, he did. He organized to have me impeached.

This was a traumatic moment for Marina, but she did not back down. She was not immediately impeached and continued her duties as PTA president making decisions she felt were in the students' best interests.

I'd write, sign checks for him on things, and I would question, what is, how is this helping our kids? How is this helping our kids? And he couldn't tell me. "But we've always done this." But how is this helping our kids? We work hard to raise this money, and it's for the children. How is this going back to the children? - And when I refused to sign checks, he would get furious, and he did calls to all the board. Board would call me, it's like, it it's not going to the kids. But we can not, I'm not going to release money to him that's not going back to the kids. "But he's the principal, Marina, we demand that you sign." And I wouldn't. And so, and so that's what, moved him to do that. I don't know, I mean, I don't know... then, I thought it was over, well I got impeached.

Marina moved to another neighborhood but kept her children at this school.

Principal Frank used Marina's children as a way to continue punishing her.

He goes, "I just want to let you know that your kids are getting a letter, and after today they can not come back to Sanchez.".... Now you tell me,

when did you and I ever talk about my kids being tardy. There is a process, and you haven't done it, we, you and I have never talked about my kids having tardy problems. And I said my kids are good kids. - I said they, they've always done good grades, - they've never had discipline problems, now why are you doing this. He goes, he goes, "because I can, and they can't be here, after today, they're getting this letter," and he hung up on me.... And so, sure enough my kids, and I picked them, my babies were all crying, they said the principal says we can't come back, and so that, that was the lowest of the lowest. - That he would use his power, and use it on the kids like that. You know? To me it's like, this is between us, and he didn't have to go there, and so I wrote letters to every school board member, to the superintendent. I went to the main office. Nobody was returning calls, nobody would see me. I said, so I want to make a deal with you. You let my kids come back, when school starts again, next, next week [after spring break, for the last month of school], and I promise you my baby won't come back next week [she means the following year for her youngest who was about to begin school]. And he said okay. - - And that, that's how I was able to get them back in school. And, that my baby would not come back. So he got what he wanted. He wanted me out of there.

As we have seen previously, Marina grew as a leader and as a human being, and was able to separate this incident from her public persona in order to work with the principal and allow him to secure funding for his school. Years later, during a meeting at another school Marina was working to create a site-based management team, her former principal gave her a public acknowledgement as someone who would be instrumental in creating change. In her effort to free herself as the oppressed, she was also able to somewhat free the oppressor and the structures in which he operated. She shares how:

I think he understood then, that I had as much power as he does. - And ah, when he would see me, - there was respect, you know.

It would be understandable if Marina had quit her association with AI and gone back to the world she knew, but she did not. She is able to reflect on the experience to learn from it and grow. She is not averse to trying again in a new domain:

To me I just feel like, life is risk, risk taking is one of the words that we learn at Austin Interfaith, being a leader.

New Civic Identity

Marina is conscious of the changes she has undergone. She has moved from using solitary language such as, “When some, when many times I thought well, gosh if I say I don’t know, I’m going to feel stupid, and, and, you know, and, - so I would just, - try to avoid the question and not say nothing,” to:

But now, how this [has] helped me change is that, I can, I can really think about it and talk to other people about it and see if it makes sense, and that, - and see who else needs to be part of that, that is, it shouldn’t be just, - me and him and her that, you know, if it’s going to affect a certain community, let’s go talk to all of them.

She has moved from thinking herself as an impotent individual to a powerful member of a group of individuals that can affect change. She understands the necessity of dialogue to create understanding and to find common purpose. She also understands the necessity for relationships and trust as precursors to mobilizing for change:

So I guess it’s building a network of people, building relationships with other people, that can begin seeing you as somebody who, who really cares about the school, they knew I cared about the students, they knew I cared about the parents.

She is conscious of her public persona, so much so that her civic self is defined not by who she is as an individual, but by who she is as part of the larger organization.

She explains how

When we go meet with council members, for the officials to see me as— they would have never really known me as Marina Lopez. They know me as Marina Lopez of Austin Interfaith. And, so they see me as, as an organization not as an individual. And I see that, that’s how I’m recognized.

Part of her new civic identity is her self-image as a mentor and generator of civic capacity. The iron rule and the need to create relationships govern her conscience and actions. A vignette she shares aptly describes her driving passion for social justice and her ingrained behavior to not step in and solve problems herself, but instead to make sure others do for themselves.

That they have, that they deserve a seat at the table... There's this custodian that I met through job training and she says, "You know Ms. Lopez, could you still help us with out supervisor, because you know he's been treating us really bad." And I said, you know, how many of your custodians are willing to do something about that? That, that they don't see themselves as being able to make change, because they don't understand that it has to be, a group of them, to fight for something together. They're seeing themselves as just me, it's only affecting me. And they aren't willing to take the risk, to talk to the others, because then they're afraid that they're going to go and tell somebody that's going to get mad at them, and they're going to lose their job. And then there's, the trust is not there. So there, there're things happening that people feel, they've got to deal with it. They have no power. They have no, - there's nothing they can do to change it.

Marina is aware that she used to be like the custodians she is describing. She knows that in the past, she had internalized the oppression and acquiesced. She is acutely aware of how AI has affected her and transformed her, how by making her story public and by surfacing her anger she can ask for a seat at the table:

And so, I don't think I would have ever been able to do any of that had I not learned, about, - - about the skills of organizing, you know, being, what is it mean to be a leader. How to, - what is it? You know, how to use your anger in a way that's not, - just, just getting angry at them, and, but really having that - - conversation with them? And sitting at the table with them and saying, - why are you doing this?

Although Marina has worked on a variety of issues facing the community, getting a seat at the table to improve the educational system for people of her community is her

main issue. Showing a very mature characteristic of a leader—imagination—she explains how societal norms about education are not as she feels they should be:

You know we talk about the world as-it-is and the world as-it-should-be. Well the world, as it is, is, education is not really at the center, at the, at the, a priority here. It's entertainment [that's at the top]. And, and the world as it should be, to me, is that, we should have our kids, education at the top. Everybody should know, and work, and be challenged to support education. And be part of making something really happen.

This is not an idealists dream. Because of the work she has been a part of, she has examples of schools that are closer to the world as-it-should-be. She shares how, “I mean, you go into a school that's an Alliance school, and you go to a school that's not an Alliance school, and you can feel the difference.”

Speaking of the public life she lives, she says, “they've seen that when I make a commitment, that I follow through.” But as we have seen, this has taken a toll on her private life. Working for the greater good for Marina is motivation for action: “So that's, that's when my, my passion comes.” Her passion is a constant and embedded aspect of her identity that intersects with her self-image as a leader to make her act in new and profound ways. She is a leader. Laughing, she shares a story of running into a teacher of hers:

“Oh, it's so good to see one of my students become a community activist.” And I was like, “A what? Nooo, that's not me. I'm a leader with Austin Interfaith.

She now can exclaim how “I no longer see it as me learning from a teacher, but even a teacher learns from me.”

ALICIA AGUILAR

“Believe it or not, I’m from East Austin. I am nothing like I used to be 11 years ago.” With these words, I launched into an amazing journey of discovery about one person’s transformation into a citizen activist. There is no clear and defining moment in Alicia’s story when she went from being apolitical to political. Some norms, values, and beliefs that defined her as a person have remained constant throughout her life, while others have been modified, or at times replaced. She has learned from a variety of life experiences. But there are also class, gender, and racial barriers that conspired to work against her—the systemic forces that keep people from accumulating power and from gaining a voice. The political era of her life can be characterized by how she behaves as an activist. It can also be described by looking at how her norms and values have changed, and how she understands the concepts of democracy, power and politics.

Alicia’s portrait will be represented by interweaving her life story with five general themes: her socio/historic context, her early (pre-political) identity, her transformation, and her mature civic (political) identity, and her ongoing contributions to the building of civic capacity.

Sociohistorical Context

Alicia was born in 1951 to second generation Mexican-Americans in San Antonio, Texas. At the age of 4, her parents divorced and she moved with her mother and younger sister to East Austin (the poorer side of town). She saw her father one time, when she was 15, but does not know if he is alive or dead now. When she was 12, Alicia fell out of a tree and shattered her hip, necessitating serious surgery six or seven times

throughout her life and the use of crutches or a cane to get around. Her mother and stepfather were unable to care for her at home, so Alicia spent a year recuperating in a nursing home (for the elderly). Although she kept up with her homework throughout the year, the school was unwilling to promote her so she repeated the sixth grade. Two years later, her stepfather was hospitalized in the VA hospital for his first heart attack. Her mother was unable to take care of the three children so “they put us in a foster home for the summer. My sister and I stayed with a family in South Austin and my brother got to stay with somebody else. And I didn’t like it.”

In ninth grade, Alicia began to notice that her mother “started being really different,” and that her stepfather was drinking a lot more. The growing family moved to the “projects on 2nd street.” At the end of her sophomore year, her 6 year old brother was crushed to death by a car in the parking lot. Her stepfather had been recently readmitted to the hospital and was unable to attend the funeral. Her mother had a nervous breakdown, and Alicia learned from a social worker who came to talk to her that her mother had been admitted to the state hospital. The social worker explained that, “by law,” Alicia was too young to take care of herself and her siblings. She, one of her sisters, and her brother were sent to a foster home outside of Austin. Her baby sister, whom she never saw again, was placed with a different family. Unlike her first foster family, this family treated her with care. However, because Alicia could not walk well, it became clear that she would have problems getting to the bus stop for school. Three days before school started, Alicia and her siblings were moved to another home in Austin. That December, her mother was released from the state hospital and Alicia and her siblings

had the option to return to her or to stay with their foster family. She and her brother decided to stay while her sister returned to live with their mother. She calls her foster parents Aunt and Uncle, and considers them and their children family. Later that year, her stepfather died.

Alicia attended one semester of college, but for economic reasons had to drop out and work. She started washing pots and pans in the kitchen at the state school for the mentally disabled. At 20, she became pregnant and married her boyfriend of two years.

Many of Alicia's experiences with institutions are negative, beginning with her stay in the nursing home and her interactions with social workers and the foster care system. She also experienced depoliticizing events in school. For example, on several occasions she was hit by teachers in school for speaking Spanish. She noticed that only white students were placed in honors classes and, when she initially asked to be allowed to take these classes, was encouraged by the counselor to stay in the "regular" courses. Her children were either bused to other majority white schools, or attended schools on the East side that had white students bused in. Like her mother, Alicia's daughter was excluded from honors classes. Language still remained an issue—all communications were in English although a majority of the parents were native Spanish speakers. Her son, attending a majority white middle school across town, was placed in an alternative school because of discipline problems. Describing her early experiences as a parent at her daughter's school, she explains how:

It was during busing so the majority of the women that took up a main roll at the school... like to make sure that the functions were going and the

carnivals and all this kind of stuff... they were all Anglo. You didn't see any Spanish people.

Cultural norms such as docility, passivity, irrationality, and dependence were pressed upon Alicia throughout her life. Her mother and one set of foster parents expected her to cook, clean the house, and take care of her siblings. Her father-in-law flew into a rage when Alicia suggested that her husband change their baby's diaper. In consolation, her mother-in-law stated that, "you're just gonna have to live with that because that is the way he is." Alicia describes her husband's attitudes towards women:

Because he is Mexicano and he was brought up with a very strict father, he comes from a family of 16, and men are machos and your wife is supposed to do what what they tell you to do and they are not supposed to work, so he criticized me a lot for working. He expected me to be at the house to attend to the kids and everything like that.

Clearly, Alicia fits the profile of a citizen who is not expected to participate politically.

Pre-politically Active Civic Identity

When Alicia describes how she used to be, she exhibits low self-acceptance, low self-esteem, and low ego strength. Even though she is generally self-deprecating, her early behavior provides many examples of inner strength and confidence.

Although Alicia described herself as a tomboy and shared a story of how a group of girls in eighth grade called themselves the pioneer women, mostly she felt that she "had to do the right things all the time," and to "Be quiet and follow the rules. And that's what I did for the most part." A key element of her personality seemed to be the importance of avoiding conflict: "And one of the right things to do was not to talk back,

not to speak out.” This subservient self-description lasted into adulthood and her early years as a parent: “I wasn’t the way I am now back then. I was a real passive person. I was always, at least this is what I was told, I always waited for people to tell me what to do.” Part of this identity came from the feeling that her brother and sisters depended on her, so she had to do the right things all of the time. She also explained that “[I] always wanted to be good because I never knew what my situation was going to be like later. Especially since I had already experienced going to a foster home.”

Her academic identity also exemplified her low self-esteem. Although she explained that she loved to learn, that her mom always encouraged her to attend school and to do her best, and that she had many fond memories of school, much of her language surrounding her education is also negative. She was attentive in class and took her homework responsibilities seriously, but she repeated on several occasions how she was always afraid to ask questions, that she “didn’t want to appear stupid.” She did not consider herself naturally bright, exclaiming that she “hate[d] people with a brain—they never took a book home. I studied!”

Alicia’s language is peppered with references to class, race, ethnicity, and gender and makes it clear that, to her, oppression is the normal human condition. Further elaborating on why she was reluctant to ask questions, she stated that “ [I] might be looked at as a dumb Mexican if [I] asked questions.” She described parent-teacher conferences in this way:

I sat there and I listened and I took it. I never questioned it because I felt like they were right, they knew more than me. I didn’t have a degree, so I didn’t question nothing and I assumed everything they were giving me

was correct.... Basically, my husband and I would sit there and just listen to them doing all the talking and signing whatever they said to sign.

With busing came exposure to people from a different class and ethnicity/race which further exacerbated her sense of oppression. She often used the term “white” and used language that expressed class issues, such as how people were dressed. She was proud of having lived her whole life on the East Side, but she also felt marginalized, and that “if you’re from the East Side, you are nobody.” She describes her interactions with PTA members from the West Side of town at her daughter’s schools as such:

So I mean, there was some really classy people going to [the elementary school] at that time. And these were all bright women, that know how to hold themselves, how to dress and stuff, how to run a meeting. And so, people like me, who didn’t do all those things very well, didn’t participate much, other than, what do you need me to bring? And I would bring it. We would have these elaborate carnivals and stuff like that because, if we had money back then, it was because those women were bringing it in.

The separation of East and West was very clear to Alicia. When talking about the other employees who worked in the kitchen with her at the state school, with whom she identified, she explained that, “I never looked at them in that respect. They were doing the same kind of work I was doing so that I thought we were all the same.” Although her language implied that she felt oppressed and excluded, she was also clear in that she did not want to become like the Westsiders. She was proud of who she was and her East side roots: “I guess I could see that as far as money wise, we weren’t going to be rich ever, but we were going to have enough to get by... and we always have.”

Alicia has a very strong side as well. She had an extremely strong work ethic expressed in a variety of ways including doing homework, taking care of her siblings and

later her own family, working a variety of jobs, and always pitching in. She learned to use only one crutch so that she would not be dependent on others carrying her school books. She challenged her husband's desire that she stay at home by first going to school and then working. After having her third child, she opted to stay at home, but could not sit around "doing this and that" and began to volunteer at the school. She also challenges the notion that she is disabled. When she first became exposed to children with disabilities at the state school, she felt that

that was the first time that I had ever been, in contact with anybody that was disabled. I didn't even picture myself as being disabled back then. Even though I had my problems with my leg still and all this kind of stuff, I never saw myself being disabled or labeled as disabled. I heard people saying that I was disabled, but I never considered myself disabled. Not even my friends considered me disabled.

Her early political forays indicate that she was not motivated by community concerns. She expressed her feelings after a community meeting she had attended as: "that's all that we were talking about and it wasn't really an area of interest for me. It didn't matter to me because I didn't live near the airport, so I didn't feel like I needed to voice my opinion on it." Although later in life she became very conscious of language issues, she felt little responsibility to the rest of the community regarding parent notices at her daughter's school: "I wasn't sensitive to that either so it didn't make any difference just because I could read the information in English and that's all that mattered."

Overall, Alicia's early civic identity reflected her sense of exclusion. Her PTA experiences left her with the feeling that "I was never in on those kinds of conversations where I could sit at the table and say, well look, let's do this this way... these are my

ideas. Never! That happened later, way later.” As Alicia says, “I didn’t question anybody, I didn’t challenge anybody because I didn’t know how to do it.”

To her, the barrier was physical, and she felt like “the person looking through the glass window wanting to be over there and then I couldn’t get there, because I didn’t know how.”

Transformation

There are several key events in Alicia’s life that caused her to “get out of my comfortable little box.” The changes she experienced happened gradually and incrementally, with no clear disorienting dilemma.

Her first political act was to challenge the system in school that she felt was treating her unfairly:

The Mexicano friends that I had, always considered that I was smart, but I never thought I was smart, I was not as smart as the white kids. Because they were always in honors classes, and I couldn’t, nobody ever told me I could be in honors classes. And nobody ever encouraged me to be in honors classes. And I remember going to the counselor and the counselor telling me, just take the regular courses... and that was the first time that I had ever, kind of uh, contradicted a counselor, because she was putting me in Related math, which was just the fundamental math class, and I didn’t want to be in related math. I told her I wanted to take algebra. And she goes, “it’s going to be too hard for you. Take this. It’ll be better for you, you’ll be able to pass your classes.” But I said, I want to go to college. And she goes, “but you don’t need to take that, you need to do this.” And, and I remember crying, literally crying, and I said, no, I want to take algebra. And... I remember going to [the principal] and telling him that the counselor said that I could not take algebra. And, it took awhile, but eventually I got to be in Mr. “Clarks’s” algebra class, and I remember Mr. Clark, who’s real funny. But, I remember struggling. I remember making Bs and Cs, but I finished the class and I passed it. So I was real proud of myself.

In this vignette, Alice is motivated by the belief that she is capable of taking honors classes, but that she has been excluded because of her ethnicity. She had to make three very big decisions, especially for a ninth grader. First, she broke from her peers and chose to enter a world where she would be different and have to compete with people she considers better and smarter than she felt herself to be. Second, she had to challenge the school's placement system, low expectations, and an adult to gain admittance. Alicia showed remarkable strength in challenging the counselor and attempting to negotiate with her. She also experienced her first defeat. Given the obstacles she had to overcome in order to be sitting in front of the counselor at that moment, it would have been easy for her to give up. But Alicia made a third decision and began to show traits that she would find useful later on. She tried again and in a different way. She displayed an understanding of negotiating skills. She understood how to locate and use centers of power. Her actions also imply that she understood that not everyone can win (i.e. the counselor). Finally, the experience was a positive one for Alicia, providing her with feedback on how to successfully negotiate change and bolstering her sense of both internal and external efficacy.

Alicia's decision to not return to live with her mother was a difficult one and an example of her continuing growth in understanding that she had some control over her life. She also displayed this sense of control by attending college and entering the work force, which challenging her husband's beliefs. The eight years Alicia spent working at the state school were formative years for Alicia's civic identity. Alicia developed a good relationship with her supervisor in the kitchen at the state school. After

a few months, he told her, “You’re too smart to work in the kitchen.... This kind of work is only for people that haven’t finished school and can’t read,” and helped her transfer to the academic department. In her words, “This was an entirely different world.” She worked with two people she found to be amazing. They were patient teachers and helped Alicia learn the skills necessary to work with children with severe mental disabilities. She began taking on more responsibilities including designing and teaching from her own lesson plans. Eventually, she learned sign language and had the opportunity to teach this skill to other staff members. This experience was so rewarding that it helped Alicia begin to change some of the perceptions she had about herself: “I felt really good being there. I’m learning a lot, I must be a smart person.”

The next key event in Alicia’s transformation did not happen until her son was in junior high school. When informed that he had been missing a fair amount of school, Alicia (who at the time was recovering from another hip surgery) made the effort to drive her son to school each day. Although she and her husband had provided the school with a variety of contact numbers, they did not find out immediately that their son was still leaving school, even after his mother had dropped him off. “Finally, I got sick and tired. That’s what triggered me getting my foot in the door at school because I had just had it. I felt that I was doing my part. I was getting my kid there. They weren’t holding their end.” Alicia approached the principal, who agreed to let her sit in on all of her son’s classes. At first, the teachers were reluctant, but by the end of the year, Alicia was helping teachers work with individual students, handling irate parents, and even substituting for teachers at times. Her son’s delinquency continued the following year. The high school principal was

more resistant, but she kept calling and “he finally broke down.” Although not officially a job, the 2 years Alicia “worked” at the school continued her political education and her knowledge about how schools work. “I didn’t actually realize what I was doing then. That is how I started getting my foot into the school and learning how it operate[s].” She began to understand how difficult the teacher’s job was and the school and district pressure they operated under. She also learned more about her rights as a parent: “But that’s when I started learning more about, on my own, about what was available for parents and stuff. And started asking more questions.”

While her son was in eighth grade, Alicia had the experience of being snubbed by the all-white PTA and again used a variety of political resources at her disposal to gain entry:

The PTA president called me at home and said, “I’m sorry Mrs. Vasquez but all the positions have been filled, all the committee chairs have been filled,” you know, and I was thinking, wait a minute, this is PTA and there is no room for me in PTA. So that got me mad, so I ended up going to the principal since she had worked with me so closely you know, getting me into school and stuff. I went to the principal... and I told her I would really like to be on the PTA, I’ve never been on the PTA, but they tell me that there is no room for me. And she goes, “What?” She goes, “technically, you know, the principal can’t interfere with PTA business but this is my business when a parent organization tells a parent that there is no room for her something is wrong.” She called, in front of me, she called the PTA president and she didn’t raise her voice too loudly but she did raise her voice and later on that evening when I got home I got a phone call... And I went to the first meeting and really felt out of place. Sat in the back. Nobody came to sit next to me saying, “Hey you know, its good to have you on board,” or “this is the way we do things.” I sat back there by myself and just kind of, I said well that’s ok. I’ll sit here and listen to what they have to say. It took a while. I didn’t share any thoughts or anything... It went like that for a while and I let it ride, I didn’t question anybody, I didn’t challenge anybody because I didn’t know how to do it. I didn’t have one-on-one’s with anybody, I just tried to keep my ears and eyes open for

who, for whose name was what and I would write it down and so the next time if I had any questions or something, if the person looked friendly enough I would say, “hey you know, Pat, can you tell me again what was that?”... It was like that for most of the year. Eventually I did get on a committee. It was the bulletin board committee. And even then the person that did the bulletin boards had always been doing the bulletin boards. She had everything ready. So the only thing that I did was just, she would tell me when to be there to help her pin it up on the board. But she didn’t ask me for my opinions, my ideas, or anything. She already had it the way she was going to have it up there, with no input from me.

Reminiscent of her own childhood, Alicia challenged the middle school to allow her eldest daughter to take honors classes. Although her daughter was a good student and had good grades, the principal asked Alicia to find parents with similar situations and get them to sign waivers: “I talked to the parents about it and told them why it was important for their kid... we should expect more of our kids.” She succeeded in signing up only one other student who eventually dropped out and “my daughter eventually wanted to drop out because she was the only Mexicano in all those honor classes at [the middle school].”

All of these experiences helped Alicia grow in her civic identity and political expertise. Most of them represented individual efforts for personal gain. However, her experience trying to convince Latino parents to request that their children be placed into advanced classes was an early indicator of Alicia’s growing sense of community. It was perhaps this quality that prompted the principal and several teachers at her younger daughter’s school to recommend her to an organizer from Austin Interfaith. Her first experience with the organizer was a long conversation about each other’s lives. Alicia was uncomfortable at first and it took her some time to relax and understand that there were no right or wrong answers, that it was a conversation to learn about each other and

what they considered important in their lives. At their next meeting, the organizer told her that there were other parents who felt as she did and asked her if she would like to speak with these parents. Alicia agreed and attended her first house meeting.

Alicia explained how “we would sit and talk about it and say, ‘Well what have you been hearing about, you know, the kids? What do you think we need to have here for the kids?’” This group of parents identified health concerns as a major issue affecting their children and their potential for success in school. Organizing around this concern, Austin Interfaith began to mobilize the community and to groom individuals to play key roles in the effort. Alicia relates a conversation with the organizer:

“You know what? You’re interested in school and you also mentioned that you were interested in health. Would you be interested... we’re going to have a rally at school and we want you, the people that live here in the neighborhood to be the talkers. You know, it doesn’t make any sense for me to get up there and say anything because I don’t live here, but you do. Would you mind, saying a couple of words? You know, talking.” Well of course not knowing what I was getting myself into, I said sure.

The organizer worked with the group to help them to organize their thoughts and work on their speeches. Alicia was very conscious of the type of people who would be listening and expressed concern to one of the organizers:

And he says, “You know, it’s you the person that we want to see in here, not your clothes. You know you’re always going to find people that are going to have something a little bit better than you. But, that’s not what’s important.” And I said, “Well, you know, I just want you to know that I don’t have suits like they do and all those dressy shoes and all this kind of stuff.” And he goes, “Don’t worry about that.” And so it wasn’t until I heard him actually say that that it made me feel less weird.

Alicia remembers that first speech vividly, and was congratulated by her friends. But she was unprepared for what happened next:

I hadn't been prepared for that. This was my first big meeting and stuff and I was really proud of the fact that I made it through the darn thing, and yet here we were at the end and they were evaluating me and critiquing me and of course I was taking it wrong... He's standing there telling me all this stuff. And I was thinking, I'm not going to do this again. That was the first time that anybody had ever critiqued me you know like that. And of course now I know not to take it personal.

This was the first of many presentations in front of the school board and the city council. Alicia is clearly proud of their success in getting the city to establish a health center at the elementary school:

This group of ladies and a couple of guys, I guess we were the driving force behind all of this and kind of created that kind of culture... [We] planted the seed. Uh, I think it was a good mix at that time. And then the ones that just felt that that was enough for them stepped back... I guess it just took off with me and it took off with "Maria" because we're still doing it.

Alicia has worked with Austin Interfaith in a variety of schools for over 10 years. She eventually became PTA president at the elementary school and has worked in a variety of capacities at other schools in East Austin. When she speaks in front of groups now, she is comfortable and confident. She has personal relationships with several state representatives and members of the school board. She remains cognizant of her transformation, understanding both the benefits of the direct political socialization she received from Austin Interfaith and indirect socialization she experienced throughout her life, such as how a speech class in high school gave her skills necessary to be successful later in life.

Alicia has an intuitive understanding of the relationship of human capital to social capital. When asked how people might best learn skills to be politically active, Alicia explained that:

Yeah, I had somebody help me, yeah. Being part of an organization. And I'm being biased because I have found one that... filled my needs that I needed at the time, and that was finding out who I was, what were my strengths, and then... providing the opportunities to put, to put that forth. And being supportive. If any organization is doing that, you know, and is strong about it and is providing the training and stuff like that. It's dependent on the person.

New Civic Identity

Alicia lives her political life with ease and confidence and is involved in myriad projects to fix these ordinary injustices. She is very conscious of the difference in her identity and understands how she has moved through the barrier she perceived as excluding her from participation:

The kind of person I used to be back then to now? I'm more assured of how I see things, because I've been in the middle of things, especially, education wise, that I feel very confident about speaking out more than I would have. I don't feel like I used to feel, back then. I think I described to you, it's like you're looking through a glass and you want to be on the other side. I don't feel that anymore.

Some of her us-and-them rhetoric has changed and she now has a more global view of problems that need addressing. Describing a meeting with a group of agency directors ("a lot of people in business suits"), she reflected on how:

You know sometimes, when you do things [and] people give you this look of who do you think you are? None of them gave me that look. You know, which made me feel even better. Because it made me feel like I was equal to them, you know, and we're all in the same boat. And we're all here trying to look for the same answers. Or better answers than what we have already.

Alicia understands how she exhibited learned helplessness as a child and young adult. When her daughter expressed how her friends “don’t like me now because they think I’m just acting too smart and stuff like that” because she was meeting “people not like me” in her honors classes, Alicia counseled her. She told her that, “instead of putting yourself down, back down, you should be looking for ways to encourage them to come up to where you’re at because they are very capable of doing the same thing that you’re doing.”

Alicia’s involvement strained her relationship with her husband. “It really irritated him for me to come home and share the stuff that I did at work, so a lot of it I kept to myself. And that was, depressing and that would make me sit down and think, Is this really worth it? But it gave me energy. I felt I was doing something for myself and I was doing a good thing so I kept at it. I didn’t care what he said.” Eventually, they divorced.

Alicia is very comfortable with conflict, is able to differentiate her private and public selves, and believes in the power of deliberation to resolve differences. At a community meeting that Alicia was a part of, she was publicly criticized by one group of community members while trying to reconcile cultural differences between two ethnic groups. A colleague called her the next day to inquire if she was all right. She explained that: “If you had asked me maybe ten years ago, you probably would find me crying, but I have been through enough of these that I’m a little more resilient than I usually would have been. ... I expected that from them. I’ll meet with them one by one eventually.”

Although Alicia feels “like [she] can be one of the players,” her musings on power, politics, and democracy show that she is still grappling with issues of self-image and societal factors such as class and race.

And many people, when they think of the word power they think of power and money. They go hand-in-hand. They don't even think about ordinary people. Well that's the same parallel there is to politics. You say politics and you immediately think of politics and money. And you don't even think of us down here, having to do anything with it because many of us feel we don't have... we don't have the background to deal with politics. Or in essence we do. We do politics all the time in our own homes. When we have to make decisions. That's all it is about. Making decisions. Making the best decisions for yourself, for your family. That's all it is. And then sitting at the table and bargaining. You know. Compromising. And finding common ground. To me that's what politics... basically is. Finding common ground and working together, being able to debate because you're never going to be my best friend maybe on some issues, but that's OK. Though we feel that this is a certain good thing to happen, and so, somewhere, we must be able to find common ground. And I think, basically that's what politics is all about, being able to debate, discuss, decide, compromise, and then move forward. Make a decision on it, you know.

Alicia does understand who has the power. She also seems to understand the power she has gained by becoming a part of the civic capacity that Austin Interfaith mobilizes, yet she is able to criticize what she perceives as a limited role of the organization:

But politics is still a big wig kind of thing. It really is about who has the money and... the most relationships with other people that have the money to make the decisions. Even though Austin Interfaith has been here a long time in Austin, over 10 years, what 15 years, 20 years, I think there should have been more of a shift down to the idea of how important it is... to be a part of the political system here in Austin, and there really isn't. Because I think we could have made... a bigger impact on a lot of the issues that Austin has addressed.... We've made [an] impact but I think we could have made a larger impact if we were... if we had a better

definition of what politics really is. Or not even use the word politics because it gives you, it gives a lot of people a bad taste... [We need to] start building the kind of relationships that take the politics out of the people with money and [give it] back to the people themselves, where it really should be.

When asked to reflect on democracy, Alicia explains how her sense of responsibility has changed and how she now feels that she has a role to play in education policy.

Right now... I can play a role in it. And I've proven that I can play a role in it. Ten years ago I didn't. I felt that my only... role in democracy was voting, every election. That was my role. No discussion with anybody, maybe with my husband at the time... and occasionally with friends at work. But that was it. So I thought,... that I was doing my duty, as far as playing a role in democracy. That's what it meant to me. Getting out there and voting on election day. Not really doing any of the work or anything like that. Just showing up at the polls.... It was similar to my... attitude, [about] school, with my kids, at the beginning. It's like, I'm not educated, so I'm not going to question you. And I'm doing my role by taking my kids to school and giving them to you and you teach them. Because you're the ones with the diploma. And now... I can do this. I can make a difference. I can change things. I can, you know, I do have opinions about things. And, I'm free to do it. And I'm free to choose what I want to do. So now the word means a lot more to me now, than before.

Finally, Alicia's initial individual motivation has transformed into a community perspective:

I feel a responsibility... not just to myself but to my family. But I feel a responsibility to the people of my neighborhood and just across the board in the city. If I'm doing OK, and I make sure your kid's doing OK or your family is doing OK, then we're going to continue moving forward. But if I'm not doing OK, or I'm doing OK and you're not OK, then what am I doing? What is my kind of work doing to help you?

Creating Civic Capacity

Alicia is reluctant to increase her participation level to that of seeking office. She has been approached to run for the school board, but she feels that:

it would take me away from people. I would, in a sense, have to get myself disconnected from people and not do the kind of work that I'm doing now because, [it] would put me in a different place I'd rather be down here... in the middle of everything.... And me going up there telling somebody else of what we need instead of me listening. Be at the other end. Do you know what I mean? I'd rather be in front of them telling them, you know what, your way of thinking is wrong. This is what we need. That's where I like to be coming from. Standing with people that are talking, talking that way.

However, she does feel that, "I need to do a little bit deeper work... To affect other people so they can be doing the job... that needs to be done. And not just, me." She has very strong opinions about how democracy should work and the relationship between the state and the citizens. Although she feels strongly about people working together, she is concerned,

What is my kind of work doing to help you? Am I just giving you a handout? People want to see change but they don't want to put the effort into it... It is work, you're waiting for someone to do the work for you, well you know what, I ain't doing it.

She works with people so that they "can... do things for [themselves]." In the same way that she is reluctant to have people become dependent on her, she feels that the government is negligent in the way it interacts with citizens.

It... makes me angry that the government's... out there, and yes, they do help you with services and things like that, but do they actually show you how to get off of those services? No they don't. Do they have anything in place to show you how to get off the services? No they don't.... Those are wonderful things, but it doesn't teach people how to be self-sustaining. So, it's hard, when you talk about democracy, there're two sides. The side that I'm learning and I've learned, and the other side, where the government... gives you all this stuff so it clouds the word democracy, so you don't become a player, you're not a player in it.

Alicia is working hard to get people to focus on the right problems and to look for appropriate solutions. She feels that many members of her community do not understand the core issues and do not appreciate how important education can be in creating change.

But not only that, but get people in that dag-gum neighborhood, instead of getting mad because my kid cussed your kid out, get mad because my kid's not in schools and I demand that he be in school. What's more important to you, that somebody cussed your kid up, or that your kid dropped out and is not receiving an education? What should really be pissing you off? That should be pissing you off. Why are you letting a kid get out of school, at 15, 16? And I tell the kids themselves, you should be pounding the dag-gum doors saying, I want my education, because I want to make sure that, [she is pounding the desk with each point] I know how to read, I know how to write. And so, if anything... in my life goes wrong, I'll be able to work it out. I'll be able to handle it. But if you don't have those skills, who's going to be able to work it out? You're going to be dependent on somebody else working it out for you. Making your decisions for you. Because you're letting them do that.

As part of her duties as a parent liaison at an Eastside elementary school, Alicia is currently working on a project to build a stronger community association. She and a colleague have begun pot-luck dinners where

the theme will be building a community. What does a successful school look like? What does a successful community look like? And then we'll break it down. We'll break it down by saying, - What is the role of the parent in a successful school community? What is the role of teacher in a successful school community?

Alicia understands the challenges she faces. She knows that most of the people she works with are poor, that they work hard and have little time. But she is also learning that there are cultural differences that she must take into account.

What I have found with this community is the African American people are a very proud people. They like to be the initiators of the ideas; they like the recognition. The Hispanic people want to be involved and they are asking for help whereas the African people are not asking for help they're

telling you what they want and what they are going to do. Whereas the Hispanic people I found have been coming to us saying, “We’re in need of this and this and this,” they are kind of passive. There’s a couple of them that are shining through, but for the most part, they are very passive and they have needs and that’s what they are expressing. So what I’m looking at it is they have needs how can I turn those needs around to where they are not relying on somebody else but on themselves.

Alicia’s story is sometimes tragic, sometimes unbelievable, but through it all, her indomitable will and spirit for living shine through. That Alicia ended up where she is today is nothing short of a miracle. Given the circumstances of her life, she might have ended up like millions of others, marginalized and fighting for day-to-day survival. But, for a variety of reasons, and with some help, she was able to not only move out of the realm of poverty that she had grown up in, but to become one of the few true civic citizens.

AURORA MÉNDEZ

Conforme uno se, conforme me metí, me metí en ese programa [Austin Interfaith], - - Se va, va uno solo como el agua, que va, que ya está el camino y sea que ya, como si ya estuviera el camino hecho ya nomás corre, al pasito, no recio sino al pasito, y ahí va como el agua uno, en el arroyo, al pasito. Va aprendiendo, poco a poco. Y, a ver hasta donde. Hasta donde llegue. Ir aprendiendo. [*And when I began the program [Austin Interfaith]—One moves along like water; the way is already set, the way is set and the water just flows, slowly, not quickly but slowly, and one moves along like the water, in the stream, slowly. One learns slowly, bit by bit. And who knows to where, to where it will arrive. To learn while moving*].

Aurora provides a rich metaphor to describe her path to transformation. She has come incredibly far from her childhood on a ranch in Mexico, and her learning keeps her moving inexorably forward. Although her life is unimaginably different now than her experiences growing up and she is active in community affairs and educational issues,

she has not transformed into a true leader. She is becoming more involved with Austin Interfaith, and she continues to grow as a civically active citizen, but she has not reached the point where her own imagination motivates her to act and her beliefs are integrated into a new frame of reference. The work she does is motivated by the rage she feels for having being denied an education, and wanting more for her own children and her community. When asked why she does the work she does while other parents she knows do not, she starts out with a joke, (Aurora laughs often) but quickly turns serious:

Pues, será porque, yo los quiero más. Será porque y los quiero más. O sea, yo no quiero que que fracasen, porque yo no tuve, no tuve, quise estudiar, como le digo, quise estudiar no tuve la oportunidad. Que yo hubiera querido que mi abuelita me hubiera dejado estudiar, pero, lamentablemente pues no, no me dejó, y, eso era lo que a mi me, me, el coraje que yo tenía, verdad, para, por, por eso sacar a mis hijos adelante, y que ellos estudien, - y que, e, que hagan una carrera, no para mi, sino para ellos mismos. [*It must be because I love my children more. Because I love my children more. That is, I don't want them to fail, because I never had, never had, I wanted to study, like I told you, I wanted to study but I did not have the opportunity. I would have liked that my grandmother would have allowed me to study, but, unfortunately, well no, she didn't let me, and that was what gave me the rage that I had, right, to, to make sure that my children succeed, and that they study, and that, they make a career, not for me, but for themselves*].

This rage keeps her involved, and this involvement allows her to continue learning, but Aurora has not yet had a learning experience or any type of dénouement to push her into civic self-authorship.

Sociohistorical Context

“Bueno pues, mi nombre es Aurora Méndez, y yo me crié en un pueblito, cerca de Nuevo León, es “López Vega” en Nuevo León. [*My name is Aurora Méndez, and I was born in a little town near Nuevo León, it's “Lopez Vega” in Nuevo León [Mexico]*].”

This strong beginning to her life story portrays Aurora as she is in person. She is confident, direct, and matter-of-fact in the way she tells her story.

[Nací] en un ranchito. Con carestías y con pobreza nos criaron, verdad, y este, fuimos 12 de familia, - seis hombres y seis mujeres. Y nuestra niñez pues fue muy, muy pobre, se dice en el sentido verdad, de, de que no tuvimos estudio todos mis hermanos. No, no estudiamos hasta sexto grado si no hasta, yo estudié hasta tercer grado, de la primaria, y - - pues al transcurso del tiempo va uno creciendo verdad, y me casé, tuve dos hijos. *[I was born on a small ranch. I was raised with scarcity and with poverty right, and uh, we were 12 children—six men and six women. And our childhood was very, very poor, one would say in the true sense of the word right, that, that we didn't have an education. We didn't study until the sixth grade [the mandatory schooling in Mexico] but only until, I studied until the third grade, of primary, and, well, through time one grows up naturally, and I got married, I had two kids].*

Naturally, there is much more to Aurora's story. Her mother had children "muy seguiditos [*one after the other*]," and was unable to care for all of them. Aurora explains how when she was six months old, "me quedé con mi abuelita, no me crié con mis padres porque mis padres pues tenían muchos hijos, y como cada año, cada año los estaban teniendo, y mi abuelita, este, decidió, pues, agarrarme a criarme. *[I stayed with my grandmother, I didn't grow up with my parents because my parents had a lot of children, like every year, every year they were having a child, and my grandmother, uh, decided to take me and raise me].*" One brother went to live at an aunt's house but the family still spent most of their time together during the day. Her father worked raising corn and a type of fiber used to make "mecate [*rope*]" which they sold for food. Her mother took care of the family and also worked in the field along with the children:

Como niños trabajábamos, a mi me, a mi me traían sembrando, eh, ¿sí sabe que es sembrar verdad, sembrar el maíz? Y, en tiempo de la escuela, pues, todos mis otros primos estudiaron, ellos salieron de, de la escuela, y

no, yo no, - no pues ahí que vaya Aurora a sembrar. Y cada año, pues, eran un mes de pura siembra, y me mandaban a mi a sembrar. [*As children we worked, they took me to plant; you know what planting is right? Planting corn? And, during school, while my cousins studied, they all finished their schooling, but I didn't, no, well there goes Aurora to plant. And every year, there was one month of pure planting, and they sent me to plant*].

Aurora feels that she was treated differently than the other children growing up.

She had to work in the field while others went to school, and she took the brunt of the housework:

Nunca entendí yo porque. Nunca entendí porque, porque siempre me ponen a mi a hasta lavar trastes. Le tocaba a mi prima, y no no no, que lo haga Aurora, mamá, ponla, ponla a que lo haga [en otra voz]. Y, ahí voy yo, ha hacerlo. Los frijoles...que haz un arroz, que haz una sopa. Y oh, pero yo, um, no me miraba mal verdad. Pues, cuando esta uno chico obedece, y nunca, nunca este, era retobona, nunca era, mal criada así no que siempre siempre obedecía yo todo. Y decía pues, “pues tiene que ser a uno así obediente verdad” decía yo porque así me, me inculcaron. Mi abuelita y, y andar detrás de ellos. [*I never understood why. I never understood why, why they always had me do the dishes. It was my cousin's turn, and no, no, let Aurora do it, mom, make her do it [changing her voice for effect]. And there I go to do it. The beans... make some rice, make a soup. But I, um, did not think badly about myself you know. Well, when one is little, you obey, and never, never um, did I speak back [act spoiled], never was I poorly behaved so I always behaved and everything. I would say well, “one has to be obedient right” I would say because that's the way they taught me to be. My grandmother, and to, walk behind them*].

Aurora's aunts and uncles lived in a variety of states, and her grandmother visited them often. Aurora was forced to go with her, “‘que vamonos para Monterrey, para Matamoros.’ No, pues hicimos ocho meses a Matamoros. Y ya de allí, ‘que vamonos para Zaragoza...’ [*let's go to Monterrey, to Matamoros.*’ *We'd spend eight months in Matamoros. And then from there, let's go to Zaragoza...*’].”

Traveling with her grandmother severely affected Aurora's education. Each time she started in a new school, she would leave without finishing out the year. In each new town or city, she would show up at the local school and attempt to continue her schooling. She graduated from the third grade at 14:

Sí, sí, nunca acababa. Y me decían, “¿en que grado ibas allá?” “Pues en el segundo.” “Pues vamos en el segundo,” y me ponían en segundo.... Ya tenía como 14 años cuando me gradué de tercer grado, reprobé, reprobaba, estuve como, como 2 años en primero, como 3 años en, en segundo, [se ríe] y como 3 años en tercero. [*Yes, yes, I never finished. They would ask me, “What grade were you in over there?” “Well, in second.” “Well, let’s put you in second grade,” and they’d put me in second grade.... I was like 14 years old when I graduated from third grade, I failed, failed, I’d be like, like 2 years in first, like 3 years in, in second [she laughs] and like 3 years in third*].

At 14, Aurora asked her grandmother if she could attend night classes to try to finish her secondary education and was told that she was too old to study and in the end was not allowed to return to school. She was persistent in trying to learn because “yo quería estudiar. Porque yo quería ser, yo quería estudiar para aeromoza, verdad, ¿si sabe lo que es aeromoza? [*I wanted to study. Because I wanted to be, I wanted to study to become a flight attendant, you know what a flight attendant is right?*].”

On a return trip to the ranch when Aurora was 15, she started dating her first husband.

A veces uno de madre es más alcahueta que los abuelos. No, me dio una santa tunda mi abuelita, porque, nomás porque me había prestado el novio el reloj. Y me dio una santa tunda que me quebró las quijadas, me dio como no hombre, un montón de cachetadas en la cara, nomás en un lado. Y, y al fin, pues me case siempre con ese muchacho, con el aquel muchacho me case. Con el, primer novio que tuve. Yo dije, pos quizás, tanto que sufro, pues quizá me voy a casar no sabe, si ya no sufro tanto que me manden para acá y que me digan que lo que no tengo que hacer, y

lo que tengo que hacer. Yo me voy a casarme. A ver que. Quizá me va mejor. *[Sometimes acting like a mother is more [?] than the grandparents. Boy, she gave me such a beating because, just because my boyfriend had lent me his watch. And she gave me a beating that broke my jaw; she gave me, man, a bunch of slaps on the face, only on one side. And in the end, well, I got married that guy; I got married to that guy. With the first boyfriend I had. And I thought, well maybe, since I suffer so much, maybe if I get married, I won't suffer so much like they order me around here and tell me what I can't do and what I can do. I'm going to get married].*

The wish of living a better and more autonomous life did not come true. Aurora entered a situation in which she was told what to do, forced to work hard inside and outside of the home, and mentally and physically abused.

Y me fue tan mal [riendo], me fue tan mal, que tuve dos hijos pero este, ese muchacho era, - tan, - - pues era huevón como le decíamos, era haragán, huevón. Yo tenía que, como yo primer me enseñaron a trabajar, yo hacía este, - - allá en López Vega hay magueyes, verdad, hay magueyes, y de esos magueyes uno saca el mezcal. Y yo trabajaba hacía, cosía el maguey, hacía el mezcal, y yo me ponía a vender. Y este hombre me quitaba el dinero, y no es que era tomador, ni era, que nomás le gustaba irse a la tienda, a estar todo el día allí. Yo me iba a la leña, a cortar leña, porque cocinábamos con leña, y a acarrear el agua por, como por un, una milla, acarrear agua. Botes así de esos grandotes, dos botes grandotes y y bien para el cenote, - - Ahí vengo con mis dos botes, llenar un [fregadero] de grande, para lavar, y de ahí este, cuando mi primer hijo pues. Según yo me estaba cuidando pero no, este hombre se enoja tanto que me llevó al hospital inmediatamente a que me quitaran el aparato porque el quería tener hijos, porque yo me había puesto un aparato para no tener hijos verdad. Eh, y no no no, el es, me obligó al doctor que me quitara el aparato porque el quería tener hijos. Y el sin trabajar y sin mantenernos, porque su mamá nos mantenía, y ahí vivíamos con la mamá de él. *[And it went so badly [laughing], it went too badly for me, that I had two children but, that guy, was, so, well, lazy is how we would say it, he was a lazy bum. I had to, since they taught me first how to work, I made, um, there in Lopez Vega there are magueyes [a type of cactus] right, there are magueyes, and from these magueyes you can take out mezcal [an alcoholic beverage], and would then sell it. And this man would take the money, and it's not that he was a drinker, he wasn't, he just liked to go to the store and hang out there all day. I would go cut wood, to cut wood because we cooked with wood, and carry water, for, like a mile, carry*

water. Pails like those really big ones, two big pails to the spring, - - there I come with my two big pails, fill up a big sink to wash in, and then, when my first child well. In my opinion, I was taking care of myself but no, this man got so angry that he took me to the hospital immediately so that they would take out the device to not have children, right. And, uh, no, no, no, he made the doctor take out the device because he wanted children. And him without work and without providing for us, because his mother maintained us, and we lived with his mother].

Aurora is 16 at this point in her life and living in abject poverty under a patriarchy that is maintained by both men and women (her grandmother), yet she continually attempts actions of defiance, agency, and authorship. Given her context, acts like attempting to remain in school, marrying against the wishes of her grandmother, and especially taking birth control provide evidence that Aurora had an innate sense of justice and humanness. These acts were taken for her own preservation and growth. Having children augmented her reasons for breaking the traditions with which she had grown up. Her marriage to her first husband continued the pattern of domination and subordination. In addition to gathering wood and carrying water, Aurora took care of the children and waited hand and foot on her husband, who she says never helped with parenting, “*Ni un vasito de agua----nunca. Not even a glass of water----never*].” Aurora began to question her situation.

Eso lo que me hizo pensar a mi de que me esperaba con él, - verdad yo no tenía futuro con él... Pues mero cuando se casa uno, no los conoce en realidad hasta cuando vive con ellos.... y pues me llene de coraje porque él era así, y ya siendo pues ya grande, porque el tenía 30 años cuando nos casamos y yo tenía dieciséis años. Si yo agarré más experiencia que él siendo viejo verdad. [That is what got me thinking about what was I waiting for with him, - in reality I had no future with him... Well when one gets married, you don't really know them until you live with them....and I was filled with rage because he was that way, and even though he was old,

because he was thirty years old when we got married and I was only 16. So I had more experience than he did even though he was old right].

Her husband came home late one night, woke up the children, expected her to tend to them as well as fix him dinner, and then reacted when she suggested he quiet the children.

Y nomás sentí el trancazo en la espalda, donde me dio una patada, y no, y ahí me tumbó, me tumbó y me agarró, como, como cuando agarra un perrito así a patadas, que lo agarra, me agarró, y y acaso me mataba ese hombre. Nomás por eso, y con eso tuve para dejarlo, - - y lo deje - - Um, dije yo, no conozco, no no es posible, este hombre me va a matar. [And I felt the slam on the back, where he gave me a kick, and no, he knocked me down, he knocked me down and he grabbed me, like, like when one grabs a dog and then he kicked me, he held me, and and that man almost killed me. And because of that I had to leave him --- and I left him. Um, I thought, I don't know, it's not possible, this man is going to kill me].

The townspeople told her husband that “como has tratado a esa mujer, no hombre, esa mujer vale por 20. [look how you've treated that woman, no man, that woman is worth 20].” When he begged her to return with him, she explained that she was going to make her life with her children, and stayed on her own without any financial support from him.

Taking an opportunity to work in Monterrey [a large city], she left her two children with her mother at the ranch and worked for one year as a seamstress. Each month she would return home with food for her children and her mother. The woman she worked for asked if she wanted to go to Los Angeles. “Y me dijo, ¿no te quieres venir conmigo para Los Ángeles? Y le dije, ‘¿y eso dónde es?’ y dice, ‘pues es ahí, es del otro lado, donde se ganan los verdes.’ [And she said, ‘don't you want to come to Los Angeles with me?’ And I said, ‘where's that?’ and she says, ‘well, it's there, it's on the other side,

where you make the greens’].” Leaving her children behind, Aurora braves the crossing through the city of Tecate in the state of Baja California:

Pasamos en un camionzote grande. En un, una de dieciocho ruedas. Nos metieron a mero adentro, así como bulto de pajas, y nos metieron ahí, había cuevas, pero veníamos como 15 pero veníamos apachurrados ahí. Y por, caminamos como 2 días, desde Tecate hasta Los Ángeles. No se cuantas horas son, como, se me hicieron eternas a mí. [We came in a big truck. In one, one of 18 wheels. They stuck us way inside, like a bale of hay, and they stuck us there, in these spaces, like 15 of us came crammed together in there. And we were on the road like 2 days, from Tecate to Los Angeles. I don’t know how many hours it is, like, they were eternal to me].

Once in East L.A., Aurora invented a Social Security number and arranged for a “seguro chueco [*false working papers*]” through her boss. She began working and enrolled in classes to learn English on Saturdays. Within 6 months, she met a man who lived in the same apartment complex. Her move across the border was a physical and a symbolic move for Aurora. She explains how “*todos los que vienen de allá solteros. [All who come from over there are single]*.” Establishing herself as single, they began a conversation:

Y empezamos ahí a platicar, y nos caímos bien, y desde entonces, como a los tres meses nos, juntamos. - - No lo pude sacar del apartamento [riendo]. ¡No lo pude sacar hasta la fecha! Hasta la fecha esta aquí. [And we started to talk, and we got along, and since then, and like 3 months later, we got together.—I couldn’t get him out of the apartment [laughing]. I haven’t been able to get him out to date! To date he is still here].

A year after arriving in the U.S., Aurora sent for her two children, by now one four and one five years old. A few years later, Aurora began experiencing problems with her husband going out drinking and coming home late. “Y ya se empezó a cortar la comunicación entre nosotros, y la intimidad, y toda la cosa. Llevamos así uno, como dos

años le aguanté. Pero no, este ya no. Ya no va a funcionar. [*And the communication between us began to be cut, and the intimacy, and everything. We lasted like that one, like two years I took it. But no, no more. This is not going to work*].” Deciding again to leave a relationship and not wishing for her children to witness the difficulties they were having, Aurora “a escondidas, como pude, iba pagando el boleto y así iba empacando poco a poquito para que no se diera cuenta. [*sneaking around, as I was able to, I paid a bit at a time for the tickets and I packed a bit at a time so he wouldn’t notice*].” When he went to work one Monday, she called a neighbor to take her and her now four children to the airport, and flew to Austin, Texas to live with her brother. Aurora’s narrative includes God as a central theme once she moves to Austin.

Dios tiene mucho, mucho que ver en nuestra vida porque a mi me inculcaron el, dicen religión pero yo digo cristiano verdad. De que, leer la Biblia y ir a la iglesia y todo eso. Y este, aquí llegué, llegué buscando una iglesia. No buscando cantinas ni buscando lugares de gente alegre verdad. Dije, yo me voy a dedicar a mis hijos, y, - - y sea lo que Dios quiera. [*God has a lot, a lot to do with our lives because they inculcated me in, they say religion but I say Christian right. That to read the bible and go to church and all of that. And uh, I arrived here; I arrived here looking for a church. Not looking for bars nor looking for places with happy people right. I thought, I am going to dedicate myself to my children and, - - and do what God wants*].”

Her husband tracked her down after a month and showed up at her door. She did not recognize him both because he cut his hair and because “el se vino a buscarnos porque Dios cambio su vida. Lo miré hasta diferente cuando lo ví. [*he came to find us because God changed his life. I saw him differently when I saw him*].” He begged her forgiveness and explained that he wanted to see his children grow:

Y me dice, es que yo quiero ver a mis hijos crecer, y darles estudio, y si tú no me quieres, nomás déjame criar a mis hijos, si ya después si ti te quieres ir, o si quiere que ya me vaya, pues yo me voy. Y ahorita tenemos 18 años. [*And he tells me, I want to see my children grow, and give them an education, and if you don't want me, just let me raise my children, and if later you want to leave, or if you want me to go, well, I'll go. And now we've been together 18 years*].

Her husband is a carpenter and has been a good provider, but Aurora feels he is absent, going from work to the house and from the house to the church. “Y él nunca se preocupó por ir a la junta ni ir a dejar a los niños a la escuela, él nunca lo ha hecho. O sea, yo he sido para ellos, padre y madre. [*And he never worries about going to a meeting or to take the children to school, he has never done it. That is, I have been both father and mother*].” However, he is supportive of her being active with Austin Interfaith and he slips her “unos cien dólares para que compres algo [*a hundred dollars to buy something*]” when she goes on out-of-town trips.

When she first arrived, she remembers how, “En la escuela, siempre había el PTA y juntas de padres, pero yo nunca iba. [*At the school, there was always PTA and parent meetings, but I never went*].” But taking care of her children (and sometimes caring for one or two other children) allowed her some time, and she eventually began attending parenting classes each Friday and it was at these meetings that “empezamos a hablar más.... de como ayudar a los niños, después de escuela, o cómo ayudarlos en las matemáticas, cuando está el TAAS, o hacer programas de salud, - - y así. [*we started to talk with each other more....like how to help our children, after school, or how to help them with mathematics, when it's TAAS time, or health programs*].”

Although Aurora lives seven hours by car from the ranch she grew up on, she is a world away. Listening to her share her story while sitting across from her at her kitchen table in Austin seems incongruous with her past. But Aurora does not seem to consider her journey an epic one. Her faith in God has allowed her to position her story as one directed by His will. She began where she began, and has ended up happy.

Y pues bien contentos. Dios nos a bendecido que nunca pensamos tener casa, carros, lancha, RV, y todo lo tenemos. Todo eso como Dios nos a bendecido fíjese. Y vivimos pues, no le digo que, somos ricos pero, si vivimos, - pues bien, en paz. *[And well, very happy. God has blessed us because we never thought we'd have a house, cars, a boat, an RV, and we have it all. It's all like God has blessed us you understand. And we live in, well, I won't say that we're rich but we do live, well, in peace].*

The cruelty she has experienced, the suffering she has endured, the pain she has felt—these all are just part of the path she moves along, like the flowing water she feels she is a part of. God put her on that path, but He has also ensured that she is where she is today. “Pero sólo Dios es el que conoce nuestras vidas y él nos va dirigiendo, con lo que Dios quiere, como Dios se vaya moviendo, nosotros ahí vamos. Y nosotros obedeciendo. *[But only God is the one that knows our lives and He is the one who is guiding us, with what God wants, the way God moves, that is the way we will go. And we obeying].*”

Aurora closes the narrative of her life in the same way she opened it—direct, matter-of-fact, purposeful: “Verdad, y este, pues esa es toda mi vida de, de aquí.*[You see, well, this is all of my life, from, from here].*”

The Immigrated Identity

Aurora has fierce opinions on the rights and responsibilities of living in the U.S., both for natural born citizens and for those who have immigrated to the country. She is

proud of how she and her husband arrived in Austin with little money and received an offer to live rent-free in a house that was unlivable. “Y ya la venimos a ver, pero la casa estaba destrozada, nomás tenía, pues nomás las paredes, paradas y el techo....porque no tenía puertas ventanas. [*And we came to see it, but the house was ruined, it only had, well, only the walls, walls and the roof.... Because it didn't have doors, windows*].” They “grabbed a broom and started to sweep” and slowly fixed the house to make it habitable. Four years later, they asked the owner when they would have to pay rent and she was so impressed with how they cared for the house and yard that she had them pay rent towards owning the house, which they were able to accomplish in two years. This story is symbolic for Aurora and illustrates her belief in self-reliance and taking advantage of what she feels this country has to offer. She sharply criticizes those who do not have the dream of home ownership:

Porque muchos ciudadanos, - no son de su propia casa y nacidos aquí, ¿cómo cree? - - Siempre están rentando, siempre, e, viven en apartamentos en, en - miseria, digo yo miseria porque, siempre aquí no tener, ni su propia casa - - y por eso se enojan con uno que viene y le quita uno, pues no los quita uno nada si no que ellos, como no son responsables, - - entonces pues el, tal oportunidad para el que lo quiere agarrar. [*Because a lot of citizens, without their own home and born here, can you believe it? They are always renting, always, and the live in apartments in, in misery, I say misery because, if you live here without your own home - - - and that is why they get angry when someone comes to take it away, well they can't take anything away if they would, since they aren't responsible - - - Well then, the opportunity is here for the person that takes it.*

Aurora is not only speaking of economic opportunity, she is also referring to the possibilities for political participation. Her memories of politics in Mexico center on attending political rallies because they provided food, “y solamente así juntaban la gente,

dándoles de comer. [*And that's the only way they got people together, giving them food*]."

She recalls a time when a large group of people gathered for a visit from the President, but other than that, she says she was not involved. Her views have changed considerably. She now feels that participation, namely voting, is not only a right, but also a responsibility. She expressed repeated anger with citizens she encountered while participating in get-out-the-vote campaigns who did not show any interest in voting. For Aurora, gaining her U.S. citizenship gave her the gift of voting and a connection to her adopted country. In a strong and emotional voice, she shares how she reacted to a person who did not see the necessity to vote:

Le digo, mire, yo traté de hacerme de ciudadana, me hice ciudadana le digo, para votar, porque estaban como, decía el dicho de la India María "ni de aquí ni de allá," porque nunca voté en México, y aquí vivía y no votaba no, no me contaban a mi - como un ciudadana. Entonces le digo, es un orgullo le digo, no se por qué, a pesar de que no es mi país, le digo, yo me siento orgullosa ahora de ser ciudadana y votar, es un orgullo votar. [*I told him, look, I tried to become a citizen, I did become a citizen I told him, to vote, because I was like, the fable of the India Maria [a narrative (and serial movie) of a poor, indigenous, rural woman placed in "modern" situations] "not from here nor from there," because I never voted in Mexico, and I lived here and I didn't vote, they didn't count me, like a citizen. So I told him, it's a source of pride to vote, I don't know why, in spite of this not being my country, I told him, I feel proud now to be a citizen and to vote, it makes me proud to vote*].

Aurora feels that voting and identity are closely related, that by not taking the responsibility to be involved, a person loses an opportunity to be someone and to be something in this country. Although she uses the term "nacidos aquí [*born here*]" often, she believes that a U.S. citizen is defined more by behavior than by birth.

No lo más importante es votar, es una responsabilidad. Que muchos ciudadanos, nacidos aquí no han sido responsables, para ocupar el puesto

que se debe, que deben de tener. Y después dicen “vienen los de México vienen y nos quitan los trabajos, los puestos.” Pero porque ellos no los quieren, e! Porque ellos, el derecho se lo están dejando a la persona, ¿verdad? Les ceden uno el derecho de, de ser alguien. De ser algo en este país. *[No, the most important thing is to vote, it's a responsibility. That a lot of citizens, born here, have not been responsible, to occupy the role that they should, that they should have. And then they say, "people come from Mexico and they take away our jobs and our positions." But because they don't want them! Because they, they are leaving their right to someone else, right? They cede their right to be, to be someone. To be something in this country].*

The apathy that exists in the country exasperates Aurora. “Pero si los viejos ni los jóvenes quieren [votar]. *[But neither the old people nor the young want to [vote]].*” According to her, people do not see a connection between voting and change. “Me he dado cuenta de que mucha gente nacidas aquí en los Estados Unidos ya son viejos, y ellos no quieren votar. No quieren votar, porque dicen ‘para que voto si como queda, - ponen el presidente que quieren.’ *[I've noticed that a lot of people born here in the United States are old now, and they don't want to vote. They don't vote because they say, 'why vote since it ends up that they put into office the president that they want'].*” But Aurora feels that “su voto cuenta *[Their vote counts]*” and backs that feeling by quoting numbers to illustrate the increased percentage of voter participation in the precincts in which she worked to get the vote out: “Y allá andamos luchando, si ganamos. Antes era el 17% de la gente que votaba, y ahora salió que era un 32% de las gentes que votaban fíjese. Entonces, sí hubo provecho. *[And we keep on fighting, and we win. Before there were 17% of the people who voted, and now look, it came out that 32% voted. So there were, there were gains].*” Although voting is an imperative for Aurora, so are more active forms of participation. “No, y, no tan solamente votar, si no que compartir o sea, ayudar

las personas también, hablar también con las personas, que se quede uno allí como a apoyar a las personas... [No, and not only voting, but to also share, that is, help people also, talk to people also, stay with people to support them].” Successfully fighting a housing project in San Antonio that was going to be built near some polluted waterways, she says, “yo he visto mucho el cambio, que si, la voz de uno, si es escuchada. [I have seen a lot of change, and yes, one’s voice, it is heard].”

Speaking of some immigrant neighbors of hers whom she is trying to get involved, she says,

Sí, con los nuevos inmigrantes o la nueva gente, muchos ya nomás llegan aquí, y se hacen tan egoístas que no quieren ayudar a la gente.... Pero no se quieren involucrar, le digo, bueno, quieren los beneficios ustedes y no se quieren involucrar. [Yes, with the new immigrants or new people, many of them just get here and they become such egoists that they don’t want to help people.... But they don’t want to get involved, I tell them, well, you want the benefits but you don’t want to get involved].

Involvement and participation are aspects of what Aurora considers to be democracy in this country, but she finds democracy to be a difficult concept to talk about: “no se explicar de lo que es democracia... Pues ya no, me quedé sin palabras, está difícil. [I don’t know how to explain about democracy... Well that’s it, I’ve run out of words, it’s difficult].” Although the words are hard to find, democracy centers around fighting for what is right. She says that the good of democracy is “... peleando por algo que es bien... pero también peleando por algo que es injusto. [... fighting for something that is good, but also fighting for something that is unjust].” However, allowing people to fight for what they believe in does create problems for her.

[El] derecho de un ciudadano de hacer bien, o a veces hacer mal. Porque ya ve que a veces, unos se aceptan una cosa y otros están en contra de otras cosas, como de los homosexuales, que les den los hijos a los homosexuales, eso es ilógico, eso no, a mi eso no me puede entrar a mí. Que un un niño se se esté criando con dos padres o con dos madres, o sea, a veces quieren hacer que pase esa ley, unos, y luego otros están en contra, entonces eso es, no se, como, una, definición de lo que es lo bueno, y que es lo malo. Que es aceptado y que no se acepta en lado por otro lado. Es lo que no, no entiendo tampoco yo. *[The right of a citizen to do good, or sometimes to do bad. Because you see sometimes, some accept one thing and others are against some other thing, like with the homosexuals, that they give children to homosexuals, that's illogical, that to me, to me that doesn't fit into my understanding. That a child can be raised by two fathers or two mothers, that is, sometimes some people want to pass a law, and others are against, so to me that is, like, a definition of what is good and what is bad. What is accepted and what one would not accept on one side or the other. That is what I don't, don't understand either].*

Despite the tensions of competing interests, Aurora understands how voice is foundational to democracy. She also is appreciative of all she has here, and the story of her life on the ranch compared to what she has in the U.S. provides a narrative that she shares with her children to motivate them in their studies. She tells them, “es muy duro, como yo que andaba chiquita, de 5 o 6 años sembrando en el solazo... padeciendo hambre, sed. *[it was very hard, when I was a little girl, 5 or 6 years old planting in the hot sun... suffering hunger, thirst].*” When her children respond “ya mamá, pero ya no estamos en ese tiempo, *[Ok mom, but we're not in those times anymore]*,” she tells them, “no estamos en ese tiempo, pero si usted no estudia, usted no va a tener, usted va a tener que ir a barrer, de tener que ir a, a trabajar de housekeeping, o a trabajar como anda su papá trabajando en el solazo. *[no, we're not in those times, but if you don't study, you will not have, you will have to sweep, to go to, to work in housekeeping, or to work like your father working in the hot sun].*” She repeats the theme of hard work and opportunity to

ensure that her children understand, “¿Que más le digo?, que tienen aquí la oportunidad. [What else could I tell them?; here they have opportunity].” She also understands the uniqueness of the U.S. public school system in which the education is free, as are the necessary materials. She explains that in Mexico, you have to buy everything, even pencils, while here, “por la oportunidad la tienes, si no tienes para las libretas, te dan hojas, si no tienen lápices, te dan, te dan todo. Nomás es el deseo que tú tengas para estudiar. Pues échale ganas, y allí estoy. [with the opportunity you have, if you don’t have [money] for notebooks, they give you paper, if you don’t have pencils, they give you some, they give you everything. It’s only the desire that you have to study [that you need to succeed]. So put in all you’ve got, and there I am].” This last phrase, “there I am,” is in reference to herself, to the effort she puts in to motivate her children to work hard through the example of her life as well as the effort she puts in to her work with AI to make schools better. According to Aurora, opportunities exist, and those opportunities require a responsibility for each person to work hard to take advantage of what is available.

On the Edge of Transformation

Lo que hace Austin Interfaith es organiza, organiza y enseña, es como una escuela... Es como un colegio de la vida, nos ayudo aprender a vivir, a defendernos los derechos. Y eso es lo que, para mi ha sido, Austin Interfaith, un colegio para poderse defender uno aquí en los Estados Unidos. A no tener miedo de nada, a hablar cuando se necesita. [What Austin Interfaith does is organize, organize and teach, it’s like a school... It’s like a school of life that helped us learn to live, to defend our rights. And that is why, for me, it’s been, Austin Interfaith, a school to defend oneself here in the United States. To not fear anything; to speak when necessary].

Aurora has been involved with AI for roughly nine years and has faithfully attended a variety of meetings, actions, and trainings. She is a provocative speaker and can effectively share her own story or the relevant facts surrounding an issue. She has a good understanding of what AI is, how it operates, and what it can do for people like her. But Aurora has not transformed into a civic agent, with the requisite imagination to motivate her actions, mobilize others, and affect change. AI has been a school for her, and she has learned much, but this learning has been informational rather than transformative. Her story is a story of change, but one that hovers at the edge of transformation.

As we have seen, when Aurora first arrived in Austin, she was not involved in the school. She began to connect initially by selling palomitas [*popcorn*] in the school and “me empezaba allí a conocer a la gente, inclusive hablar con los maestros, con el director, y todo eso. [*I started to meet people, including talking to the teachers, to the principal, and all that*].” She attributes her first contact with an organizer to the relationships she was developing with her children’s teachers.

Pues los mismos maestros que me miraban siempre que yo andaba allí, o sea, iba a dejar los niños a la escuela, y como que los tenía en los Boy Scouts, a los grandes, y si siempre me miraban que iba y los dejaba y que nomás yo era la que, los atendí y todo. Y quizá miraron que era, pensaban que quizá yo era una persona activa para trabajar en esa situación, de la escuela y todo eso. Y así fue como le dijeron a ella [a la organizadora], “invítala a la madre de los muchachos, esta, la señora Aurora.” [*Well those teachers saw that I was always at the school, that is, I’d drop off the kids at school, and I also had them in Boy Scouts, the older ones, and they always saw that I dropped them off and that I was the only one that was attending to them and everything. And maybe that’s what they saw, and they thought that maybe I was an active person to work in that situation,*

in the school and all of that. And that's how they told her [the organizer], "invite the mother of the boys, Mrs. Aurora"].

In relating her recruitment, she elaborates on the methods that the organizer used to entice her to a meeting. There are elements of insistence, pressure, guilt, and responsibility. But the language she uses to tell the story also hints at her early, developing understanding of equality, justice, and power—an understanding that would be necessary if she were to become involved with the organization.

Y me invitó y me dice: “pero venga” y me dijo, “no quiero que me diga que, que ‘a ver’ si no quiero que venga porque eso va a ser un meeting interesante, bien importante para la educación de sus hijos, para el desarrollo de la escuela, y sin ustedes, la escuela no tiene valor. O sea, el apoyo de ustedes es tan importante, como el presidente.” Me dijo así. Y dije, “a caray, a poco?” “Sí. Sin ustedes, el principal no se mueve, los maestros tampoco. Porque ustedes, ustedes son la prioridad.”[*And she invited me and she tells me, “you have to come,” and she told me, “I don’t want to hear, ‘we’ll see,’ but what I want is for you to come because this will be an interesting meeting, very important for the education of your children, for the development of the school, and without you, the school has no value. That is, your support is as important as that of the president’s.” She told me like that. And I said, “no way, really?” “Yes. Without you, the principal doesn’t move, nor do the teachers. Because you are the priority”*].

The Friday meeting she attended was the initial drive to create the first Alliance school in Austin and the beginning of her involvement: “Y ahí fue donde me empezaron a involucrar verdad, a decirme de que, que debería de ser la escuela alianza, para que tuviera más ayuda, más apoyo. [*And that’s where they started to get me involved right, to tell me that, that there should be an Alliance school, so that it would have more help, more support*].” The standard house meeting format was followed, in which “entre todos nos hablamos y decimos pensamientos, que es lo que queremos hacer, cómo lo vamos ha

hacer, o, ideas, nos compartimos ideas. [*we talked between us and shared thoughts; what did we want to do, how were we doing to do it, or ideas, we shared ideas*]. In the initial meetings, Aurora explains that she felt “media rara [*sort of strange*]” because of her lack of English skills, even though the meetings were conducted bilingually. Although she understood what was going on, she explains that initially she just listened to other parents give testimonials: “a mi nomás me ponían escuchar, y como se hacía. [*they had me just listen, and watch how it was done*].” Eventually, Aurora did begin to share her story and to overcome any fear she had about public speaking: “Conforme una va asistiendo a las juntas y entrenamientos, entonces se va quitando ese miedo de hablar con la gente, y desarrollarse. [*And as one attends the meetings and trainings, then the fear of talking to people begins to go away, and you develop*].” When asked whether it was only talking to people that helped rid her of fear, she responded emotionally that “no, y haciendo, y actuando. [*no, and doing, and acting*].”

Aurora has acted and participated in many battles waged in Austin and across Texas. She has traveled to other states to share what she is involved with at home and attended a variety of trainings. Yet there are few ways in which she feels she has changed. Perhaps the most important way she feels she has grown is in terms of the number of relationships she has. She observes that now “conozco más gente. [*I know more people*].” To underscore the importance of this statement, she adds, “allí en Los Ángeles, o en Pennsylvania. [*There in Los Angeles, or in Pennsylvania*].”

Aurora also feels that her understanding of politics has changed. Her prior understanding placed politics outside of her realm, practiced by professionals who

compete to keep their positions. “Para mi antes significaba política andar allá con los políticos, metida allá en la Casa Blanca, para mi eso era el político. Quitándole el puesto a otro más. Eso es política. O sea, yo así miraba la política. [*Before, I thought politics was to be there with the politicians, in place at the White House, for me that’s what politics was. Taking the position away from someone else. That was politics. That’s how I saw politics*].” She is still struggling with what the concept means for her. On the one hand, the work she does is not politics but community work. “No me gustaba a mi la política, y todavía pienso esto no es política, esto es algo que, que debe uno ayudarse entre, entre la comunidad, y ayudar a los muchachos. [*I didn’t like politics, and I still think that what we do is not politics, this is something that, that one should help within, with the community, and help the children*].” But on the other hand, she says, “Ahora estoy mirando a que todos somos políticos para hablar. O sea, que todos debemos de tener algo de político para poder sobresalir en este país, o en cualquier país. Es, como hablar, como defenderse, conocer los derechos. [*Now I see that we are all politicians to be able to speak. That is, that we all should have some politicalness to be able to succeed in this country, or in any country. It’s how to speak, how to defend oneself, to know your rights*].”

Another way that Aurora has traveled towards a transformation is in her sophisticated knowledge of how the organizers work with individuals to help them become leaders. She understands how relationships are built upon common stories of suffering and pain and she is cognizant of how she has learned to probe skillfully during individual conversations: “Le enseñan a uno como algo de psicólogo verdad. Se mete uno entre las personas, y conforme ellos están hablando, uno sabe lo que más profundo de lo

que están sufriendo. [*They teach you something like a psychologist right. You get into people, and while they are talking, you know what they are most deeply suffering about*].”

Uncovering a person’s pain is the beginning of the process. Turning this pain into cold anger and anger into action is the next step. Aurora explains how she listens empathically and talks to people to guide them, and that by acting one can solve problems and reduce the pain.

Nomás hay que pensarlo en las personas y en las palabras que esta haciendo, entonces uno siente el dolor de aquella persona. Y va diciendo, no mira, pues hazle así, y vas a ver que se te va a solucionar. Pero tú no pongas tanto tu mente en eso, que estabas pensando, que estaban tratando mal, sino que tu salte de ahí. Y tú mira por tú mismo. Y así va uno, o sea, va uno trabajando en eso. [*You only have to think of the person and the words they are using, and then you feel the pain of that person. And you tell them, look, do it this way, and you will see that things will be fixed. Don’t dwell so much on that, what you were thinking, that you were being treated poorly, but get out of there [that space]. And you look out for yourself. And that’s what I do, that is, one keeps working at this.*

By having these types of conversations, a communal story is created and “su mente se va abriendo a qué nos, - que es lo que estaban pidiendo. [*your mind begins to open up to what, what it is they are asking us to do*].” These conversations make people feel that “is vale la pena [*it’s worth the effort*]” and that “la voz unida es mejor. [*a united voice is better*].” Although Aurora understands how this collective anger is used to mobilize people, she does not understand the core principal of the iron rule. She uses the language “what it is they are asking us to do,” implying that it is the organizers who are making the decisions about how to act. In this story, instead of the group deciding to take action, the organizer tells them, “mire, vamos a hacer una junta de tal y para este programa y entonces apóyenos para que nos oigan. [*look, we’re going to have a meeting*

about this and that program and so support us so that we are heard].” Aurora does not use language that shows that she has the type of imagination that would drive her to act on her self interests. However, she is fulfilling a prerequisite to this kind of thinking by critically questioning her assumptions.

Todos Somos Iguales

The narrative that Aurora has as an immigrant in the U.S. aligns closely to the narrative she is exposed to by Austin Interfaith. Perhaps the most important theme Aurora focuses on is that of equality. She knows that there are people and systems in place that discriminate among people and create inequalities, and that this can occur in a variety of domains including race, religion, class, and education.

Aurora is aware that she herself can act in this way:

Hemos aprendido que, en verdad, sí hay discriminación entre uno mismo. Y hablamos para que no haiga victimas ya más, de las personas, sino que, podamos nosotros ayudarles y enseñarles a ayudar a otra personas, no más solamente los como nosotros, sino a los demás personas también. De no ser egoístas, de no ser envidiosos y racistas. Porque a veces uno mismo es racista, con su propia raza. *[We have learned that, in reality, there is discrimination even between ourselves. And we talk to each other so that there will never be any more victims, of people, instead, we can help people and teach them to help other people, not just people like ourselves, but everyone else also. To not be egoists, to not be jealous or racist. Because sometimes, one is a racist, even with his or her own race].*

We have seen that homosexuality is a difficult concept for Aurora. Being forced to interact with people from other religions has also caused her to assess some of her assumptions:

Antes sí me molestaba, porque decía ¿cómo me voy a juntar con un católico si es católico verdad? Entonces, eso se me ha quitado, o compartir opiniones, entonces digo yo ahora, e aprendí a respetar cada religión y

cada creencia que es la persona tenga, y viera que bonito se siente porque no hay discusión, o sea, yo respeto y el me respeta. [*Before it bothered me, because I would say, how am I going to get together with a Catholic right? Now, that [those thoughts] are gone, or share opinions, I say now that I've learned to respect each religion and each belief that a person has, and look how beautiful it feels because there are no discussions, that is, I respect and am respected*].

Her language indicates that she is not just tolerant, but that she values people for who they are. She is proud of her association with AI and the focus they have to work on issues:

Pues uno es importante, cualquier persona es importante, y no importa la religión en que estés. Le digo que este programa de Austin Interfaith, es un programa donde hay 30 organizaciones de diferentes razas e religiones. Hay metodistas, bautistas, episcopal y yo que soy Pentecostal verdad. También hay católicos, hay un montón. Y todos nos respetamos, allí no se habla, no hablamos de un, de mi religión y que, no no no. Ahí no metemos la religión. Allí simplemente metemos los asuntos, a lo que estamos pidiendo, o estamos necesitando. [*Well a person is important, any person is important, and it doesn't matter what religion you are in. I tell you that this program of Austin Interfaith, it's a program with thirty organizations of different races and religions. There are Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, and I'm Pentecostal right. There are also Catholics, there are a bunch. And we all respect each other, there we don't talk, we don't talk about one, about my religion and that, no no no. We don't introduce religion there. There we simply deal with issues, about what we are asking for, or what we are needing*].

She elaborates that at the trainings she has attended, they prepare them to speak, so that “no tengamos miedo o temor de hablar con la gente, todos somos iguales. Hay igualdad entre todos. Podemos hablar hasta con el presidente. Que no tengamos temor para hablar con nadie. [*we don't have a fear of talking to people, we are all equal. There is equality between everybody. We can even talk to the president. That we don't have fear to talk to anyone*].” This respect is extended to people with different language skills as

well as varying educational levels, although there is an implicit hierarchy in place when she speaks of “lay” people as compared to “important” people.

Antes yo decía que, pues una persona que ni habla el idioma como ellos, y, una persona laica, ¿cómo le van a poner atención? Y eso es mentira. Porque, si le ponen atención, y escuchan, escuchan uno lo que uno esta pidiendo, para el beneficio de la comunidad, que se le escuchan, si le ponen atención. Eso es lo que he mirado ahora. Pues no importa que uno sea una persona laica, o que no sabe hablar, porque, si habla uno con el vecino, pues puede hablar con una persona importante. Y más cuando está pidiendo algo que va a beneficiar a la comunidad, o a los muchachos en programas para la escuela. *[I used to say that, well, a person that can't even speak the language with them, and, a lay person, how will they pay attention? And that's a lie. Because, they do pay attention, and they listen, they listen to what one is asking for, for the benefit of the community, that they listen to them, they do pay attention. That's what I've seen now. It doesn't matter that you are a lay person, or that you don't know how to speak, because, if you can speak with a neighbor, well, you can speak with an important person. Even more so when you are asking for something that will benefit the community, or the kids in the school programs].*

Placing the president at the same level as a neighbor provides Aurora with a visual on which to base her values for equality. For her, equality is not tied to outcomes, but to opportunity. She uses the word “ser” [to be] to explain how we all have the opportunity to be equal, perhaps displaying a more nuanced model of equity versus equality. She emphasizes that we must “Defender derechos de las injusticias... Que uno no puede ser más o menos, si no que seamos iguales todos, o sea una igualdad, entre el rico y el pobre. O sea que no hay diferencia. *[Defend our rights against injustices... That one cannot be more or less, that is, we should all be equal, that is, an equality, between the rich and the poor. That is, there is no difference].*”

Equity and equality are tied to voice for Aurora—speaking to a neighbor, asking for things that the community needs, talking to a Catholic. In the past, she perceived the

voice she was capable of using as placing her in a position of inferiority and placing her in a position where she could not make demands for her community.

Yo no tuve estudio, al yo hablar con una persona, estudiada, entonces, pues, a mi no me van a salir las palabras como a él le salen con elocao, el, como, elocuacia, o, o, muy, que sabe hablar bien, pues. Y, y, en, o a acomodar las palabras adecuadas, - - porque uno no, no, yo no estudié al, al grado de tener educación, - de estudio. [*I didn't have an education, so when I speak with an, educated, person, then, well, my words are not going to come out like his with eloq, the, uh, eloquence, or, or, that he knows how to speak well then. And, and, in to use the adequate words, - - because one didn't, didn't, I didn't study, to the third grade I studied*].

In addition to her lack of formal education, Aurora was taught to respect her elders and to not speak up to them. As she began to work in the public arena, she had to overcome her perceived inferiority in her speaking ability, in her level of education, and in her social class, as well as in her relationship to those “older” than she, that is, those people in power. Aurora now feels that she has had an education and that she can speak eloquently with any other person.

Entonces, para esas personas, yo sentía más respeto hacia ellas, y es difícil hablar con, con una persona así. Antes para mi era difícil. Ahora no, no le digo que ahora me ponen a hablar hasta en inglés, y a leer en inglés, y delante del director, el superintendente, a pesar de que no sé mucho inglés, pero lo leo, y lo estudio y lo estudio y lo leo y se lo que estoy diciendo. [*So, with these people, I felt more respect for them, and it is hard to talk to, to someone like that. It was hard for me before. Now it's not, no, I tell you that now they [organizers] have me speak even in English, and to read in English, and in front of the director, the superintendent, in spite of the fact that I don't know much English, but I read it, I study it, I study it and I read it and I know what I'm saying*].

VERÓNICA SOLÍS

Si ella tal vez, me dice su forma de pensar, yo podría entender, y así podríamos una buena democracia pienso yo, que democracia, que todos

estemos, -compartiendo, - - - como se, como económicamente, como - en todos los aspectos, que estemos, más o menos, a la altura ¿verdad? Pienso yo, que eso es democracia, no se. [*Maybe if she would tell me her way of thinking, I would understand, and that way we would have a good democracy. I think democracy is where we are all sharing, like economically, like in all aspects, that we are, more or less, at the same level right? That's what I think democracy is. I don't know*].

Verónica is just beginning her journey towards civic participation, but her words show that she has strong ideals of what she expects from this country, and what she wants to give back. Relationships based on conversation are foundational to her beliefs on how to improve the world around her. Her interactions with Austin Interfaith have been few. However, her limited civic experiences can help paint a portrait of a person who is beginning a transformation. Her stories join with those of the other women in this study to create an impression of a more complete transformation process.

Verónica's story will be shared in three parts, her sociohistorical context, her pre-political identity, and a discussion on the level of her participation.

Sociohistorical Context

Verónica, the second child of six, was born in Mexico city roughly 35 years ago. Her parents immigrated from the Mexican state of Michoacán for economic reasons. Her mother was clearly a role model for Verónica, instilling in her strong values on motherhood, education, community, and work.

Que la base principal es la mamá. Y mi mamá, pues, trato de sobresalir, de conocer gente. Yo admiro mucho a mi mamá, porque por ella misma, no hizo una carrera ni nada, pero, siento que ella como madre, está satisfecha de su familia, de sus hijos, como nos crió, como hemos tratado de sobresalir todos, a pesar de cómo ella [creció]... y siento que es ya por, de verla a ella, una persona luchadora... Mi madre es una persona así, de tratar de ayudar a la gente. Y, también tiene un defecto que quiere corregir

a todo el mundo (se ríe). [*The principal base is the mother. And my mother, tried to rise above her situation, to know people. I admire her, she never had a career or anything, but I think that as a mother she was proud of her family, of her children, how she raised us, how we have all tried to better ourselves, in spite of the way she grew up. And I think it's because, seeing her, she's a person who fights. My mother is like that, she tries to help people. And I think she has one defect, she wants to fix the world (laughing)*].

Although Verónica laughs when she shares this point, her mother is fixing the world one person at a time. Her father did not have an education, yet her mother taught him, as an adult, to read and write. Four of Verónica's siblings have college degrees and the "carreras [*careers*]" that both mother and daughter consider so important. Her mother was involved as a parent in Verónica's schooling, and considered voting to be important. Her mother did not work, while her father worked in the kitchen of a large, government sponsored hospital. Both of them made the effort to ensure the education of their children, "con el esfuerzo de mis padres, todos estudiamos, ellos trataron de darnos la mejor educación que ellos pudieron dar" [*with the effort of my parents, we all studied, they tried to give us the best education that they were capable of*].

Like her brothers and sisters, Verónica started classes at the university level to become a teacher, but when she married and had a child, she opted to stay home to care for her daughter. Eventually, she went to work as a secretary in a government institution while her husband worked as a chauffeur; in her words, "no estábamos muy mal en México" [*We weren't bad off in Mexico*]. However, in 1981, because he was "gente de provincia" [*a person from the provinces*], and curious, her husband decided to come to the U.S., and so Verónica, with her 5-year-old daughter and 11-month-old son, became

the first person in her family to move across the border. Because of her connections at her job, they were able to come to the United States with documentation allowing them to work. The family moved to Anaheim, California, for three years, where Verónica felt out of place and uncomfortable.

Me sentía fuera de, si me entiende, fuera de lugar, como que no pertenecía a este lugar....Yo recuerdo que, nadie hablaba casi español. Casi no había, mucha migración [allí], muy poquita migración de gente que hablaba español, la mayoría hablaba inglés, y yo creo que por eso... siento que en aquel entonces fue un error porque en vez de que yo dijera, “bueno voy a acoplarme a esta comunidad, voy a aprender inglés” yo me regresé, para México. *[I felt out of, do you understand? out of place, like I did not belong in this place. I remember that almost no one spoke Spanish. There was not much migration there, very few people who spoke Spanish moved there, the majority spoke English, and I think that because of that, I feel that at that time it was a mistake because instead of saying, “I’m going to become a part of this community, I’m going to learn English,” I went back to Mexico].*

Verónica understands the importance of community, and how one’s identity is tied up with the social. But even with this knowledge, she decides to move back home. When Verónica and her husband returned, the jobs they had were no longer available. They remained in Mexico for two years and then returned to the U.S., this time to Austin, Texas, where Verónica’s brother had come to work. The reasons she gives for moving back to the U.S. are complex. Economics and education were clearly important motivators, but Verónica views the U.S. as a place of equality and equity, and also views it as a place differentiated by race and color.

[Las] personas latinas verdad, que venimos [para] mejores oportunidades de trabajo, que tengamos mejores oportunidades de estudio, que seamos al parejo que, otras, otras este, comunidades verdad, otras, se puede decir que, otras razas aquí, como los, los blancos y los negros, que tienen, que tengamos, o sea, que seamos iguales a ellos. Sobretudo eso, que,

mejoremos como personas, y económicamente, [*The Latinos, right, we come for better opportunities to work, for better educational opportunities, that we be equal to, others, to other, communities right, other, one can say races here, like, like the Whites and the Blacks, that have, that we have, that we should be equal to them. Above all, that we improve as humans, and economically*].

Her use of the word community varies. At the deepest level, community is all of us together. Yet she also used words to differentiate between communities of color and ethnicity. Describing the community she moved into, she says, “Sí, hispana. Sí pues, uno busca, entenderse con su propia gente [*Yes, Hispanic. Yes, well, one looks to commune with ones own people*]. Also prevalent in her words is the existence of communities of language. Her experiences in LA were difficult because she did not have a community of language. In Austin, “más gente habla español, o sea, desde que llegué aquí, pues, siempre me sentí más, mejor, se puede decir” [*more people speak Spanish, that is, since I’ve arrived here, well, I’ve always felt more, better, you might say*]. The Solis’ had intended to move permanently to the U.S., but immigration laws changed and the advice they received from a variety of lawyers made it unclear if they could remain in the country. Eventually, and in confusion, they moved back to Mexico while a lawyer “nos estaba arreglando los papeles [*a lawyer was fixing our papers*].” A year and a half later, the lawyer informed them that they could return: “tiene que traer a tu familia rápido, tenía que pasar.” [*you’ve got to bring the family quickly, you’ve got to come over*]. Although they were able to return, it took some time to receive paperwork that allowed them to work. A key component of Verónica’s identity is the feeling of self-worth she derives

from working, and implicit in that feeling is the importance she puts on work and career.

Being kept from employment had two effects on her. First, it made her feel less useful:

Me, me sentí, diferente, a lo mejor porque yo trabajaba en México y de repente dejé de trabajar y me vine y, y no entré a trabajar aquí a lo mejor ese es el cambio que me afectó. De que, trabajaba, cuando uno trabaja como que uno se siente útil. [*I, I felt different, probably because I worked in Mexico and all of a sudden I left my job and came [to the U.S.] and, and I did not work here and that probably was the change that affected me. That, when one works, one feels useful*].

Second, her disenfranchisement from work created a sense of disenfranchisement from other aspects of U.S. life, so much so that this sense of not belonging affected the way in which she interacted with the elementary school her children were attending. “Yo muchos años estuve como que, me sentía rara, sentía como que no pertenecía a este lugar, pero ya últimamente, me, desde que entré a trabajar como que siento que me involucré más [*For many years I felt strange, I felt like I did not belong here, but lately, I’ve, since I’ve started working, I feel like I’ve been involved more*].” She speaks humbly of her involvement with the school, doing “lo poco [*the little*]” she can to cooperate but “porque muchas veces aunque uno quiera por alguna razón, o otra, pues, no se puede pero, en lo que he podido, he estado involucrada [*because much of the time, although one wants to be involved, for one reason or another, well, one can’t, but when I’m able to, I’ve been involved*].” Her involvement has also been tempered by language issues:

Si entiendo uno poco inglés pero no lo suficiente como para una conversación o algo y a veces que, va uno a un lugar, o lo invitan a un lugar, y, hay gente que habla inglés uno se siento, bueno, al menos yo, me siento mal porque, - - pues muchas personas se sienten fuera de lugar porque están conversando. [*Yes I understand a little English, but not enough to have a conversation and sometimes, when one goes someplace, or they invite you someplace, and there are people speaking English, one,*

well, at least me, I feel bad because, well, many people feel out of place because others are talking [in English]].

Verónica moves back and forth between the personal and a sense of “we,” of community, of solidarity. As she shares a neighbor’s story told at a house meeting of a problem one of her children was having with a teacher at the school, Verónica uncovers the tenuous relationship all of the mothers have with the school, partly because of language; she also provides evidence of the type of interaction that is common between schools and the “other”.

A veces le da uno pena preguntar, porque yo creo que, que ese día, la Sra. que no entendió, que estuvo haciendo preguntas, y no entiende muchas cosas, y ya ve que ya le tuvieron explicando, y muchas veces porque uno no pregunta, por pena o no se, no pregunta. [*Sometimes one is embarrassed to ask questions, because I feel that, that day, the woman [her neighbor] didn’t understand, she was asking questions, but not understanding a lot of things, and you saw how in the meeting, the other people there had to explain, but you see that many times, one won’t ask questions, because of shame or something, one does not ask questions*].

However, Verónica understands the growth she witnessed in her neighbor as the woman received support from the rest of the group, as well as her own recent growth when she says, “y ya conforme uno va teniendo más confianza pues va preguntando [*and as one gains confidence, well, one begins to ask questions*].” This confidence also manifests itself in her critique of the people who sometimes translate at events and meetings she has attended.

La gente que traduce es gente que creció aquí, ¿entiende? Que no habla mucho en, mucho español, habla mucho inglés y poco español, pero, o sea, uno les agradece porque, hacen su mejor esfuerzo y todo lo que ellos pueden por, por traducirnos verdad, pero muchas veces no, no traducen la idea como uno la piensa que uno que habla español, si me entiende ¿verdad? Y este, hay veces que ellos, no, no entienden la idea, porque

nada más lo traducen como a la mitad, si me entiende? [*The people that translate are people that grew up here, you understand? That don't speak much in, much Spanish, they speak a lot of English but little Spanish, but, that is, one does appreciate them because they are making their best effort and all that they can do to translate right, but many times, they don't translate the idea like one who speaks Spanish would think of it, you do understand right? And there are times that they, they don't understand the idea because they only translate it half way, do you understand?*]

Although these experiences are examples of institutional hegemony that clearly affected Verónica, she did not allow them to affect her inner sense of being or agentic capacity. Sitting in her kitchen, still wearing the stained polo shirt from the deli she works at, tired but strong, she tells these stories matter-of-factly, neither positioning herself as victim of injustice nor as a hero conquering insurmountable odds. She is focused on her own learning, first by learning English, and then “estudiar algo, no se todavía [*study something, I don't know yet*].” She also is showing a beginning understanding of ways to get power. She feels more powerful when she works, when she has a voice, when she gains knowledge, and when she is part of a group of neighbors discussing ways by which to affect their children's educational experiences.

Pre-politically Active Civic Identity

Verónica's participation in civic affairs increased after she began to work and the family had moved to a trailer park near the school her children were attending. She began taking ESL classes sponsored by AI at a nearby middle school. At these meetings, organizers and leaders with AI would inform parents of issues that community members were addressing. For Verónica, the safety of her children is paramount, and it was this issue that motivated her to attend meetings:

Las reuniones que vamos es porque, a veces por seguridad de los niños, también por la viabilidad, que hay problemas, a veces cuando hay, cuando ellos se enteran de que hay, que los niños se están involucrando en mucha violencia, o eso, hay juntas, yo voy a esas juntas de, de contra la violencia. *[The meetings that we go to is because, sometimes for the security of the children, sometimes for the ways the children get to school, because there are problems, sometimes when there is, when they find out that there is, that the children are involved in violence, or something like that, there are meetings, I go to these meetings against violence].*

One of these meetings was held at the local middle school, but because it was difficult for the parents to attend, Verónica's neighbor held house meetings in the space between her trailer and a neighbors: "Otras se hicieron aquí en, con, la vecina, ella porque esta presta su lugar, para que, para que asistan los papás y porque hay muchos veces uno no alcanza llegar. *[Others were held here, with the neighbor, because she lends her place, so that, so that the parents will be there and because there are many times when one can't get to [the school]].*" The issue in which Verónica became involved in was an effort to have the district modify a bus route so that kids did not have to walk a long and dangerous route to school:

Todos los niños se van caminando, y usted sabe que caminando en tiempo de diciembre. Nosotros estábamos pidiendo un bus, un bus escolar para que recogiera los niños, que van al "Warner", porque, el año pasado, en hace, no, fue, eso fue hace 2 años, que... en "Scott" había muchos problemas de, que se peleaban mucho [los estudiantes de high school]. *[All of the kids walk, and you know that walking in the December weather. We were asking for a bus, a school bus to pick up the kids that go to "Warner" [the local middle school] because last year, no, 2 years ago, that in... "Scott" [the local high school] there were many problems with [high school students] fighting].*

Verónica's participation was minimal. She attended a meeting at the middle school one evening and two house meetings at the trailer park. She sat quietly and

listened, answering questions when asked, but never pushing a discussion nor volunteering suggestions. She was not involved with others who met with the district transportation director and local school board members. Her children did walk with the transportation director when he came to experience for himself the conditions the students experienced as they walked to school. Unfortunately, it was a warm sunny day and he did not undergo the difficulties that the students usually experienced. In the end, the district refused the community request because of a statute that mandates that buses will only be provided if students live farther than 2 miles from the school. This failure was difficult for Verónica.

Pues se siente defraudado uno, porque lucha uno mucho, trata de hacer todo lo que ellos dicen [AI], - - de, y - sobretodo por los niños, verdad... si, si se siente uno mal, porque, porque, uno les apoya en lo que uno puede. [*One feels defrauded, because you fight so much, you try to do everything they say [AI], and, above all for the children right, and one feels bad, because, because you support them in any way you can*].

Although disillusioned, Verónica insists that, “Sí, tenemos que seguir con la lucha [*yes, we must continue with the fight*]” because there will always be children who will be making the long walk. She feels that, one day,

Si uno insiste y insiste y insiste. Alguno que llegue allí, - nos va a entender, alguno. Porque a lo mejor, la persona que ahorita esta encargado en eso, no nos puede entender, pero no quiera entendernos. Pero yo se que alguna vez, va a estar una persona ahí, que nos va a entender, y nos va a mandar el bus. [*If one insists and insists and insists. One day, one person who comes here [from the district] is going to understand. Because now, the person there does not understand us, or does not want to understand us. But I know that some time, there will be a person there who will understand us, and will send us the bus*].

Verónica understands that with politics, understanding who you are trying to influence is important. She also knows that some battles will be lost, but that with persistence and time, the community can get what they are fighting for. And her words reiterate her theme, that through conversation comes understanding—through voice comes power. She also is beginning to understand her relationship with AI and the processes and procedures they use to gain power.

Es lo que le decía a mi vecina, digo es que nosotros siempre los apoyé, los apoyamos en el aspecto como usted dice, de que si ellos dicen “necesitamos que los papás, que sus firmas, que vengan.” O sea, a la mejor somos pocos papás los que hacemos eso. Pero este, - ahí estamos con ellos, o sea que, - y a lo mejor si falta más... más gente, más gente que, que exigiéramos más. *[It's what I was telling my neighbor. I was saying that we should always support them [the organizers from AI] in the way that you say, that if they are saying “we need the parents, their signatures, that they come [to meetings].” That is, it is possible that we are too few parents that are involved. But, we are there with them, that is, possibly we need more... people, more people that, that demand more].*

Even after experiencing failure, Verónica knows that the small group of parents had power. But she realizes that if they are to succeed, more involvement is necessary, and the group must make continued and stronger demands. However, her words also show that she neither understands nor exemplifies the iron rule. She talks of how she and her neighbors should support the AI organizers, that they should show up when and where the organizers ask them to. Although she clearly feels that the issue is important, she plays a supporting role, allowing others to do what she must do in order to become a leader. She is frustrated that the fight seems to be over. Work on the busing issue had stopped or been put on hold because the legislature had slashed the budget for a statewide program the Texas IAF had created, “ahorita se detuvo por lo de los presupuestos, que,

que le están dando prioridad al que están desapareciendo algunos programas que no quieren que desaparezcan [*work on the [busing] has been stopped because of the budget thing, that, they [AI] are giving priority because some programs are disappearing and they don't want them to disappear*].” Verónica does not understand that she has the capacity to be a leader on this issue. Yet in other areas of her life, she is beginning to show movement from follower to leader. Verónica feels that “una forma de política [*a form of politics*]” is her effort to help out newly arrived employees at her workplace; by interacting with them, teaching them how to fit in, and how to do their work, she can help create an environment where “toda la gente nos llevemos bien, cooperamos unos con otros [*everyone gets along well, we cooperate one with another*]” and there is less fear and more confidence. However, she has an innate sense for a fairly advanced principal of leadership development—when to realize that her efforts are not successful:

Yo trato de ayudarles un mes, si yo veo que esa persona no responde, lo olvido, digo bueno, no quiere aprender. [*I try to help them one month, and if I see that this person does not respond, I forget them, they don't want to learn*].

These interactions are conversation based, which is a repeating theme in Verónica’s stories and one at the heart of her feelings on democracy. Through dialogue, people come to understand each other, respect each other, and if necessary, persuade each other.

Para mi democracia quiere decir que, que respeten las ideas de cada persona... o, platicar, sobre todo, platicar, no se, de, vamos a suponer en un, como dos personas, yo quiero democracia, - te voy a respetar pero respétame también a mí, y donde tú estés mal, si yo quiero democracia, vamos a tratar yo de, como política, hacerte ver, - que estas mal y porque lo estas haciendo mal. [*For me democracy means that, to respect the ideas*

of every person... or talk, above all, talk, I don't know, let's suppose, like two people, I want democracy, I'm going to respect you, but you need to respect me also, and where you are wrong, if I want democracy, that I'm going to try to, like politics, make you see that you are wrong and why you are doing wrong].

In talking about “doing wrong” Verónica is not judging, but rather, making clear that people have competing values, that this tension is both a problem and a foundational principal for democracy, and that democracy is enhanced and in essence defined by the act of dialogue through respect. She also highlights the importance of mutuality and reciprocity. Differences need to be respected, but if few people have the opportunity to share their beliefs and attempt persuasion, democracy is achieved. Verónica understands that democracy is not a thing, but a process. However, it is a very messy process.

Yo pienso que es muy difícil la política, porque, cada quien, la política es como, - como la religión pienso yo, que cada quien utiliza la política, - como le parece, como cada quien entiende diferente la política, a lo mejor lo que yo entiendo de una manera, otra persona no lo puede entender igual. Si me entiende? Es lo mismo que la religión. La religión se enfoca en un solo lugar, y ya ve que, surgen muchas religiones pero todo es basado en lo mismo, y siento que la política es igual. Que la política es como, como ahorita, como ahorita es la guerra [Iraq], y mucha gente entiende, diferentes formas de, de porque es esta guerra... algunos lo entenderán que que bueno, otros que malo. Si me entiende no? Y siento que la política es así, porque la política es, - - es tan difícil, convencer, mucha gente, muy difícil de que la convenzan, y muchas gentes, es muy fácil de que la comprenda. Porque la política es, para mi es una cosa muy difícil. *[I think that politics is very difficult because, each person, politics is like, like religion I think, that each person uses politics like they want, since each person understands politics differently, probably what I understand one way, another person will not understand it in the same way. Do you understand? It's the same as religion. Religion is based in one place, and you see that many religions come out of that, but they are all based on the same thing, and I feel that politics is the same way. That politics is like, like now we have the war [Iraq], and many people understand the war in different ways, because this war, some people think it's good, others that it's bad. You do understand me right? And I feel that*

politics is that way, because politics is, is so difficult, to convince, many people, it's hard to convince them, and many people, it's very easy that they comprehend. Because politics is, for me it's a very difficult thing].

Even though this allocation of values is so difficult and messy, Verónica feels that citizens have a responsibility to participate. This view comes partly from her upbringing and the messages she received from her mother, but it is also strongly affected by her choice to come to this country.

Si, en este país hay responsabilidad de hacer eso [participar]. Y hay libertad de hacerlo, o, no no le reprimen tanto como en otros países. Si uno tiene una idea, tratan de escucharlo a uno, en este país... Siento yo que hay más democracia, que en México que en otros países de Latinoamérica. Yo creo que si. Porque muchas veces en, en México las autoridades quieren que uno piense como ellos quieren que uno piense. [Yes, in this country, there is the responsibility [to participate]. And there is the freedom to, they don't repress people as much as they do in other countries. If you have an idea, they try to listen to you, in this country... I feel that there is more democracy here than in Mexico and other Latin American countries. I believe that. Because in Mexico, the authorities want one to believe they way that they want you to].

Combined with this sense of freedom of thought and expression is the ability to act. For Verónica, power “Es la persona que puede hacer algo, tener el poder para hacer algo. Para mi eso significa poder [*Is the person that can do something, to have the power to do something. For me, that is power*].” Power can be earned by “luchando por lo que quiere, y dependiendo el poder que quiera agarrar [*fighting for what one wants, and depending on the power that one wants to take*].” Verónica feels that she has power, “Sí. Yo siento que tengo poder. Es proponerse a algo, pienso el poder. Cuando yo me propongo a algo, lo logro y tengo el poder de hacerlo, - pienso, para mi así es poder [*Yes, I feel that I have power. It's to commit to something, I think—power. When I commit to*

something, I do it and I have the power to do it. That's what power is for me]." Although Verónica has personal power, and is able to exercise it in limited ways, she still sees power as existing in the domain of the individual. She understands how AI works, and the necessity of having more parents be involved in educational issues, but she has not translated her sense of power from "me" to "we." She sees the world, and in many senses, understands the world, but the dialogue she sees as important to achieve consensus given competing values is a conversation between two people. For Verónica to make the transformation into a leader, she will need to understand that her story is the story of others around her, and to mobilize for change, she will have to take these collective stories to create community power.

Naïve Participation

During meetings, Verónica tends to be quiet, listening carefully and generally speaking only when spoken to. She remembers details and events and has a good understanding of particular issues. Although she participates, albeit in a limited way, her words hint at a certain lack of clarity or sense of purpose. In some ways, she exemplifies Freire's naïve participation (1993). When she refers to a neighbor who is more involved than she is, Verónica makes passive comments such as "*ella nos explica [she explains things to us],*" and "*ella nos ha ayudado mucho, a entender [she has helped us a lot to understand].*" Some comments she makes are not so subtle. Explaining why she attended a particular meeting, Verónica shares how her participation is based on the perception of doing good rather than having a deep understanding of the issue.

Porque yo apoyaba a la escuela, mis hijos vienen aquí, y yo los apoyo a ellos [AI], porque ellos decían que era [una junta] para el apoyo de la escuela. Y yo decía, debe de ser algo bueno que es para la escuela verdad? *[Because I support the school, my children come here, and I support them [AI] because they said it [the meeting] was to support the school. And I said, it must be something good if it is for the school right?].*”

Verónica is aware of this naïveté. Speaking of organizers from AI, she shares how:

Ellos siempre manejaban que era por ayudar a la escuela, y por uno lo hace por ayudar a la escuela verdad? Pero a veces este, a veces uno realmente no sabe que es lo que en realidad esta apoyando, pero ya conforme, va, bueno ya ahorita ya no entiendo más me entiende? *[They always maintained that it was to help the school, so one does it to help the school right? But sometimes, sometimes one does not really understand what one is supporting, but still goes. Well, now I don't understand more. Do you understand?].*”

As with other participants, language issues are a major barrier to participation.

Verónica explains how

Cuando hay que apoyar pues va uno y apoya, pero muchas veces va uno y apoya y no sabe que esta apoyando porque todas las conversaciones están en inglés. *[When it's important to provide support, well one goes and supports, but a lot of the time one goes and supports but does not really know what they are supporting because all of the conversations are in English].*”

As mentioned above, translation is common at the meetings and events that these women attend but as Verónica explained, the quality is not consistent and she often feels that she only gets one half of the meaning. Despite the language issues, Verónica is becoming more comfortable with the format and style of the meetings and is beginning to understand more about particular issues and therefore is better able to explain her participation. While sharing a story about a district budget issue that had originally been

difficult to understand, Verónica shows that she is moving away from naïve participation to informed action.

En aquél entonces yo no sabía, que era para que, el presupuesto de la escuela o cosas así. Y pues, ellos decían entre más apoyemos, más vamos, más, o que, como ellas decían esos días, que, entre uno, tiene que, tienen que oír el, la voz de uno para que ellos vean que en realidad la escuela esta necesitando, esto, pues a veces yo, iba, y no sabía que en realidad, eh, pero ahora ya lo entiendo, me entiende? [*At that time, I did not understand what a school budget was or things like that. And they [AI] said that with more support, a greater attendance at the meetings, they would say in those days, that, between us, they need to hear our voices so that they can see that the school really is in need, and sometimes I would go, and really, I would not understand, but now, I do understand, do you understand me?*]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Taken as a whole, these stories provide insight into the transformations these women experienced, from the first tentative steps to becoming agentic individuals. Their stories, especially those of Marina and Alicia, show how constant and daily their transformations were. However, the presentation of the stories does illuminate the process used to create the portraits, that is, what themes were selected, what was emphasized (and what was *not* emphasized), and how stories were sequenced.

Each story in and of itself provides a rich source of data; but understanding transformation was also aided by looking for similarities and differences of experience across the stories. Once I identified four mothers to represent the process, it became clear that there might be a way in which to order the portraits to provide a richer understanding and an overall sense of aesthetic (that is, to try for inter-portrait aesthetics as well as intra-portrait aesthetics). For this reason, the portraits are presented in a most-transformed

to least-transformed order. In addition, the level of detail is modified for each portrait. The first two are fairly complete, but succeeding stories are edited down somewhat to reduce redundancy and repetition. This accounts somewhat for the difference in the length of each portrait (that is, Marina's portrait is elaborate, while Veronica's is more sparse). However, the difference in detail can also be attributed to the number of transformational experiences each woman had. Veronica is just starting to experiment with civic involvement and has not had the same experiences that Marina has had. Therefore, in the narrowly defined context in which these stories are presented (that is, transformation into civically active individuals working to influence educational policy), each story will contribute different lessons. Nevertheless, each portrait is true to the portraiture philosophy and elaborates themes that arose from the particular sets of data. In keeping with the metaphor of art that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) use (i.e. the weaving of a tapestry), this scheme might be viewed as an opera: each individual is represented as a character (a single portrait), but it is the voices together that give the opera its meaning and soul. The four portraits together form the basis upon which to ground theory, which is presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

The portraits presented in chapter 4 impart an initial level of analysis that provides a structure on which to build a model of transformation. Rooted in a strong sociohistorical context, the stories together show a progression of experiences that suggest political learning and the processes and structures that might be necessary to enhance socialization. The model represents both the common stories and the unique experiences uncovered in the narratives, integrated with elements of transformative learning, the IAF experience, and possible answers to Smiley's (1999) questions: "What kinds of political knowledge are necessary for democratic participation? How can we enable citizens to achieve such knowledge? What kinds of institutions might be necessary?" (p. 373).

TRANSFORMATION

A model consisting of five general concepts will be used to describe the transformation that these women experienced. First, the significance of historical, sociocultural, and personal contexts will be discussed. The specific concept of political learning will serve as a container in which the rest of the process will be outlined. Second, a prior state of depoliticization will be described. The third and fourth concepts are two foundational processes and four mediated experiences. The foundational processes include the constant presence of disequilibria and the ongoing exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions. The mediated experiences include naïve

participation, being recognized, understanding relationships, and becoming “un-grand-inquisited”. Finally, the final state of a transformed civic identity will be discussed.

Context

Context played an important role in the transformative learning experienced by the women in this study. First, their experiences did not stand apart from their personal, historical, and sociocultural contexts (E. W. Taylor, 2000). Life histories, gender, race, class, culture, religion, and educational levels all intersected with the situations that placed them in particular places and times (e.g. schools and congregations) to create circumstances where participants “were ready for change due to former critical events, personal goals, or prior intercultural experiences” (E. W. Taylor, 2000, p. 309). In addition, as Edwards (1997) points out, not considering context “is hardly possible without the strengths of narrative to story context of experience” (p. 187).

Second, these transformations took place outside of these women’s daily context. Edwards (1997) terms this shift in context “decontextualization.” Like the women in Edwards study, the women in this study were “decontextualized from the dominant messages playing in their lives” (p. 188). However, the source of decontextualization was not geographic, but institutional. They moved from institutions such as marriage, work, and church, to that of AI. Sometimes, this involved a movement back-and-forth between contexts, while at other times, the change in context was permanent, for example, through the experience of divorce.

Finally, the context that AI provides is very specific to these women's changes and to a transformation into civically active citizens. "That is, although the *capacity* to develop more adequate meaning-making frameworks is always there, transformative learning is by no means inevitable and depends strongly on the particular environmental and cultural forces at work in the individual's life" (Daloz, 2000, p. 104). As Alicia explains, "there's nobody else that works this way. I have yet to find anybody else to work, work this way." This implies that the description of transformative learning herein applies to this very isolated and specific context. This is akin to Holland et al.'s (1998) figured worlds, in which "persons may be stretched over times and spaces, fully active in some worlds, perhaps scarcely formed in others" (p. 287).

By "figured world," then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents (in the world of romance: attractive women, boyfriends, lovers, fiancées) who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state (flirting with, falling in love with, dumping, having sex with) as moved by a specific set of forces (attractiveness, love, lust). (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52)

In the figured world of the IAF, agents include such people as organizers, other leaders, community members, and elected officials who engage in one-on-one meetings, house meetings, formal training, and a variety of actions. Issues that involve the community and local schools are the drivers for action, leading to getting a seat at the table, setting the agenda, and getting results.

The context that AI provides serves as a figured world for these particular transformations. Given a new context (figured world), these women would possibly need

to experience an entirely new transformation to change an embedded meaning perspective, such as Aurora's inability to be open to a homosexual couple raising children. However, given the examples of how these women's lives were affected outside of their interactions with AI (e.g. divorce, challenging bosses and principals), the borders enclosing any given context are porous. That is, some of the learning and transformation they experienced in their interactions with AI will carry over to a new transformative learning experience. For example, they will know how to critically assess assumptions. They will be comfortable taking risks and trying out new roles. They will have already explored their stories and objectified hegemonic experiences.

Depoliticization

As Sigel (1989) writes, pressures on members of ethnic, religious, or social groups (so called disadvantaged groups) judged by society to be inferior or less worthy, often run the risk of incorporating this negative judgment into their self-image. They respond by refraining from active political involvement and feel the sense of "learned helplessness" (p. 460). Indeed, Conway (2000) provides data that shows that socioeconomic status, education, income, occupation, race, ethnicity gender, and life experiences all contribute to patterns of political behavior and that Hispanic citizens have the lowest rates of voter registration and turnout and other forms of political participation than do either White citizens or Black citizens. Commonly, this behavior has been termed apathy, but Tom Deluca (quoted in Engel, 2000) posits that apathy may not be a free choice but rather a form of complex depoliticization, which he describes as:

The indefinite suspension of the ability to achieve and sustain political intentions due to the tightly spun web of depoliticizing ideology, language, social psychology, and technological and economic hegemony which together form a mutually constituting and reinforcing system that for all practical purposes is closed. (p. 47)

The participants in this study did not have the luxury to be apathetic. The factors that Deluca outlines were so dominant in their lives that they were in effect un-socialized from possessing any kind of useful political frame of reference. Partly this is evident in the lack of involvement these women had with politics before their association with AI. Alicia, however, narrates her feeling of exclusion as a physical barrier, one that allows her to see what is on the other side, but solid enough to keep her from participation. Alicia felt like “the person looking through the glass window wanting to be over there and then I couldn’t get there, because I didn’t know how.” She uses a different physical barrier, the highway running through town, as another metaphor to describe her disenfranchisement by claiming, “if you’re from the East side, you are nobody.” As does Marina, Alicia uses another metaphor—having a seat at the table—as a way to describe her impotence. Her PTA experiences left her with the feeling that “I was never in on those kinds of conversations where I could sit at the table and say, well look, let’s do this this way... these are my ideas. Never! That happened later, way later.” As Alicia says, “I didn’t question anybody; I didn’t challenge anybody because I didn’t know how to do it.” Alicia’s words provide insights into the depoliticization she and the others experienced. Partly depoliticization is due to outright exclusion. Partly it is due to the lack of knowledge and skills needed to participate politically. But she is also conscious of an overt effort to ensure that people in her sociocultural situation do not participate.

All four women had very conservative values in terms of having the opportunities to work hard to succeed. Alicia elaborates on this theme with her statement that the government has been complicit in creating an atmosphere of dependence, and with this dependence, an inability to act. She posits, “where the government... gives you all this stuff so it clouds the word democracy, so you don’t become a player, you’re not a player in it.” This prior state of depoliticization provides the context in which these women began their journey to reclaim their politicalness.

Foundational Processes

Understanding the connections between government and politics and one’s own life requires modifying a sense of relationship to the political system, which Sapiro (1984) says requires an alteration to one’s “webs of significance” (p. 84). Although talking about entering the work world (and the connection to a political role), Sigel (1989) elaborates a scenario that applies to individuals becoming involved with AI: “The role transition to wage earner includes several clusters of changes; new interpersonal relations, new latitude in decision-making, new job commitment, new environment, and new norms and expectations” (p. 70). These modifications and role transitions describe the type of transformation that is most evident in the women’s stories, that is, they are not the sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight that Mezirow (2000) describes as *epochal* but rather more *incremental*—involving a “progressive series of transformations in related points of view that culminate in a transformation in habit of mind” (p. 21). In addition,

none of these women experienced a clear disorienting dilemma to drive their transformations, which some took more than ten years to accomplish.

Given these caveats and the women's lived experiences, there seem to be things that happen that cannot be neatly categorized in some kind of phase or stage theory, but that are ongoing. Two processes stand out as foundational to the women's narratives and the stories of their transformations—a constant state of disequilibrium and the ongoing exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions. It is important to note that these two foundational processes do not “end” when a transformation has occurred, but that they are always present as a way to nurture continued growth in one dimension, while fostering transformation in new and unforeseen contexts.

Disequilibrium

Describing how individuals associated with social action groups transform, Scott (2003b) explains the importance of constant disequilibrium:

[T]ransformation is linked with the social construction of knowledge (self, social, and body knowledge) through the mediation of dyadic and group relationships in a context of social action, disequilibrium, and the appearance of new sensations and perceptions presented in participative action seem to be necessary conditions for transformation. By this I mean that social action disrupts, bothers, and interferes with the established internal structures of the psyche as well as external structures in the world, and it is this constant state of disequilibrium that supports transformation. As participants begin to ‘see a different way,’ as one organizer put it, individuals are able to internalize new external experiences that expand perceptions in consciousness.” (p. 280)

The IAF fosters disequilibrium in two ways: by agitating leaders and creating tension in their lives. Chambers (2003) explains how

Organizers don't give people information or pander to their preferences. They push them to make a world they can believe in, not accepting things as they are, but pushing them for things as they could be. Strong convictions attract some and repel others, but they don't leave people indifferent. Organizers agitate people to act on their values and interests in the world as it should be. Organizers teach engagement in public life as a means to moral meaning. (p. 107)

Organizers disrupt, bother, and interfere with potential leaders from their very first interactions. Aurora explained how the organizer would not let her excuse her way out of attending a meeting by saying “maybe”; she was told that she must attend because it was important to the education of her children. The agitation Marina felt is palpable when she relates how the organizer fired questions at her after a meeting: “What do you want them to know? What was easy? You said it was very hard for you. What was hard about it? Do you think other parents see it that way? How, how can we make it in a way that they can understand it?” Alicia almost quits when she is critiqued after her first speech at a large meeting.

More subtle, but also more profound, is the way in which leaders are exposed and agitated by information that uncovers the tensions that exist in the world. Sometimes this is accomplished by the presentation of data, such as looking at the disaggregated data from accountability tests for the schools their children attend and understanding how poorly their neighborhood schools match up to other schools within the city. During formal training, leaders are involved in discussions that focus on tensions between the two worlds—the world as it is and the world as it should be. Chambers (2003) names this back-and-forth tension a dialectic—the “gap that people who aren’t completely lost in the culture of self-centeredness feel between the reality that surrounds them and their ideals”

(p. 22). That is, human beings exist in between the world as it is and the world as it should be. In her early moments with AI, Marina recalls how the organizer asked her to “Close your eyes and think about [a safe learning environment for you children], what would that look like?” to create a tension between her current experiences with public education and what she envisioned for her children. Thirteen years later, Marina is still being agitated. During formal training, using a Socratic style of conversation, organizers lead discussions around polarities such as self-interest—self-sacrifice; power—love; change—unity; and imagination—hope which require individuals like Marina to vocalize their opinions, but in doing so, to be challenged as to how their current thoughts match (or do not) the vision they have of the world as it should be. Keeping leaders in a constant state of disequilibrium is a mechanism by which organizing groups keep the transformational process moving forward.

Exploration of Options For New Roles, Relationships, and Actions

In his list of phases of meaning, Mezirow (2000) places the exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions halfway through the 10 phases he outlines. The decontextualization that these women experienced was so profound that the very nature of attending a first meeting was an exploration of a new role, necessitated the creation of new relationships, and was a new action. From that first contact, each experience contributed to furthering their transformation, that is, this process started at the beginning and was constant and on going. For Holland et al. (1998), “identities are unfinished and in process” (p. vii). To study the person, an emphasis needs to be placed on process, a

“continuing cultural production: a development, or interlocking genesis, that is actually a codevelopment of identities, discourses, embodiments, and imagined worlds that inform each moment of joint production and are themselves transformed by that moment” (p. vii).

We see these moments of joint production continually throughout the stories shared herein. Leaders enter into mentoring relationships with particular organizers whose job it is to continually create new roles for them. Leaders, who may not have had much schooling, and none of whom had significant post-secondary educational experiences, suddenly become students again. They read and are asked to synthesize and digest academic material. They are assigned tasks such as putting together notes for a speech. They get questions shot at them in order to refine their thinking and organize their thoughts. They are required to attend meetings and show up on time. They are placed in positions in which they speak to persons who, for these leader’s entire lives, have represented money and power. They stand up in front of several hundred people to share their personal stories and perhaps to challenge an elected official. They are critiqued openly and in public. They challenge individuals, like their child’s teachers, where in the past they have acted with deference and obliging respect. Perhaps most significantly, they are asked what they think about particular issues and what should be done to focus attention on the problems their communities are facing.

Exploring new options and roles was not a planned stage after disorientation as suggested by Mezirow. Each new role and action contributed to perspective transformation (indeed, it could be argued that these women experienced many

perspective transformations) as well as to their sense of disequilibrium throughout the transformative learning process. Both the constant state of disequilibria and the exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions had components to them that were driven by each woman's agency as well as by outside pressure from people such as teachers, neighbors, and organizers. However, several factors emerged from the stories that appear as more discrete (rather than ongoing) processes, and were entirely dependent on the mediation that AI provided.

Mediated Processes

By agitating and training leaders, organizers serve in some sense as educators. The close connection between adult learning and education and the organizing world are evident as Mezirow (1997) explains how

the educator functions as a *facilitator* and a *provocateur* rather than as an authority on subject matter. The facilitator encourages learners to create norms that accept order, justice, and civility in the classroom and respect and responsibility for helping each other learn; to welcome diversity; to foster peer collaboration; and to provide equal opportunity for participation. The facilitator models the critically reflective role expected of learning. Ideally, the facilitator works herself out of the job of authority figure to become a colearner by progressively transferring her leadership to the group as it becomes more self-directive. (p. 11)

These words echo closely the concept of "agitation" and the tenets of the iron rule. They also make clear, especially in the context of community organizing, that the process of transformation into politically active citizens is a mediated process, that is, "IAF organizations are the instruments that let people practice and evaluate public life in collectives" (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 71). Articulating Vygotsky and Bakhtin, Holland et al. (1998) explain human life "as necessarily mediated; as produced by social

interchange among persons whose activity, however circumscribed by material and social circumstances, and however cast in forms of discursive and practical genres, nonetheless remakes these conditions” (p. viii). For Daloz, (2000) mediation, in the form of a mentoring community, is indispensable. He outlines four conditions of transformation: the presence of the other, reflective discourse, a mentoring community, and opportunities for committed action. He explains that “mentors seem to do three distinct things: they *support*, they *challenge*, and they *provide vision*” (Daloz, 1999, p. 206).

Alicia and Marina were emphatic when they explained that becoming the individuals they are today would not have been possible without their associations with AI. Alicia’s words explain the importance of mediation, as well as how her (and the others) knowledge is socially constructed (Scott, 2003b):

I had somebody help me, yeah. Being part of an organization. And I’m being biased because I have found one that... filled my needs that I needed at the time, and that was finding out who I was, what were my strengths, and then... providing the opportunities to put, to put that forth. And being supportive.

We have seen how two foundational process under-gird the journey of transformation (as well as keep transformed individuals engaged). The stories shared by these four women, taken together as a description for transformation, explicate four mediated processes that are integral to their changes: naïve participation, recognition, understanding relationships, and becoming un-grand-inquisited.

Naïve Participation

Previously we have seen how Verónica storied her participation with AI as naïve. As she said, “Pero a veces este, a veces uno realmente no sabe que es lo que en realidad

esta apoyando, pero ya conforme, va [But sometimes, sometimes one does not really understand what one is supporting, but still goes].” Similarly, Marina shares how “I was kind of involved with Interfaith but I didn’t really know that I was a member of the organization yet because, well, [the church] was a member, but I just didn’t understand all that part.” Although Alicia and Aurora did not use overt language to describe this phase, both position themselves as unawares as to why they had been approached and what it is they were being asked to be involved in. Verónica is just beginning her journey, possibly still in a phase that Aurora described as one of witnessing what others were doing and learning by observation. However, even after nine years, Aurora still behaves at times in a way that indicates her naïveté about some of the processes that AI teaches in the trainings she has attended. For example, she finds it difficult both to act in a way that indicates she has internalized the iron rule and to explain it to others. This variability implies that there is not a clear juncture to indicate when the participants moved from naïve participation to informed participation, but rather that it is more of an ongoing process that an individual moves in and out of depending on the issue, process, or context.

Synthesizing Freire’s naïve consciousness stage, Scott (2003b) explains that “there is little awareness of inward psychological or spiritual knowledge of one’s inner self. Without words to abstract meaning, the state or activity characterized by sensation, emotion, volition, or thought is arrested.... One knows and feels something, but it cannot be articulated” (p. 278). Holland et al. (1998) use Vygotsky and Bakhtin to describe how an individual in initial learning situations like the ones these women experienced begin

an identity transformation. As these women sat in those initial meetings, “social speech” [the dialogue occurring at the meeting or action] “penetrated the body and became the premier building block of thought and feeling” (p. 175). The authors explain how Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” describes development as appearing twice, first on the social level [between people], and later on the individual level [inside the person]. They connect this with Bakhtin’s “space of authoring” in which there are “differences between the neophyte, given over to a voice of authority, and the person of greater experience, who begins to rearrange, reword, rephrase, reorchestrate different voices and, by this process, develops her own ‘authorial stance’” (p. 183). In this situation, the voice of greater experience belongs to the organizer and other leaders, and the different voices—the social speech—that these women are hearing counters the messages they received through depoliticization. Bakhtin (in Holland et al., 1998, p. 183) describes this struggle:

This process—experimenting by turning persuasive discourse into speaking persons—becomes especially important in those cases where a struggle against such images has already begun, where someone is striving to liberate himself from the influence of such an image and its discourse by means of objectification, or is striving to expose the limitations of both image and discourse. The importance of struggling with another’s discourse, its influence in the history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual’s consciousness (just as they struggle with one another in surrounding social reality).

Using Bakhtin's model, there are two struggles and liberations that these women need to enact to move from naïve participation (or being a neophyte) into a more self-authored civic being. First, by listening to the organizers, and sharing their stories with other leaders, they begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the depoliticizing discourse they have been exposed to. Second, as they mature in their transformations, they will find their own voice as differentiated from that of the IAF. That is, their own voice will be stimulated by organizers and experiences with AI, but eventually they will liberate themselves from the authority of the IAF discourse. This marks the transition from naïve participation into a more nuanced participation. At the end of the quotation, Bakhtin speaks of alien voices "entering the struggle for influence within an individual's consciousness." Alien voices that came from the larger society and culture that surrounded these women, the institutions they were a part of, and their families, all made moving out of naïveté more of a challenge.

Recognition

One particular component of social speech helped stimulate these women towards change. As we have seen, a significant experience for Marina occurred after the first meeting she attended:

And so people spoke and, then we were leaving and he [an organizer] approaches me and says that, "What did you think about this meeting?" And, excuse me? As simple, [as] that question was, what I thought, - that was the first time in my whole life anybody had asked me what I thought.

Although they did not express this sentiment as straightforwardly as Marina does here, all the participants experienced a similar sensation. With this statement, Marina

uncovers two key elements that factor into the process of change—that of not having a voice for much of their lives, and the importance of being recognized. Charles Taylor (1994) provides a framework in which it is possible to make a connection between the depoliticized identity we have looked at previously, and how recognition and voice are tied to the formation of a new identity. Although speaking of cultural versus political identity, Taylor explains how a person's identity is affected by others:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (p. 25)

The four women use language to describe how they have been nonrecognized or misrecognized by such people and institutions as families, husbands, the educational system, the workplace, and government entities. Much of what they talk about relates in one way or another to their inability to speak. As Alicia shares, “And one of the right things to do was not to talk back, not to speak out.” Marina and Aurora expressed similar sentiments to Alicia's: “your husband is your voice.” For Verónica, being understood and understanding others is a matter of being able to hear each other's words. Aurora and Verónica feel apart from the system at times because of their limited English capabilities. Alicia was punished for speaking in Spanish. Marina provides a strong visual for how these women were nonrecognized and misrecognized when she states (often) how she just wanted to sit in the back of the room and not be noticed. Like Mezirow, Taylor (1994) stresses the importance of a dialogical relationship: “This crucial feature of human

life is its fundamentally *dialogical* character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression” (p. 32). Taylor elaborates on this premise and highlights the importance of recognition:

Thus my discovering my own identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others. (p. 34)

For these women, their dialogical relationship to others began at the moment they were recognized by a neighbor, teacher, principal, or priest as potential leaders and approached by an organizer to become involved. These relationships began to reform their identities to diminish their depoliticized selves and to begin the change towards stronger civic identities. The essence of their narratives changes when they story their newfound voices. For Marina, recognition made her feel like “it was just a total different me” and that “I knew what I was talking about, and that people listened to me.” Being listened to made her feel that, “my voice counts.... I felt like I was somebody, who not only needed me, but I felt like I was making a difference.” At another time, she reiterated the importance of voice and her own importance by stating, “we do have a voice and we count.”

Taylor (1994) elaborates certain characteristics of recognition that are visible in these women’s words. First is the concept of worth: “But the further demand we are looking at here is that we all *recognize* the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their *worth*” (p. 64). Taylor is speaking about

culture, and not necessarily self-worth (although for some of these women, especially Alicia, having the Latina component of her identity and her community acknowledged is of paramount importance), but the point is valid—these women were recognized as unique individuals and began to feel worthy. A second feature Taylor introduces is a principle of *originality* in which “each of our voices has something unique to say” (p. 30). The stories the women share of the house meetings they attended in which they shared their unique stories illuminates the importance of experiencing this sense of originality, and how these kinds of experiences can further the transformation. Third, the relationship that Taylor is describing (e.g. between the organizer and the leader or between attendees at a house meeting) is one of respect, what he calls the “the politics of equal *dignity*” in which “all humans are equally worthy of respect” (p. 41). Finally, Taylor describes in detail how the dialogical relationship is not a paternalistic or patronizing one. Fundamental to being recognized is the recognition of others, what he terms *reciprocity*, in which, “The struggle for recognition can find only one satisfactory solution, and that is a regime of reciprocal recognition among equals” (p. 50). Verónica ties this concept into her vision for a good democracy when she explains that not only does she need to explain her thoughts, but that “me dice su forma de pensar, yo podría entender, y así podríamos una buena democracia [*she would tell me her way of thinking, and I would understand, and that way we would have a good democracy*].”

Taylor embeds recognition in his discussions on the politics of difference, which he bases on what he terms a universal potential, which is “the potential for forming and defining one’s own identity, as an individual, and also as a culture” (p. 42). He is careful,

though, to explain how “We need relationships to fulfill, but not to define, ourselves” (p. 30). This concept relates well with the founding principles of the IAF, in which relationships are built on communal stories, and growth occurs by basing civic identity on collective action. In the introduction to Taylor’s (1994) book, Amy Gutman elaborates on this theme of collective stories and the importance of conversation to a deliberative and democratic society:

If human identity is dialogically created and constituted, then public recognition of our identity requires a politics that leaves room for us to deliberate publicly about those aspects of our identities that we share, or potentially share, with other citizens. A society that recognizes individual identity will be a deliberative, democratic society because individual identity is partly constituted by collective dialogues. (p. 7)

Understanding Relationships

Relationships are integral to a socially mediated transformation as well as to the nature and process of recognition. They are also integral to the way that the IAF operates. Along with politicalness, human beings are born with the creative capacity of sexuality. Chambers (2003) explains that “Sexuality is at the core of our being and relationships. It is the innate, wired-in instinct to be related to others in bonds of affinity.” Looking at the civic transformation that these women experienced in the context of organizing, it is clear that their coming to understand the power and necessity of relationships was an important growth process. This understanding manifested itself in several ways including the sharing of stories, differentiating types of relationships, and the element of trust.

Like the organizers in Scott’s (2003b) study, the participants in this study valued the sharing of stories. Scott explains how collective stories serve to modify identity:

[T]he formation of relationships in dyads and groups... mediates and becomes the containers for the internationalization of external experiences. Personal and collective stories of family history mediate the transference from the past to future action as rational sociohistorical reasons are made known and personal stories in the present are attached to those reasons. There is movement out of personal hurts, into collective hurts, as similarities are seen and personal issues in family histories are disclosed. (p. 282)

Aurora understands how sharing stories moves personal hurts to collective hurts and action:

Nomás hay que pensarlo en las personas y en las palabras que esta haciendo, entonces uno siente el dolor de aquella persona. Y va diciendo, no mira, pues hazle así, y vas a ver que se te va a solucionar. Pero tu no pongas tanta tu mente en eso, que estabas pensando, que estaban tratando mal, sino que tu salte de ahí. Y tú mira por tu mismo. Y así va uno, o sea, va uno trabajando en eso. *[You only have to think of the person and the words they are using, and then you feel the pain of that person. And you tell them, look, do it this way, and you will see that things will be fixed. Don't dwell so much on that, what you were thinking, that you were being treated poorly, but get out of there [that space]. And you look out for yourself. And that's what I do, that is, one keeps working at this].*

Chambers explains how “People who can understand the concerns of others and mix those concerns with their own agenda have access to a power source denied to those who can push only their own interests” (p. 28). The relationships that Alicia maintains center on her main agenda of children and education:

So I guess it's building a network of people, building relationships with other people, that can begin seeing you as somebody who really cares about the school, they knew I cared about the students, they knew I cared about the parents.

The relationships that these women formed or are forming are not friendships (although this does happen), but alliances developed to foment action. Marina explains that,

You know, it's not about me, it's about, Interfaith teaches us about public and private relationships. And you have to know when to separate that.... And they helped us think that it's not about making friends, it's about you representing the parents and the community.

Aurora shares another's pain not to be sympathetic, but to help them objectify their pain in order to move forward. Alicia has a more nuanced view of relationships that shows her ability to use the dialogic process to “become critically reflective of the *assumptions* [italics in original] of the person communicating” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 9) in order to find common interests and common ground:

Finding common ground and working together, being able to debate because you're never going to be my best friend maybe on some issues, but that's OK. Though we feel that this is a certain good thing to happen, and so, somewhere, we must be able to find common ground.

Alicia touches on another important aspect of the IAF style of relationship by highlighting the variability of the association depending on the issue involved. For the IAF, “Public relationships involve the exercise of power, *quid pro quo*. They are not about unconditional private loyalties but rather about making and keeping public promises, initiating, compromising, and accountability” (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 74).

Taylor (2000) maintains that there exist ideal conditions for fostering transformation: “It is through building trusting relationships that learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal with learning on an affective level, which is essential for managing the threatening and emotionally charged experience of transformation” (p. 308). Although these women developed a variety of relationships, it was their association with the particular organizer who spent time with them before their

first public speech that created their first public trusting relationships. Marina describes how this was a slow and dialogically intense process:

I recognize and realize, why Interfaith does it in the way they do it. You know, it's about doing your one-on-one first. - You know, initiate that conversation. Then do another conversation. And then kind of begin to feel what people's interests is.... And that's why it's a process. I mean, - the organizer asked me at that meeting, that first time, - but it didn't happen the next day, it happened like 3 months later... They take a lot of time to work with us, to make us feel like it's safe and that we can trust them, and nobody else does that.

Becoming Un-grand-inquisited

Without feeling safe and trusting others, these women would not have been able to engage in a critical reflection of their own assumptions. As we have seen, Tenant (quoted in Mezirow, 2000) sees transformative learning as

the extent to which it exposes the social and cultural embeddedness and taken-for-granted assumptions in which the self is located; explore[s] the interests served by the continuation of the self thus positioned; incite[s] a refusal to be positioned in this way when the interests served are those of domination and oppression; and encourage[s] alternative readings of the text of experience. (p. 24)

Taylor's criteria provide a context in which to describe the core of transformative learning that the women experienced, and perhaps a way to gauge the extent to which they transformed. Additionally, the IAF's success in identifying and training leaders is dependent on the transformative learning that Taylor describes. To accomplish this, the organization mediates experiences to allow individuals to critically reflect, participate in discourse, and reflectively act. We have seen previously that transformative learning may occur through objective and subjective reframing. *Objective reframing* involves critical reflection on the assumptions of others. *Subjective reframing* involves critical self-

reflection on one's assumptions and can be done in several ways. The one that most closely aligns to the IAF pedagogy involves a critical self-reflection on "a narrative—applying a reflective insight from someone else's narrative to one's own experience" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 23). One way organizers expose socially and culturally embedded and taken-for-granted assumptions is by reading selected documents (newspaper and magazine articles, research reports, book chapters, religious writings, etc.) and then discussing them (and, at times, dramatizing them) in relation to family and community. One of these readings is Dostoyevsky's (1880/1995) *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* from Chapter 5 of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

In this chapter, Ivan has made up a story that he is explaining to his brother Alyosha. The story takes place in Seville, Spain where the inquisition is in full swing and the grand inquisitor rules supreme. In the midst of people being burned at the stake, Christ returns. Although he does not speak, he is recognized by the people and asked to perform a miracle, after which he is arrested by the grand inquisitor and jailed. The essence of the story is the conversation (although Christ remains silent) between the grand inquisitor and Christ. The grand inquisitor tells Jesus that freedom was too much a burden for people to accept; they would prefer someone to provide for their needs and give them something to worship. He says, "But let me tell Thee that now, today, people are more persuaded than ever that they have perfect freedom, yet they have brought their freedom to us and laid it humbly at our feet. But that has been our doing." The people say to the church, which has created a system of laws and obligation, "Enslave us, but feed us" (p. 305). Love has been replaced with worship. The inquisitor explains how "they

will value all too highly the advantages to be derived from submitting to us once and for all.... We shall prove to them that they are nothing but weak, pathetic children, but that a child's happiness is the sweetest of all" (pp. 311-312). But the inquisitor carries his own burden, for "the keepers of the secret will be unhappy" (p. 312). The inquisitor sentences Christ to burn at the stake the following day; he promises that those who celebrated the miracle Christ performed upon his arrival would pile burning embers around him the next day. But when Jesus kisses him on the lips, the old man frees him and admonishes him never to return.

The discussion that follows this reading does not shy away from the implications set forth in Dostoyevsky's story. In small groups, leaders and potential leaders are asked what the story is about—who has power? who does not? who are the children?—and how people behave if they are the oppressor or the oppressed. As leaders incorporate this lesson over time, they understand how they have given up their freedom and become dependent slaves. They have become "grand-inquisited." Their transformation depends partly on becoming "un-grand-inquisited."

Being grand-inquisited is similar to social dominance theory (Sidanius, 1993) in which society is inherently oppressive and group oppression is the "normal" default condition of human relations, or Freire's (1993) naïve consciousness where oppression is an accepted way of life. Gramsci (in Brookfield, 2000) uses hegemony to explain "the way in which people are convinced to embrace dominant ideologies as always being in their own best interests" (p. 128). Brookfield explains how

The term *hegemony* describes the process whereby ideas, structures, and actions come to be seen by the majority of people as wholly natural, preordained, and working for their own good when in fact they are constructed and transmitted by powerful minority interests to protect the status quo that serves these interests so well. The subtlety of hegemony is that over time it becomes deeply embedded, part of the cultural air we breathe. One cannot peel back the layers of oppression and point the finger at an identifiable group or groups of people whom we accuse as being the instigators of a conscious conspiracy to keep people silent and disenfranchised. Instead the ideas and practices of hegemony become part and parcel of everyday life—the stock opinions, conventional wisdoms, or commonsense ways of seeing and ordering the world that people take for granted. If there is a conspiracy here, it is the conspiracy of the normal. (p. 138)

We have seen in the sociohistorical contexts of each of these women how they experienced hegemony in various guises (e.g. patriarchy, capitalism, religion), and in their stories of transformation ways in which they have freed themselves or are in the process of freeing themselves. In the stories they tell, the women (especially Alicia and Marina) describe how they used to be by using language that fits with Lane's (1962) concept of the *impoverished self*—that is, they exhibit low self-acceptance, low self-esteem, and low ego strength. But “in order to be free, [they] must first of all purge themselves of these depreciating self-images” (C. Taylor, 1994, p. 64). Outside of the figured world of AI, these women showed tremendous agency and resiliency in refusing to position themselves in dominated positions. Like the women in Holland et al.'s (1998) study, the women in this study possessed “the ability to imagine and create new ways of being” (p. 5) and participated in the act of negotiating and/or authoring hybrid spaces of possibility, transformation, and resistance (Pérez, 1999). As Villenas (2001) points out, “the resistance that occurs in direct and subtle ways in the intimacy of the home is

critically important” (p. 22). Villenas also explains that resistance does not happen as a moment, but that it is preceded by years of day-to-day resistance. These women’s stories of their pasts are littered with examples of these day-to-day resistances. Aurora escaped the agrarian poverty and gender hegemony in Mexico and literally crossed a border. Alicia challenged the counselor and the principal at her high school to allow her to enroll in the honors class. Marina hid a disability from her teachers and stayed in school through graduation.

Sigel (1989) notes, “The contemporary women’s movement has posed a challenge to patriarchal relations... Like other social movements, the feminist movement has served as an agent of political socialization... providing them with an alternative framework for viewing the world” (p. 307). Sapiro (1984) explains that norms of femininity such as docility, passivity, irrationality, and dependence are in direct conflict with those associated with the democratic participant. This alternative framework affected relationships with husbands and children, and certainly for Marina, created the possibility of another form of resistance (especially so because of her strong Christian ideology). Her context for her relationship with her first husband dictated, “your husband is your voice.” But the voice she gained through Austin Interfaith gave her the power to change her views on what a relationship with a husband could be like:

And when I started getting involved with Interfaith, and as I got to know more about having a voice... slowly, I mean, I think 3 years later, I learned that, I didn’t have to put up with this kind of relationship.

“This kind of relationship” in which “your husband is your voice” serves as a metaphor for all of the relationships these women were involved in—private, public, and

civic. Therefore, gaining voice was a major factor in becoming un-grand-inquisited. In order to gain voice (or perhaps take voice back), these women had to take voice for themselves and imbue language with their own meaning. By narrating themselves with this new personalized language, they gain power. Bakhtin (in Holland et al., 1998), explains how this process of taking language from other people's mouths works:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriating, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not after all out of a dictionary the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own (p. 172).

This "moment of appropriating" is most vividly exemplified in two words, "parent" and "leader." Verónica, who has had little interaction with organizers and has not had the opportunity to attend any actions or trainings, does not call herself a leader, and is a parent in the way that other people define the context and their own intentions for the word. For Aurora, both words are still half someone else's. She uses them without conviction and without power. When she stands at a meeting and introduces herself, she is somewhat mechanical when she says, "I am a leader with Austin Interfaith." On the other hand, through countless mediated conversations and trainings, Alicia and Marina have taken these words and made them their own. When these two women stand up and say, "I am a leader with Austin Interfaith," they not only position themselves as individuals with power, but as equals, and more importantly, these words place the typically hegemonic forces as equal to them. For Marina, Bakhtin's point is exemplified

in the concept of title and the word “parent.” As her relationship with AI deepens, “I am a parent” moves from a statement of fact to a statement of position. The narrative she grows up with, that others have titles—such as priests, principals, teachers, human resource specialists—changes when she appropriates her own title and populates it with power. Telling her story, she uses the refrain “I am a parent” often to describe episodes of liberation. For example, when she tells the story of being confronted by the principal at the school where her children attended and where she worked, Marina positions him as the grand inquisitor, and herself as grand-inquisited. But the moment she appropriates the word, she is able to free herself (and him), by stating, “I am a parent.” In the telling, these words say “I am equal to you” and “I have power like you.” These statements also tend to be followed by the action of terminating a conversation and saying, “This conversation is ending.”

In our early conversations, Alicia expressed hegemony as a glass barrier—keeping her in a state of oppression, unable to act. When describing who she feels herself to be now, she returns to the metaphor to express the freedom she has and positions herself as civically transformed:

The kind of person I used to be back then to now? I’m more assured of how I see things, because I’ve been in the middle of things, especially, education wise, that I feel very confident about speaking out more than I would have. I don’t feel like I used to feel, back then. I think I described to you, it’s like you’re looking through a glass and you want to be on the other side. I don’t feel that anymore.

Transformed Civic Identity

Marina and Alicia demonstrate political efficacy—the belief that one has some influence over political events, that when one acts, the political system responds. They demonstrate *internal* political efficacy in that they feel that they have personal control. They demonstrate *external* efficacy because they believe that their political acts are effective and that the political system is responsive (Lane, 1999). Verónica is beginning her civic transformation, and therefore demonstrates little political efficacy. Aurora has some measure of efficacy, but her civic identity differs from Marina's and Alicia's. Aurora can talk of her involvement and be specific on the details of a particular issue, but she still behaves more like a follower than a leader. She understands the importance of her story and the power she has when she stands in front of a group of elected officials, but these moments exist externally to her own actions; they are driven by others. On the other hand, Alicia's and Marina's new civic identities have become a part of who they are. They display Mezirow's (2000, p. 22) final phase: "A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective." More strongly, life is lived from the new perspective. Roseblum (1999) describes how this is enacted as a habitual disposition.

By definition, the requisites of democracy in everyday life are simple, involving competencies that anyone and everyone is capable of developing without enormous conscious effort. And they are a matter of habitual disposition rather than principle, severe obligation, or some virtue that is called for only intermittently. The competencies I have in mind are simple and in constant use. They are treating people identically and with easy spontaneity, and speaking out against ordinary injustice. (p. 72-73)

In Alicia's early narrative, the separation of East and West was very clear to her. Interactions with "them" were rare. Like Lasch (1995) she felt that "social classes speak to themselves in a dialect of their own, inaccessible to outsiders; they mingle with each other only on ceremonial occasions and official holidays" (p. 117). In her current narrative, Alicia explains how it "feels natural" when she sits down with a group of people she has perceived in the past as different and more powerful than she, and engages them in conversation as equals:

[W]hen I went to this conference, I felt very relaxed and comfortable in speaking to people... But it feels natural. It doesn't feel out of place, so in that respect, you know, I feel very good about that. It's made me be able to do that. And it doesn't matter if you're a person in a business suit because there were a lot of people in business suits. Directors of agencies and all that kind of stuff and it was, and they, I mean, they, told their name and who they were connected to just like everybody else did. So it, it made me feel real good that I was able to do that.

Marina and Alicia also demonstrate many of the qualities of an organizer that Alinsky (1989, p. 73) finds important. They use personal experience for the basis of teaching. They are curious. They are somewhat irreverent, that is, "just because this has always been the way, is this the best or right way of life? To this question, nothing is sacred" (p. 73). They have a vivid imagination, a wonderful sense of humor, and a blurred vision of a better world. They keep a free and open mind and have a distrust of dogma. They demonstrate a flexible personality that does not break when something unexpected happens. And they create the new out of the old—allowing new ideas to arise from conflict.

Marina and Alicia, and to an extent Aurora, exemplify Lippé and DuBois' (1994) Ten Arts of Democracy, which match closely the teachings of the IAF and the tenets of deliberative and participatory democracy: 1) Active listening: encouraging the speaker and searching for meaning; 2) Creative conflict: confronting others in ways that produce growth; 3) Mediation: facilitating interaction to help people in conflict hear each other; 4) Negotiation: problem solving that meets some key interests of all involved; 5) Political imagination: reimagining our futures according to our values; 6) Public dialogue: public talk on matters that concern us all; 7) Public judgment: public decision making that allows citizens to make choices they are willing to help implement; 8) Celebration and appreciation: expressing joy and appreciation for what we learn as well as what we achieve; 9) Evaluation and reflection: assessing and incorporating the lessons we learn through action; and 10) Mentoring: supportively guiding others in learning these arts of public life.

Of these criteria, the two that are most significant in terms of serving as indicators for transformative learning for civic engagement are having a political imagination and the capacity for evaluation and reflection (through action). Alicia and Marina are highly imaginative in many domains, but it is their belief in the common good through common action that is the most emblematic of a perspective change. They envision and work towards a society with a common purpose, one in which there is a “‘we’ that is an ‘I’, and an ‘I’ that is a ‘we’” (Hegel quoted in C. Taylor, 1994, p. 50). We see this in the involvement Marina and Alicia have in the community and the political arena. It is also evidenced in the way they interact with their children. When Marina’s daughters

complain that Marina's civic activities are taking her away from home, she asks them to think of the larger picture and also uses the word "we" to make them understand they too need to be active in making change:

And so that's not just always thinking about just us, - but I said, yeah, I care about you and getting your education. But what about your friends, who you say whose parents can't be there, whose parents aren't there? So it has be things that's going to help not only you, but for your friends, and, and your nephew, my grandkids, are going to be coming to these schools, you know, what are we doing to make things better for them?

Alicia gets angry with students she encounters in situations where she perceives them to be wasting the opportunities they have for education. Instead of ignoring the situation or focusing on the insular world of her own family, she shares her knowledge of hegemonic forces and how the oppressed have a responsibility to break the relationship between the inquisitor and the inquisited:

And I tell the kids themselves, you should be pounding the dag-gum doors saying, I want my education, because I want to make sure that, [she is pounding the desk with each point] I know how to read, I know how to write. And so, if anything... in my life goes wrong, I'll be able to work it out. I'll be able to handle it. But if you don't have those skills, who's going to be able to work it out? You're going to be dependent on somebody else working it out for you. Making your decisions for you. Because you're letting them do that.

For both these women, their new civic identities are not enacted in specific moments and situations but are integrated into their new ways of being. They have become leaders at the schools they are involved with. They are active in myriad continuing education programs for both students and adults. They sit on multiple committees for the district and the city. They are senior leaders with AI. In these situations, it is easy for them to take on responsibilities because of their new skills and

knowledge. A key marker of their transformation is their constant reflectivity. They are ever mindful of the importance of relationships and imagination, as Marina shares: “It’s just about conversation and just challenge you to, to imagine, and to be creative.” However, they are now leaders, and it is part of their new civic identity to challenge others to imagine. This is difficult to do. Marina explains how she has to constantly remind herself about the iron rule, and to not allow herself to do things that she should be encouraging others to do: “it’s easy to get sucked into thinking like that again.”

Succinctly, she is able to describe her own civicness, hegemonic structures, and the principals of democracy when she throws out the challenge to individuals she perceives as having marginalized voices: “Is this your church? Or is this the people’s church? Is this your school? Or is it the parent’s school?” These questions illuminate her new civic identity, but also hint at a certain independence from AI by acting outside of the organizations auspices. Through AI they have learned to negotiate and act for their own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings, rather than those uncritically assimilated from others (Mezirow, 2000). However, they have learned to not uncritically assimilate messages they receive from AI, deciding how best to organize the organizations they are members of (for example, schools) and opining on AI practices.

NON-TRANSFORMATIONS

In a conversation with an Austin Interfaith organizer discussion my research, I was asked, “What makes Alicia Aguilar different from ‘Laura Muñoz’?” Laura, the organizer explained, has “been a follower for a long time.” She is reliable, showing up at

house meetings, accountability sessions, and other events. She simultaneously translates on occasion. She shares her story. And she is able to deliver a small following. Yet she has not moved past this form of participation, where she comes through when asked, but has not yet internalized the norms and values of the IAF culture. The organizer opined that possibly her lack of growth was because Laura was not an “academic learner.” However, this characteristic would seem to describe many leaders with the organization and to include individuals who have not transformed as well as those who have.

The nature of this study was to describe transformation, and not to look for reasons why someone might not transform, so a discussion of non-transformation is somewhat of a conjecture. However, the stories of the women who have transformed compared to those who have not give possible clues as to why some individuals make the jump and some don't. As the stories of Marina and Alicia show, the transformations described in this study may take many years to complete. Therefore, it may be that Verónica will experience a transformation eventually. However, both Alicia and Marina became involved quickly and experienced significant events early on. Aurora, on the other hand, has been involved for roughly ten years but has not become an agentic person in influencing policy. All of these women have somewhat similar sociohistorical and cultural contexts and existed in a prior state of depoliticization. They have children in public schools and care deeply about their education. Because of their association with AI, they have all experienced disequilibrium and had the opportunity to experiment with new roles, develop new relationships, and explore new actions. They all began their involvement as naïve participants. They all have an understanding of how the

association depends on relationships to build power and the necessity to understand each other's stories. I believe what differentiates Alicia and Marina from Aurora and Verónica is their experience with recognition and the depth of their becoming un-grand-inquisited.

Alicia and Marina have strong and vivid stories that they use to position recognition as important events. Wortham (1999) describes how autobiographical narratives are connected to the present self:

It can also tell us something about the present self of the narrator. This is because the narrator established him or herself as the kind of person who has emerged from the past (narrated) selves, and who positions his or her present self with respect to those past selves in some characteristic way. (p. 162)

In addition, Wortham explains how an individual might choose a particular description over another to guide actions and shape self:

An autobiographical narrative has power when it foregrounds one particular description, despite other possibilities, and when that description becomes compelling enough that the narrator acts in accordance with the characteristics foregrounded in the narrative. (p. 156)

Both Marina and Alicia have vivid stories of recognition that differentiate a past, in which they had no voice, to a present in which their voice carries power. This is seen most clearly in Marina's foregrounding of a particular incident:

And so people spoke and, then we were leaving and he [an organizer] approaches me and says that, "What did you think about this meeting?" And, excuse me? As simple, [as] that question was, what I thought, - that was the first time in my whole life anybody had asked me what I thought.

At another point in her narrative, she repeats this theme: "But it would of never happened had the organizer [not] challenged me with that simple question, 'What do you think?'" Marina positions this moment as a pivotal one in which she is recognized as a

worthy and unique person, and acts accordingly from that point on. Aurora and Verónica do not have a particular story that they foreground as one in which they were recognized in such a way that they are compelled to act in “accordance to the characteristics foregrounded in the narrative.”

In contrast, when Aurora foregrounds a story of recognition, it is clearly not a narrated event that guides her actions and redefines self. She shares how she spoke at a school board meeting “hasta en inglés, y a leer en inglés, y delante del director, el superintendente [*even in English, and to read in English, and in front of the director, the superintendent*].” She is recognized by others in some fashion, but not in the way that produces the change in self that Alicia and Marina exemplify.

Aurora also differs in the way she demonstrates an understanding of hegemony and how to liberate herself by becoming un-grand-inquisited. She is able to talk of hegemonic structures such as racism with ease and knowledge and is adept at pointing out individual and institutional hegemonies. However, she does not narrate her story in a way that indicates that she feels oppressed in any way. Her autobiographical narrative is told as if the experiences she has had are normal. In short, she exemplifies a person who remains grand-inquisited.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

The focus of this study was to look at how typically marginalized Latina women transform into politically able citizens. However, as they gained power, these women not only experienced a personal transformation, but also transformed (to some extent) the

structures around them. Marina's early interactions with the principal at her children's school were patriarchal and authoritarian in nature and, as we have seen, he had her impeached as president of the PTA. But when she interacts with him years later, after her transformational learning experience, she is able to say, "I think he understood then, that I had as much power as he does. - And when he would see me, - there was respect, you know." Alicia is almost nonchalant when she relates that she had received a phone call from a school board member or city or state representative. Marina has access to venues traditionally cut off to individuals who are not members of the economic and social elite. Her name is well known in the political circles in Austin and Texas, giving both her and AI access to the political machinery.

Scheurich (1997, p. 103) outlines five "regularities" that shape the social construction of the problem of the failure of a particular group of school children. These are gender, race, class, governmentality, and professionalization. The lived experiences of the women portrayed in this study push against each of these. Given the participants in this study (women who are Latina, working class or working poor, with little formal education, and marginalized governmentally and professionally) and their stories of transformation into strong women who have crossed the racial divide (in this instance, from the East Side to the West Side), and achieved a middle class existence by the nature of their political power and their access to better jobs, it is clear that existing structures are being modified. For example, Marina's story of gaining respect from the principal exhibits both the principal's previous behavior and a new behavior. He had been behaving in a way that "[equated] the well-being or happiness or productiveness of

individuals with behaviors that reinforce[d] the social order” (Scheurich, 1997, pp. 105-106). Scheurich continues:

Though individual governmental agents apply this mentality to their areas of responsibility, they typically are not conscious that they are proliferating a social regularity. Their individual actions are commonsensical given the grid of social regularities that is constituting social life. These individual agents do not have bad intentions; they are, instead, inscribed by and, in turn, inscribing governmentality. (p. 106)

When the principal shows respect, and more importantly, when Marina perceives and understands this respect, the social order has been modified. The transformation of these women would not be complete if this were not the case. If they had only been able to identify and describe hegemony, and possibly learn skills that would have allowed them to speak at public functions and meet with decision-makers, but not had an effect on these structures, then the transformation would have been an illusion and nothing would have changed. But because they have successfully made themselves a seat at the table where they are able to modify the agenda and the outcomes, combined with the facts that they are women, Latina, from low-income communities, depoliticized, and apart from the professional class—they have successfully experienced change themselves while promoting change in the structures that have oppressed them in the past. As Scott (2003b) explains, “The social construction of transformation coemerges in the learner and the setting, that is, the personal and the social in dialectical relationship transform” (p. 275).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The common stories and the unique experiences detailed in the portraits in chapter 4, in conjunction with the theory of transformative learning and the learning environment

provided by the IAF, formed the basis on which to build the model presented in this chapter. The model was presented using five general concepts: 1) historical, sociocultural, and personal contexts; 2) a prior state of depoliticization; 3) two foundational processes including the constant presence of disequilibria and the ongoing exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; 4) four mediated experiences including naïve participation, being recognized, understanding relationships, and becoming un-grand-inquisited; and 5) the final state of a transformed civic identity.

As is the case with any model, this one suggests a variety of limitations. By delineating categories (for example, depoliticized or being recognized), the model may appear overly reductive, implying some sort of developmental order for civic transformation. It is difficult to argue this point, but several techniques were used to mitigate reductivity. First, the entire process has been described as ongoing, implying a fluid, spiral, and, at times, messy movement in and out of categories. None of the concepts happened in a clear-cut instance. For example, participants did not suddenly become un-grand-inquisited. Second, the context has been very narrowly defined. Terming a participant naïve is not a general categorization, but one that speaks to political efficacy and nothing else. It is not meant to be a deficit label. A participant might be naïve in one realm, yet expert in another. Indeed, Aurora might not fit the conception of “transformed” as defined herein, but it would be hard to argue that she could not be considered transformed in other conceptions of the word. Third, the mediated processes were presented by necessity in a certain order, yet they do not have to be experienced in that way. Indeed, it is possible to imagine concepts occurring in a

different “order,” or more obviously, overlapping in time and in the experiences that pushed transformation forward. Finally, the word “processes” has been used to move away from concepts like “stages” and “phases” which bring with them unwanted images of order and sequence.

It is hoped that by presenting the model and its limitations, a more holistic view of the transformation these women experienced can be envisioned, one in which the parts of the model can be understood as contributing to the significance of the whole.

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARIES, INTERPRETATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter first presents a summary of the study, the research methods, and the findings. This section is followed by a review of the research questions and accompanying interpretation. Implications for theory, practice, policy, and future research are presented followed by a conclusion.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this research was to develop a better understanding of the process of transformation of marginalized and disempowered parents into citizens active in the formulation of educational policy. Despite vocal support for decentralization and increased support for parental involvement in school reform issues (Epstein, 2001), educational policy is created in subsystems outside the purview of public opinion (Stone et al., 2001). Members of the policy elite—people who manage the economy, who have privileged access to the media and to political officials, who control foundations, and who lead our city and state education agencies and universities—have disproportionate authority over educational reform. This problem is exacerbated by the current democratic climate of minimal political participation—especially by members of minority and low income communities (Conway, 2000; Gee, 2001)—and declining civic and social institutions that promote social capital (Putman, 1995, 2000). However, when individuals recognize the political character of public education and mobilize as a group, they are able to drive issues through the system that have a direct impact on their own lives and on

the schools their children attend (Shirley, 1997; Stone, 1998). For this civic mobilization to be successful, a diverse citizenry is required to reconcile, put aside, and in some manner accommodate their differences in order to pursue common well-being and create civic capacity in which there exists a commitment of physical, personal, and communal resources along with a shared understanding (Stone et al., 2001). It also involves a more public and collective mediation among disparate interests and an integral relationship to formal institutions of governance. Civic capacity differentiates itself from social capital in that social capital is “largely the unconscious byproduct of everyday interactions. Civic capacity is the conscious creation of actors seeking to establish a context in which extraordinary problem solving can occur” (Stone et al., 2001, p. 156). Civic capacity also lends itself to a deliberative style of democracy in which legitimate lawmaking issues from the public deliberation of citizens (Bohman & Rehg, 1997).

Understanding how “citizen activists are made, not born” (Frantzich, 1999, p. 198), requires an understanding of political socialization and ways in which individuals acquire their political orientations including knowledge, feelings, and evaluations about the political world (R. Dawson et al., 1977). Political socialization is often seen as a gradual, incremental, and lifelong process (Steckenrider & Cutler, 1989) that happens *to* people, that is, that people are acted upon. However, “political socialization as cultural transmission and as individual learning—are complementary” (Richard Dawson & Prewitt, 1969, p. 13).

Individuals change as they interact with socializing experiences. Sapiro (1984) maintains that “the process of political integration involves an alteration of ‘webs of

significance,' that is, change in an individual's understanding of and sense of relationship to the political system. In order to be a full-fledged citizen of a democratic polity, one must see at least some of the connections between government and politics and one's own life" (p. 84). Generalizing political learning to adult learning theory, a connection can be made to Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning theory. Mezirow terms these connections *frames of reference* and explains that they can be transformed through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which individuals base their interpretations, beliefs, habits of mind, and points of view. Transformative learning then, for Mezirow,

Refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7-8)

Mezirow details ten phases of meaning that occur during transformation: 1) a disorienting dilemma; 2) self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame; 3) a critical assessment of assumptions; 4) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change; 5) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; 6) planning a course of action; 7) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; 8) provisional trying of new roles; 9) building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and 10) a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

Community organizing is one context in which individuals may be involved in constructive discourse and critical reflection that may result in transformative learning to develop a political and civic identity. As Scott (2003a) maintains, “Organizing people is a fertile place for adult transformation as the imagination and psychic structures are agitated to vision society in another way” (p. 1). Scott expands Mezirow in an important way by explaining how it is within the context of relationships in an organization that social and personal transformation occurs. Austin Interfaith (AI) is an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a national network of organizers that has been organizing in the United States for over 60 years. Through extensive one-on-one conversations; small group discussions (house meetings); cross- city, state, and national meetings; and public accountability sessions with elected officials; local mediating institutions such as congregations, unions, and schools are organized into a broad based organization (BBO)—an organization of organizations. A BBO strengthens mediating institutions, transforms the people in these institutions, and transforms the society to attempt to bring the civil society sector into balance with the market and the state. Individuals from typically marginalized communities who show potential leadership skills are trained informally and formally to share their personal stories as a basis to create relationships and organized power. This power may take years to form, but by building upon small victories, the various affiliates of the IAF have achieved successes in a variety of areas including housing, job training, and city services. One of the Texas IAF’s accomplishments has been the creation of the Alliance School Initiative, in which public schools partner with local IAF affiliates. Through this partnership, organizers

work with parents, teachers, and community members to pressure district, city, and state bureaucracies for services and programs, including after school programs, parent specialists, reading recovery programs, parent job and language education programs, smaller classrooms, and sixth grade elementary programs to get students into the pipeline to attend magnet middle schools. A guiding principle of the IAF is power [or politics] before program. For this to take place, organizers are dependent on identifying leaders and facilitating their transformations into civically active individuals.

Much research and writing has been generated about political participation, socialization, and forms of civic association such as social capital, but little inquiry has examined the process of transformation itself, especially for marginalized and politically disempowered individuals. To add to the understanding of political transformation in the context of educational policymaking, a qualitative methodology involving a short-term ethnographic study combining developmental and sociocultural perspectives was used (Sigel, 1989).

Understanding the transformation of marginalized individuals into politically active citizens is the primary focus of this study. In this chapter, I first review the research methods used in this project. I then provide a summary of the findings followed by an interpretation guided by the study's research questions. The next section details implications of this research for theory, practice, policy, and future research. The chapter ends with concluding remarks.

Research Methods

For the purpose of this dissertation, an ethnographic approach to qualitative research was used. Research took place in Austin, Texas during the fall of 2001 and between November 2002 and January 2004. Using a snowball sampling technique, ten Latina mothers were identified who met the following criteria: they have or have had a child in an Alliance school, they are working-class or low-income, they are not college graduates, they have participated in at least one Austin Interfaith event, and they had little or no political activity prior to their relationship with AI. The participants were selected to serve as “information rich” participants in order to provide information on key and critical experiences (Plummer, 2001) and to allow for contextualized observation in a variety of socio-structural environments (Hritzuk & Park, 2000). In addition to the criteria elaborated above, participants were selected who represent four levels of participation with AI: those who have been heavily involved with the organization for many years and are politically active in influencing educational policy, those who have been identified as leaders and are active with the organization, those who have attended some Austin Interfaith activities but have not been identified as leaders; and those who were involved, but terminated their involvement.

Data was gathered through interviews, participant observations, and the collection of documents. Interviews were conducted using a general interview guide approach and were semi-structured (Davies, 1999; Patton, 1990). The interviews were conducted in the language of choice by the participant, either Spanish, English, or both. All interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed. In addition, fieldnotes were taken to augment

the recorded interviews. Depending on their level of participation with AI, participants were formally interviewed between one and three times. Life histories were uncovered during the first interview in order to develop a contextualized understanding of the participant's human phenomena and experience (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Topics covered during these conversations were the participant's views on democracy, politics, participation, and their democratic theories. In addition, the conversations were used to help uncover their experiences with direct and indirect forms of political socialization and any skills, knowledge, and strategies they might have that transferred into their new civic identities. Observations were conducted in the participants' homes; in their communities; and at Austin Interfaith activities including house meetings, committee meetings, accountability sessions, and public meetings. These observations were recorded in a regular and systematic fashion in order to create an accumulated written record (Emerson et al., 1995).

Accumulating data were processed by using initial memos for discrete phenomena; theoretical memos for ideas, insights, and connections; and integrative memos to clarify and link analytic themes and categories (Emerson et al., 1995). Analysis occurred in several phases. Data was organized and sorted and general concepts were discovered using the process of open coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Davies, 1999; Emerson et al., 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Weiss, 1994). Coding was accomplished using the qualitative software package Nvivo 2.0. Eventually, coding of initial sources of data, such as interview transcripts and fieldnotes, gave way to the reading and coding of excerpt files—collections from a variety of sources dealing with the same issue (Weiss,

1994). Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a theory grounded in the data began to emerge that plausibly explained relationships among concepts and sets of concepts. Using the software, a matrix intersection of the excerpt files and individual participants was generated to create a repository of participant vignettes. These files became the source of data to present the findings in the form of portraits, in order to “capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). Of the ten participants, four were selected that best represent the spectrum of political involvement and transformation. Two women could be considered to have experienced transformative learning and were civically active. One had been active for many years, but had not yet become civically engaged. One had attended only a few meetings and had not had significant contact with the organization.

Trustworthiness was insured through prolonged engagement and persistent observation; by triangulating data between multiple sources; by using colleagues, advisors, and members of the organizing community to discuss emerging theory; and by referential adequacy, in which the six remaining cases not used in the final findings served to test theory. Trustworthiness was also insured by reflecting on the process, my relationship with the participants, and on my own biases.

The following five questions guided the data collection and data analysis processes:

- a. What changes in civic identity do parents undergo as they transform into citizens active in the formulation of educational policies at the district, city, and state levels?
- b. What strategies do parents use to become politically active in the context of educational policy formation at the district, city, and state levels?
- c. How do parents transform innate skills and knowledge into competencies necessary for political action?
- d. What experiences and attitudes turn a nonpolitical parent into a politically active citizen?
- e. What resources do parents draw on as they become politically active in the context of educational policy formation at the district, city, and state levels?

Findings

Chapter 4 profiled four Latina mothers' voices and their varied stories of transformation. Although each of their sociohistorical contexts was different, all of them experienced hegemony in some guise or other. Most pertinent to this study was how their early socialization had in effect excluded them from political participation. Two of the women had experienced transformations, and their stories detail a pre-politically active identity and experience of transformation into civically active women involved in promoting civic capacity. Their stories also illustrate ways in which they critically assessed their assumptions in order to gain power and counter hegemony. The stories of the two women who had not experienced total transformative learning provide evidence

of a type of naïve participation and a lack of criticality that hampered their efforts to experience a total transformation (this is not to say that it may not happen in the future) into civically active women. Their combined stories suggest a model of transformation which will be summarized in the next section.

Transformation

Chapter 5 outlined a model consisting of five general concepts used to describe the transformation that these women experienced including the relevant contexts; a prior state of depoliticization; two foundational processes, four mediated processes, and a description of the final state of transformed civic identity.

Context

These transformations did not occur independently of these women's personal, historical, and sociocultural contexts. Life histories, gender, race, class, culture, religion, and educational levels all intersected with the situations that placed them in particular places and times (e.g. schools and congregations) to create circumstances where participants "were ready for change due to former critical events, personal goals, or prior intercultural experiences" (E. W. Taylor, 2000, p. 309). However, these transformations occurred outside of their daily context, that is, they were "decontextualized from the dominant messages playing in their lives" (Edwards, 1997, p. 188). This decontextualization occurred through their association with Austin Interfaith, which provided very "particular environmental and cultural forces" (Daloz, 2000, p. 104) that moved them from their daily context into a world of one-on-one meetings, house

meetings, informal and formal training, interactions with educational policymaking mechanisms, and associations with elected officials and other decisionmakers. Prior and current contexts, then, were instrumental in the transformation process.

Depoliticization

Prior to transformation, these women refrained from political involvement. As Sigel (1989) writes, pressures on members of ethnic, religious, or social groups (so-called disadvantaged groups) judged by society to be inferior or less worthy, often run the risk of incorporating this negative judgment into their self-image. They respond by refraining from active political involvement, and feel the sense of “learned helplessness” (p. 460).

Deluca calls this depoliticization:

The indefinite suspension of the ability to achieve and sustain political intentions due to the tightly spun web of depoliticizing ideology, language, social psychology, and technological and economic hegemony which together form a mutually constituting and reinforcing system that for all practical purposes is closed. (Quoted in Engel, 2000, p. 47)

Foundational processes

The historical, sociocultural, and personal contexts along with these women’s depoliticized identities form the basis from which they began their transformations. These transformations were not sudden, dramatic, and reorienting (epochal) but rather incremental, involving a “progressive series of transformations in related points of view that culminate in a transformation in habit of mind” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 21). Two processes were foundational to this transformation, not occurring as discrete phases but as constant events in these women’s lives, even for those who have civically transformed. First, “social action disrupts, bothers, and interferes with the established internal

structures of the psyche as well as external structures in the world, and it is this constant state of disequilibrium that supports transformation” (Scott, 2003b, p. 280). These disruptions began with the first request to attend a meeting and continued throughout and beyond the transformational process. Organizers agitated leaders in a variety of ways, including asking them to share stories, exposing them to new information, requiring them to speak in public, and uncovering hegemonic structures of which they were unaware. For example, during formal training, using a Socratic style of conversation, organizers lead discussions around polarities such as self-interest—self-sacrifice, power—love, change—unity; relational power—unilateral power; and imagination—hope. Keeping leaders in a constant state of disequilibrium is a mechanism by which organizing groups keep the transformational process moving forward.

Second, exploration of new roles, relationships, and actions was not a discrete phase as posited by Mezirow (2000), but a continual process. The decontextualization that these women experienced was so profound that the first interaction with AI involved them with people who previously had not been a part of their world, such as teachers, principals, and school board members; they attended meetings where they were asked their opinions and thoughts on future action; and they were placed a new role as a representative of their community to other members in the community as well as to the greater world, including district, city, and state bureaucracies. Each new role, relationship, and action contributed to a modification in civic identity. As Holland et al. (1998) explain, each moment is transformed by that moment. Transformation is a “continuing cultural production: a development, or interlocking genesis, that is actually a

codevelopment of identities, discourses, embodiments, and imagined worlds that inform each moment of joint production and are themselves transformed by that moment” (p. vii).

Mediated processes

The relationship between the organizer and the leader can be seen from an educational standpoint as a teacher-student or mentor-mentee type of relationship, what Mezirow (1997) calls facilitators or provocateurs. Articulating Vygotsky and Bakhtin, Holland et al (1998) explain human life “as necessarily mediated; as produced by social interchange among persons whose activity, however circumscribed by material and social circumstances, and however cast in forms of discursive and practical genres, nonetheless remakes these conditions” (p. viii). Within a social interchange, organizers agitate leaders and enforce the iron rule, in which leaders are encouraged to do for themselves. The “IAF organizations are the instruments that let people practice and evaluate public life in collectives” (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 71). This mediation helped move leaders through four discrete processes: naïve participation, recognition, communicative learning, and becoming un-grand-inquisited.

All four women began their involvement with AI at the request of an organizer to attend a meeting but with little understanding of why they were asked, in some cases what the nature of the meeting was about, and what AI was or the organization’s purpose. Exhibiting Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, their development appeared first on the social level [between people], and later on the individual level [inside a person] (in

Holland et al., 1998). Before behaving on the social level, these women exhibited Freire's naïve consciousness stage, in which "there is little awareness of inward psychological or spiritual knowledge of one's inner self. Without words to abstract meaning, the state or activity characterized by sensation, emotion, volition, or thought is arrested.... One knows and feels something, but it cannot be articulated" (Scott, 2003b, p. 278). There is not a clear juncture to indicate when the participants moved from naïve participation to becoming self-authored civic beings; rather the indication is that it is more of an ongoing process punctuated by two liberation events. First, by listening to the organizers, and sharing their stories with other leaders, the women began to liberate themselves from the authority of the depoliticizing discourse to which they had been exposed. Second, as they matured in their transformations, they found their own voice as differentiated from that of the IAF.

The second mediated process these women experienced was being recognized. Their political identities had been misrecognized through the oppressive force of depoliticization "imprisoning [them] in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (C. Taylor, 1994, p. 25). In general, this imprisonment was exemplified by a lack of voice, and the recognition of their voices was a key driver for their transformations. One way the IAF recognizes voices and humanness is by creating a dialogic relationship with potential leaders. Taylor (1994) explains: "This crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally *dialogical* character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression" (p. 32). Taylor elaborates four characteristics of

recognition that can be seen in the stories of the more transformed women. By being recognized as unique individuals, they began to feel *worthy*; by sharing their stories and realizing they have something unique to say, they feel *original*; by being treated with respect, they gain *dignity* and understand how a relationship can be based on *reciprocity*.

Implied in the process of being recognized is a deep understanding of relationships, the third mediated process. For these women, their coming to understand the power and necessity of relationships was an important growth process. This understanding manifested itself in several ways including the sharing of stories, differentiating types of relationships, and the element of trust. By sharing stories, “There is movement out of personal hurts, into collective hurts, as similarities are seen and personal issues in family histories are disclosed” (2003b, p. 282). Some of the similarities that are uncovered reveal common agendas, and it is the mixing of concerns and agendas that creates power (Chambers & Cowan, 2003). However, the public persona must be able to understand public relationships: “Public relationships involve the exercise of power, *quid pro quo*. They are not about unconditional private loyalties but rather about making and keeping public promises, initiating, compromising, and accountability” (Chambers & Cowan, 2003, p. 74). However, these are not conflictual relationships, but ones built on trust, especially between leader and organizer. As potential leaders become more involved, they spend an increasing amount of time in individual meetings with their primary organizer. It is in these intimate settings that trust is built: “It is through building trusting relationships that learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal

with learning on an affective level, which is essential for managing the threatening and emotionally charged experience of transformation” (E. W. Taylor, 2000, p. 308).

Finally, serving as mediators, the organizers helped the leaders become un-grand-inquisited. By reading and discussing the story of the Grand Inquisitor from Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, organizers help leaders begin to see the world in a different way, one in which some people are forced to exist as oppressors (the grand inquisitor) while others believe that they are safer and freer by living under this hegemonic structure. This lesson is one of the core tenets of both the IAF and transformative learning theory, which sees transformative learning as

the extent to which it exposes the social and cultural embeddedness and taken-for-granted assumptions in which the self is located; explore[s] the interests served by the continuation of the self thus positioned; incite[s] a refusal to be positioned in this way when the interests served are those of domination and oppression; and encourage[s] alternative readings of the text of experience. (Tenant quoted in Mezirow, 2000, p. 24)

As they integrate this message, the women challenge patriarchal, social, cultural, and political hegemonies. One example of this challenge is their changing views of others who have authority through owning a title (e.g. principal, governor) and claiming a title of their own. By taking the title “parent” or “leader” and claiming in public “I am a parent” or “I am a leader” these women take the word from “other people’s mouths.” They appropriate the words and populate them with their own intentions, their own accents, adapting them to their own semantic and expressive intentions (Bakhtin in Holland et al., 1998, p. 172). They do more than become aware of hegemonic structures; they take power and use it to create change, freeing both themselves and the oppressors.

Transformed civic identity

The women who have transformed into civic individuals demonstrate political efficacy—the belief that one has some influence over political events, that when one acts, the political system responds. They demonstrate *internal* political efficacy in that they feel that they have personal control. They demonstrate *external* efficacy because they believe that their political acts are effective and that the political system is responsive (Lane, 1999). They exemplify Lappé and DuBois’ (1994) Ten Arts of Democracy, which match closely the teachings of the IAF and the tenets of deliberative and participatory democracy: 1) Active listening: encouraging the speaker and searching for meaning, 2) Creative conflict: confronting others in ways that produce growth, 3) Mediation: facilitating interaction to help people in conflict hear each other, 4) Negotiation: problem solving that meets some key interests of all involved, 5) Political imagination: reimagining our futures according to our values, 6) Public dialogue: public talk on matters that concern us all, 7) Public judgment: public decision making that allows citizens to make choices they are willing to help implement, 8) Celebration and appreciation: expressing joy and appreciation for what we learn as well as what we achieve, 9) Evaluation and reflection: assessing and incorporating the lessons we learn through action, and 10) Mentoring: supportively guiding others in learning these arts of public life. The two women who have become civically engaged have integrated these markers and the teachings of the IAF into their new ways of being. They are leaders in the schools they are involved with, in their churches (for those who attend), with adult and young adult education, on the boards they sit on, in the district and city committees

they sit on, and with AI. Most significantly, they have a political imagination and the capacity for evaluation and reflection through action. In addition, these women are able to think independently of AI, making decisions on how to organize in their respective institutions and grow power in communities not touched by AI.

INTERPRETATION

This research sought to describe the transformation of Latina mothers living in marginalized communities who become civically engaged in educational policy. The study was guided by five research questions which will serve as a framework to interpret the findings.

Research question #1—Changes in Civic Identity

What changes in civic identity do parents undergo as they transform into citizens active in the formulation of educational policies at the district, city, and state levels?

The women who experienced transformative learning experiences displayed changes in their civic identities in a variety of ways. Petrausch (2002) uncovered five “categories” in his work with individuals belonging to Toastmasters International which included: from silence to having a voice; from follower to leader; from self-doubt to courage to act; from non-involvement to active engagement; from self-orientation to caring for others; and leader within. The womens’ portraits and the analysis outlined in Chapter 5 uncover some changes which are similar, but others unique to the particular context. The more transformed of these women exhibited change in four “dimensions”: movement from follower to leader; from being unheard to being heard; from an

individual focus to a community focus; and from being depoliticized to becoming civically engaged.

The most observable change in the two women who had experienced transformations was in the dimension of moving from follower to leader, which was not observable in the other two women. Regarding the IAF norms for a primary leader, they exhibit interest in developing self and relationships. They understand the need for power—that without power, nothing gets done. They are willing to wait on their own issue and work on others while they build relationships and gain power. Primary leaders identify other leaders and tend to be visionaries. They also move into positions that allow them to act as leaders, such as becoming parent specialists in public schools, running job-training programs, organizing English and civic classes for adults, and serving on boards for city and state initiatives and non-profit organizations. In addition to acting as leaders, these women are recognized as leaders. They have access to city, district, state, and federal lawmakers and decision makers who know them by name and who will call them when they need persons to sit on committees and when they desire access to the communities that these women represent. Finally, they are continually reflective and constantly critiquing themselves. Their capabilities as leaders emerge when they stop themselves from solving problems posed to them and enact the iron rule, requiring others to do for themselves.

Although these women spoke often of the importance of gaining voice as a symbol of power and recognition, it was their movement from being unheard to being heard that served as a marker for a change in identity, especially in the realm of

educational policymaking. As outlined in the introduction, individuals from marginalized communities—especially low-income, poorly educated, Latina women—are not heard in the making of educational policy. These women understand the difference between being listened to and being heard. They are able to trace their voices from inception to implementation. For example, both women were involved in an effort that determined that health issues were the primary cause of students at a particular elementary school not performing well. Continually rebuffed by district and city officials, these two women participated in many individual, house, and planning meetings that eventually led to an on-site clinic being constructed at the school, creating both a much-improved school and a community with clear purpose and identity. More subtly, but perhaps more importantly, these women are not only heard, but they expect to be heard. When faced with situations of power and exclusion, they do not cower or back down, but work gently and sometimes not-so-gently to ensure that their message is heard. This aspect of their new identity is perhaps most public when they serve as the “pinners” at accountability sessions, repeatedly asking elected officials if they will support the agenda they have been presented with until these officials move from making speeches and providing elusive responses to emphatically saying “yes I will.”

The more transformed women use the word “we” when they discuss problems that they are investigating and issues for which they are fighting. They criticize “activists” for making a lot of noise but not representing a constituency. When asked for help from others, their response is to request the person to come back when they have a group of people willing to work on the issue. They are willing to sacrifice time with their

husbands and children and the norms of motherhood and wifehood that they have grown up with in order to work on issues that they understand will help everyone in the long run. When they identified issues at the school in which their children were enrolled, they pushed the issue to a district-wide focus knowing that a solution would benefit all children.

As we have seen, liberating themselves from hegemonic structures was a key aspect in these women's identity shifts. It was not only important to be able to identify these structures, but to become un-grand-inquisited in such a way that they were able to work within the structures to create change for their communities as well as to change the hegemonic structures themselves. Most pertinent to the focus of this study is how these women moved from being depoliticized to becoming civically engaged (although it could be argued that politics and power are necessary to combat any type of hegemony). For these women, moving out of a state that affects a vast majority of U.S. citizens (exemplified by the low levels of voter participation in local affairs), and especially those from marginalized communities toward being persons who spend much of their time in conversation and action (including get-out-the-vote campaigns) is a titanic shift. The women who have become civically engaged cannot imagine themselves any other way. They use the word "responsibility" to describe not only their motivation for action, but also what democracy and participation mean to them and what these concepts should mean to every person living in a democracy. They understand that their politicalness is their birthright, that most people have lost it, and that it must be regained for all. They understand that the Spanish word for power, "poder," means, "to be able to." Power,

then, is not something to be critiqued and not something that we all should be attempting to eradicate. However, they also understand that it is not something that can be bestowed by others—those with power “empowering” those without. Power must be taken and created; it is not a zero-sum factor. They know that they need to work within the accepted power politics that are in existence but not to go to these structures *for* a decision but *with* a decision. They know that power precedes program. Getting 500 people to demonstrate outside the state capitol is not going to affect the policy agenda. They know that it may take years of conversations and building relationships to identify self-interests that can coalesce around a particular issue and drive civic mobilization to create change. Finally, they are able to counter arguments that the U.S. citizenry is apathetic or excluded from the political process by their political behavior and the successes of which they have had a part.

Research question #2—Strategies Used

What strategies do parents use to become politically active in the context of educational policy formation at the district, city, and state levels?

For Mezirow (2000), a transformative learning experience involves overcoming situational, emotional, and informational constraints and requires that the learner make an informed and reflective decision to act on his or her reflective insight (p. 23). The women who participated in this study used several strategies to overcome constraints in order to promote their continued growth. Chief among these was their ongoing decision to maintain their association with AI. This is not a trivial decision. In a given year, AI attracts hundreds of individuals to house meetings and actions. Of these, only a few are

identified as potential leaders. Organizers work with these individuals and provide support, but most of them relegate themselves to minor involvement or drop out altogether. Those who remain active commit themselves to many one-on-one meetings, house meetings, planning meetings, research actions, accountability sessions, and one, two, five, and ten day training. Once these women began their journey to become politically active, they understood that their continued involvement was the only way they could ensure growth.

However, this commitment required them to use strategies to accommodate the time and organizing effort required. One of these was making modifications to their home and work environments. As we have seen, several of these women chose to break with their cultural traditions that mandated that they be at home to receive their husbands and children and to provide a clean home and food on the table. Some women were able to accommodate this tension by including their spouses and children in some of the AI activities. More often, they made the choice to be home less often, requiring others to care for each other or take care of themselves. The most serious strategy used was to divorce husbands who were intolerant and at times abusive, jealous of their relationship with AI.

Another strategy some of these women used was to integrate themselves into environments associated with AI. The mothers wishing to learn English enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that had been begun and maintained through AI organizing efforts. Those who spoke English taught these classes. Two of the women have worked in successive positions associated with AI such as working as parent

specialist at local area public schools, working for an adult job-training program, and managing after-school programs. One works in the ministry that her church created to work with AI. In putting themselves in these positions, the women have been able to find solid employment and career paths that both require them to be involved with AI (for example: by the constant need to secure state funding) and give them the flexibility to remain involved because the jobs have components to them that allow them the time to continue their involvement.

Putting themselves in jobs that are inherently political is a strategy to remain political. But for the more transformed of these women, a component of their civic identity is to be agitating, always stirring the pot. These women have an acute sense for social justice and understand their own power and how others can create power. These two factors combine to motivate proactive behavior to make change. When they encounter individuals and institutions acting with unilateral power, they speak up and automatically begin to gather others who share an interest in the situation. On the other hand, when they encounter individuals who have accepted an oppressed lot in life, they enact the iron rule and guide them toward acting in their own behalf. In short, being a political being is part of their nature, and getting themselves into situations that are inherently political is a strategy to ensure involvement.

Research question #3—Innate Skills and Knowledge

How do parents transform innate skills and knowledge into competencies necessary for political action?

We have seen how these women's sociohistorical contexts were dominated by hegemonic structures that excluded them from educational, economic, and political opportunities. However, we have also seen how these women were able to transform into civically active individuals who are able to work within the hegemonic structures to create change. The profiles of each of the women, especially of the two who experienced a transformative learning event, provide detailed stories that help answer: "Why do so many theorists take mature, independent thinkers as the subjects of their theories without any mention of how they got that way?" (Belenky & Stanton, 2000, p. 75). Clearly, the mentoring and learning environment that AI provided these women was instrumental in facilitating their change. However, it is also clear that these women brought skills and knowledge into the new setting that enhanced their learning capabilities, their transformations, and their successes as leaders, what Moll et al. (1992, p. 133) term "funds of knowledge" to refer to "these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being." Indeed, the women who were identified as potential leaders at the beginning of their association with the organization were recognized because of inherent traits that were noticed by organizers or individuals at the schools or churches they were involved with.

These women possess specific funds of knowledge that are useful for the purposes of organizing people around issues that affect their communities. First, they are part of social networks that interconnect them with their social environments (Moll et al., 1992). Second, they have a vast array of knowledge and skills that they use in their lives. These

include economic knowledge such as renting or owning homes, securing loans, consumer awareness, and transportation costs; legal knowledge such as immigration laws and labor laws; health knowledge such as health providers, costs, and city, state, and government programs; religious knowledge; and educational knowledge such as the governance models of schools and districts, and how to move their children to a school out of their neighborhood. Third, they have negotiating skills accumulated from a lifetime of managing change and difficulty. Finally, they have an understanding of power—who has it and who does not—and in some cases a sophisticated comprehension of social and cultural factors that maintain people from their social milieu in a state of oppression.

One of the necessary qualities of a leader is the ability to speak in public, which requires a variety of skills. When leaders are asked to share stories, they must first write down what they plan to say. Although the organizer will work with them to refine their message, perfect their delivery, and be conscious of timing, the leaders write their stories, listen to critique, edit, and practice. Often without ever having a prior experience, they are able to stand up in front of a group of people (these first speeches can be in front of crowds as big as 500 individuals) and deliver an impassioned and forceful speech. They work from notes, but they also depend on their memories to guide what they are saying, and to keep the anger and the passion readily available as a motivator to move beyond fear.

These women also have an intuitive understanding of the etiquette required in a formal meeting situation. They listen and observe. They take notes. They frame their arguments and speak with respect. They are aware of the focus for the meeting and the

outcome. They know how to speak to the person holding the authority. They bring with them a public persona that provides a structure on to which the organizer can build power and accountability.

An important doctrine of the IAF is to not patronize leaders. This is perhaps most evident in the organization's approach to expose individuals to new information and ideas through reading and group discussions. As discussed in chapter 2, reading is an integral part of learning, and is required for all trainings and many smaller meetings and actions. Material is culled from a wide variety of sources including academia, news media, and literature in general and covers a wide variety of topics including economics, power, politics, religion, philosophy, ethics, sociology, cultural studies, community organizing, and education. Leaders are not trained to read, and are not assisted in reading (other than being provided translated versions when available or having someone translate the material as they read). Regardless of their formal educational level (which for some may not exceed the 3rd grade), individuals read carefully, underlining key passages and writing notes in the margin. Discussing what they have read, they are able to highlight points they find intriguing or important, and participate in discussions of what the main messages of the reading might be and why this particular piece was selected. To summarize, these individuals bring with them the ability to read and synthesize complex material.

Research question #4—Experiences and Attitudes

What experiences and attitudes turn a nonpolitical parent into a politically active citizen?

Clearly, the overarching experience that turned the participants in this study into politically active citizens was their involvement with AI, an organization whose purpose is to create political leaders. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, this specific context placed these individuals in a constant state of disequilibrium with opportunities to explore new roles, establish new relationships, and act in new ways. They began as naïve participants, but by being recognized as people who matter at the same time that hegemonic structures were being revealed to them, they were able to gain power to work within existing structures to affect change. Although the specific training that these parents were exposed to was integral to their transformation, it was the experiential learning that facilitated their change. They learned by doing. Relationships were created by the continuing conversations in one-on-one meetings and house meetings. Public speaking was taught by giving public speeches. Political skills were honed by interacting with decision makers and elected officials such as school board members and superintendents. Understanding power relationships in a given institution (e.g. a school or a city) was learned by doing a power analysis on that institution. Challenging elected officials to be accountable was done by pinning them in public. Understanding how to be critically self-reflexive was learned by self and group critique after each public action. Facilitating a meeting was learned by both participating in meetings and running meetings. In short, the experiential learning environment that the IAF promotes *is* the experience that turned these women into politically active parents.

Core to these experiences and to the women's change was the opportunity to taste power, generally happening while giving a speech to a large group of people, and having

the power elite respond. For these individuals, typically marginalized and silent, such moments were profound, but they were not the moments in which that they actually gained power. This moment occurred when were able to appropriate language from other people's mouths and populate it with their own intentions (Bakhtin in Holland et al., 1998). Specifically, it was when they could say, with conviction and absolute certainty, "I am a parent" or "I am a leader with Austin Interfaith." It is in these moments of production that they are able to free themselves as the oppressed and at the same instant free the oppressors (Freire, 1993).

Experiences outside of the purview of AI also contributed to these women's transformations. As the participant profiles show, growing up in poverty and in marginalized situations placed these women in a context from which a transformation was possible. These contexts included both a political aspect and a sociocultural one. Some of these women had challenged institutions before their involvement with AI, but it was the lessons they learned from the organization in the political arena that tended to have dramatic effects in other areas of their lives. These outside experiences contributed to their sense of power and agency and pushed their transformations forward. The most significant example of how outside experiences contributed to change in their lives is how some of these women challenged the patriarchal hegemony in their lives, such as standing up to their husbands (and in some cases, divorcing them), pushing back against principals, and challenging their priests.

Research question #5—Resources Used

What resources do parents draw on as they become politically active in the context of educational policy formation at the district, city, and state levels?

Increasing involvement with AI created a more complex lifestyle for these women, requiring modifications to their lifestyles and behavior. Being a leader required attending many meetings and actions at inconsistent and sometimes odd hours. Sometimes, there was advanced notice, sometimes not. The more seasoned leaders were involved in a variety of issues requiring methods to manage information. To manage their new civic identities, these women drew upon resources available to them and learned to identify new ones as needed. In a general sense, these resources were used to aid logistically in managing their lives, but these women also used other leaders or organizers as a means to sustain their transformations.

A key logistical resource these women learned to manage was time. At a most basic level, these women committed themselves to spending much of their discretionary time working with AI, including weeknight evenings, time during the weekend, and occasional travel with the organization and out-of-town training (several participants attended the national ten-day training). Many of their individual meetings occurred during lunch breaks at their jobs. More significantly, several of these women chose to spend time with AI at the expense of time with their families, causing tension and stress with husbands and children. At the same time, family members as well as friends and neighbors served as support networks, mostly by providing transportation but often attending meetings to witness an event such as speech-making, but also because they had

been committed to attend by the leaders (who must provide a following at public events). Leaders are also adept at finding locations for one-on-one meetings and house meetings; they are comfortable at restaurants, public libraries, church meeting rooms, picnic tables, an empty classroom, or their own homes. These women also all used some type of agenda to keep track of appointments and contact information. Finally, the more transformed women were studious notetakers, able to recover information from previous entries and to keep track of information from the many issues they were involved with.

The most important resource these women used was AI itself, which became for them an indispensable support system, what Welch calls “communities of ‘solidarity, resistance, and persistence’” (quoted in Daloz, 2000, p. 117). At the personal level, leaders talked to organizers in times of need and difficulty. They also used them as resources when they began efforts independent of AI to organize people around issues in the organizations they were a part of, such as schools and churches. Finally, by becoming members of the AI community, they had access to a broad range of people and institutions. Two of the women in this study eventually became employed in a variety of venues because of their association with the organization.

IMPLICATIONS

This section will elaborate on the implications to the framework outlined in Figure 1 followed by implications to theory, practice, policy, and future research.

Implications for the Framework

Figure 1 in Chapter 2 provided a model to help envision the influences on civic identity that might propel a person into civic mobilization to create civic capacity to affect the educational policy agenda. The findings from this study align closely with the model. The political socialization that the IAF facilitated for the participants in this study combined current and past experiences, attitudes and beliefs, civic association, and formal learning to move these women toward a new civic identity. This transformative learning helped overcome barriers, some logistical, many hegemonic, to motivate the women to participate politically. Those who progressed mobilized with the organization to create civic capacity and were able to affect the educational policy stream. As they experienced success and power, their civic identities continued to grow and those who transformed became primary leaders, able to deliver a following for the organization and therefore further increasing the organization's civic capacity. Finally, husbands (some of them), children, friends, and neighbors were affected by these women, in effect becoming politically socialized themselves, so that they too began to become involved and to challenge hegemony in their institutions. Although the instituted policies were important, it is perhaps the effect that these women had on their children and the schools they attended that shows how the framework is a holistic picture of an interconnected system, and how educational policy and teaching and learning are connected to creating continued civic capacity.

Implications for Theory

This study was conceptually based on two frameworks, Mezirow's (1991; 1995; 2000) adult learning theory of transformative learning and the IAF's practice of community organizing around educational issues. This study and accompanying analysis has demonstrated a tight coupling between the two. Indeed, Mezirow (2000) hints at the connection between transformation and politically active citizens and how democracies inherently create opportunities for self-transformation:

[W]ere individuals more broadly empowered, especially in the institutions that have most impact on their everyday lives (workplaces, schools, local governments, etc.), their experiences would have transformative effects: they would become more public spirited, more tolerant, more knowledgeable, more attentive to the interests of others, and more probing of their own interests. (Warren quoted in Mezirow, 2000, p. 28)

Because of the strong component of adult learning in community organizing and its reliance on transformation to develop leaders, and given the nature of community organizing to facilitate transformation, implications for Transformative Learning theory are specific to this particular context. Chapter 2 outlined six broad critiques of Transformative Learning Theory that are pertinent to this study: the linearity of the process; what warrants a perspective transformation; the complexity of the triggering event; the affective dimension of transformative learning; the relational nature of rational discourse; and the role of context. Each one of these will be touched on in this section.

Mezirow (1991; 1995; 2000) outlines two perspective transformation paths, one epochal and one incremental. The epochal path involves a disorienting dilemma that causes a change in meaning perspective, while the incremental path, through the

cumulative revisions of meaning schemas, may over time result in a perspective transformation. For Brookfield (2000)

no matter how much it might be described as an incremental process, transformative learning has for me connotations of an epiphanic, or apocalyptic, cognitive event—a shift in the tectonic plates of one’s assumptive clusters. I believe an act of learning can be called transformative only if it involves a fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts” (p. 138).

The learning that the more transformed women in this study experienced involved “a fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts” but they certainly were not epiphanic or apocalyptic. They were tectonic in the normal sense of the word—slow and fluid—and tended to be “recursive, evolving, and spiraling in nature” (E. W. Taylor, 2000, p. 37).

There is debate as to what warrants a perspective transformation. This study has attempted to describe how working-class and working-poor Latina mothers transform into politically active individuals in the educational policy arena. This implies action. Transformative learning may occur as a purely cognitive event, but for me, transformation involves a behavioral component: “action, acting upon redefinitions of our perspectives, is the clearest indication of a transformation” (Saavedra quoted in E. W. Taylor, 2000, p. 297).

The methods that the IAF uses to help leaders critically assess their assumptions have a strong cognitive dimension to them by using such techniques as reading, Socratic discussions, power analyses, and research actions. However, the foundational process is to uncover and share individual stories in order to uncover anger. Anger is used as a way

to find common self-interests and, when turned into cold anger, a way to motivate individuals to act. The transformations as described by these women tended to be emotional as well. Sharing their narratives of change provoked deep affective responses indicated that the process was not solely a cognitive event for them. Finally, the IAF uses image, symbol, ritual, fantasy, and imagination as non-rational factors to move leaders towards a perspective transformation (Dirkx, 2000).

Taylor (2000) asks

When during the transformative processes are supportive relationships most helpful? What do helpful relationships look like? What kind of discourse takes place in these significant relationships that might offer more insight into the transformative process? How can relationships be safely manifested and managed? (p. 308)

Clearly, any transformation that occurs by an individual allied with an IAF organization is dependent on relationships. After all, the IAF creates civic capacity through conversations to build relational power. Most significant is the relationship between the leader and the organizer but relationships with other leaders and organizers are also key. These relationships are built upon exploring stories to uncover common interests. They are also dependent on uncovering hegemonic structures by determining power structures within organizations. For this to happen, individuals must have significant contact with each other. Organizers meet with leaders often, especially before actions (sometimes four or five times a week). As leaders mature, they begin the relational culture within their own institutions, working to have one-on-one conversations with people they determine to have leadership potential and with the power brokers (such as pastors or principals). That is, in the realm of community organizing, relationships are

not optional but integral to transformation. But these relationships are not easy to categorize. Taylor (2000) explains how “It is through building trusting relationships that learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal with learning on an affective level, which is essential for managing the threatening and emotionally charged experience of transformation” (p. 308). Organizers do create trusting relationships with leaders in order to manage the “threatening and emotionally charged experience of transformation,” but the relationships are not symmetrical: “Transformational theory also presumes relations of equality among participants in reflective discourse when, in actuality, most human relationships are asymmetrical.” (Belenky & Stanton, 2000, p. 73). Brookfield (2000) expands on this premise by stating that “it is disingenuous to pretend that as educators we are the same as students. Better to acknowledge publicly our position of power, to engage learners in deconstructing that power, and to attempt to model a critical analysis of our own source of authority in front of them” (p. 137). Organizers with the IAF understand this, and so do leaders, so public acknowledgement may not be entirely necessary. In the one instance in which I witnessed an overt statement during a formal training on power, the trainer asked, “Who has the power in this room?” Although this concept had not been discussed previously, all of the leaders in the room were able to identify the trainer as the person with power. Indeed, part of the training involves learning how to interact in the public world, including showing respect for others and for oneself by arriving on time to meetings. If individuals arrive late to training after breaks, they are asked to apologize, which on several occasions led to heated exchanges between organizers and leaders. This interaction makes clear the

asymmetrical relationships that exist between organizers and leaders and also troubles the concept of providing a safe place in which to transform. Relationships seem integral for transformation to occur, but it is likely that transformations may occur in trusting and reciprocal relationships as well as in those that are asymmetrical.

The stories of transformation detailed in this study provide an example of how adult learning differs when it happens through a process embedded in daily life, as compared to a person transforming in a constrained environment such as a college class. That is, context structures knowing and learning (Wilson, 1993). Context includes both present and sociohistorical aspects: “The cultural forms that come to inhabit the individual depend upon the place, the social position, from which the individual engages with others in activities, in practice” (Holland et al., 1998). The women’s prior state of oppression and depoliticization created a foundation upon which to transform into civically engaged individuals. The context that the IAF provided created a situation in which they could learn, both directly and indirectly, the world of people organized for power. As Holland (1998) explains, “In the interchange that surrounds the telling, they are softly directed toward the generic forms of the organization” (p. 176). This context may also include a cultural component. Hritzuk & Park (2000) explain how Latinos’ social milieu acts as a critical context for socialization, information dissemination, and mobilization, thereby providing some requisite resources central to facilitating participation.

In summary, transformations did occur for some of these women and tended to be incremental rather than epochal with no clear disorienting dilemma, both cognitive and

affective, highly dependent on relationships, and not separate from current and past contexts. In addition, the IAF uses an experiential model of learning where leaders spend minimal time in formal training situations and much time acting. This style of learning has elements of situated learning which is described by Stein (1998) as: “Situated cognition theory conceives of learning as a sociocultural phenomenon rather than the action of an individual acquiring general information from a decontextualized body of knowledge.”

Implications for Practice

Moving from the school context outward, a variety of implications arise from the study. At the school level, parental involvement needs to broaden its scope and definition to move toward parental engagement. Engaged parents bring with them the political power necessary for the school to engage in serious reform issues and human and social resources that can benefit the school program. Through dialogue between school staff and engaged parents, a clearer mission can be established that both sides understand and support, making the school and home environments more effective for the children’s learning. This can only be accomplished in one way—through constant and ongoing conversations between teachers, staff, administrators, parents, students, and community members. These conversations must reflect IAF tenets of sharing stories to uncover self-interests and common ground as well as to unearth the way things are and the way things should be. Implied in this type of parental engagement is the return of politics into educational settings and understandings of the types of power and how power works. As

it did for the women in this study, increased political involvement affects the children of active parents. López (2001, p. 428) points out how the transition of sociocultural values has rarely been documented in the literature as a type of parent involvement. Engaged parents will satisfy some of the curricular standards for civics education by serving as models and will help to create a generation of individuals more committed to public action.

Implications for Policy

Stone et al. (2001) remind us that: “urban parents are scarcely visible as *active* [italics in original] stakeholders in the current school improvement movement” (p. 83). This statement, along with the findings from this study, suggests one imperative for policy: power before program. The IAF creates civic capacity, defined by Stone et al. (2001, p. 8) as “the activity by which a diverse citizenry reconcile, put aside, or in some manner accommodate their differences in order to pursue their common well-being.” Chambers (2003, p. 76) explains how “embracing plurality—deliberately cultivating a blend of beliefs, ethnicity, and class—brings public strength to a collective...” The IAF provides the environment that satisfies the four conditions of transformation that Daloz (2000) identifies: the presence of the other, reflective discourse, a mentoring community, and opportunities for committed action. Combining lessons from Transformative Learning theory and community organizing for school reform with the overarching goal of creating power before program suggests the following action for policy makers:

- Begin a culture of conversations and relationships starting with policymakers at the federal, state, city, district, and school levels. Make conversations and building relationships (especially with individuals and communities perceived as the “other” to the policymaker) part of the job description.

The inclination is to create a list of policy implications, but in doing so, the rule of putting power before program would immediately be broken and further reform would have the same probability for low success as most reform efforts. Starting out with this credo has the benefit of being respectful of unique contexts by allowing policies to emerge that have the buy-in from all of the stakeholders in a given setting. However, it is possible to envision possible policy outcomes that would emerge:

- Create a new accountability dimension that sits on top of, rather than below, other measures, and that holds all stakeholders in the public school arena accountable for creating relationships (including pastors of local congregations, parents, educators, members from the business community, and non-education bureaucrats such as those in health and public safety).
- Naturally, structures will emerge that facilitate ways in which individuals and groups can find the time and place to share stories on a continual basis. At the school level, this will translate into more time for teachers to meet with each other and with parents and community members.
- Provide training on organizing for change and adult learning theories that lead to transformation. This implies having serious conversations with a critical bent.

- Hire liaisons at the different levels of bureaucracy to enhance a culture of conversation and connection.
- Modify the policy culture to become more grassroots oriented.
- Policy makers must not make the decision that this type of policy system will not work. They must understand how a relational culture premised on continuing education is necessary for our civil society. Ellis and Scott (2003) explain how

the potential contributions of critical adult education to the future well-being of a global civil society are becoming increasingly apparent. Identifying and assessing means of resistance to the escalating encroachments of international finance and administrative power into the domains of individual and community autonomy is one practical role for adult education. (p. 253)

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this research are not definitive. A research study based on a sample of ten women does not necessarily suggest ways in which an individual might transform into a civically engaged citizen. Additionally, the sample was fairly homogeneous and findings may or may not generalize to other populations categorized in such ways as race, income, gender, and educational attainment. Furthermore, this research focused on individuals who became involved with an organization dedicated to facilitating civic involvement in educational policy issues. The research focus would need to be expanded to include comparative cases to determine what transformation looks like in other contexts.

Figure 1 narrowed the scope of the study by focusing on the civic identity component. Each element of the model illuminates an area of needed research that would add to the understanding of civic capacity working for school reform, especially in marginalized communities. Some possible questions that might be asked are:

- Who defines educational reform issues? Equally as important, who does not?
- What issues are raised? Why? What issues are not raised? Why?
- Once these issues are raised, how do they get onto the educational policy agenda? Conversely, are there issues that are prominent that do not make it onto the agenda?
- How do different educational reform policies affect different subpopulations of the society?
- What differing attitudes do family members from different subpopulations of society hold regarding various educational reform policies?
- What barriers exist to full democratic participation?
- What democratic theories do different subpopulations of society believe in (e.g. the educational elite, suburban families, inner city residents)?
- What successful and unsuccessful efforts have been driven by civic capacity and civic mobilization? What contributed to their successes and failures?
- How is civic identity created and influenced?

These questions deal indirectly with issues of power and hegemony. Work needs to be done to understand how marginalized individuals and communities can use a

critical lens to uncover hegemonic structures that keep them in oppression but at the same time work within these structure to make change for themselves and the oppressors.

Finally, more work needs to be done to give voice in academia and the policy system to typically silenced people. As Behar (1993, p. 270) intones, “Surprisingly few researchers, themselves women, have focused on the way that women subjects of their studies narrate their understandings of their world; and hardly any have sought to make these understandings central to the recasting of theoretical frameworks.” Qualitative studies with a narrative focus could provide a rich understanding of how individuals narrate the world and themselves and provide a means for voices typically not heard in the policy circles to be a part of the conversation.

CONCLUSION

González (2001) sounds a note of caution for marginalized women and other groups when she says “We may resist, accommodate, adapt, and act as active agents, but we do so within sociohistorical parameters that do not contain limitless possibilities” (p. 73). Elshtain (1992) posits a conundrum in which “women are and have been powerful; women are and have been powerless” (p. 110). Marina touches on both sides of the conundrum when she describes the difficulties she had imagining she could be a leader because of her narrative of being a wife and a mother:

I felt so strong about, being at the home to receive my husband, having dinner for him, and with my kids, and... it would have just been, harder for me to really understand it [becoming a leader] because I felt like, I would have felt like, I was not doing my obligation as a housewife.

When asked, “So do you think it’s difficult or impossible to be able to do both of them?” Marina responds with, “I don’t think it’s difficult... I don’t think it’s difficult to do, it’s just difficult to understand that we can do it.” Marina understands the limited possibilities, but she also envisions something different for herself, her children, and her community. She also feels that she is able to act on her vision. She provides a lesson of hope for all of us and embodies Lasch’s (1995) comment that, “Democracy works best when men and women do things for themselves, with the help of their friends and neighbors, instead of depending on the state” (p. 7).

Repeating Sehr’s (1997) words from Chapter 1: “The project of articulating a radical, participatory, and public vision of democracy and struggling to bring it about is the most important counter-hegemonic project that can be undertaken in the United States today” (p. 28). The purpose of this study was to describe the transformation of marginalized and disenfranchised individuals into civically active persons involved in educational policy, an inherently counter-hegemonic undertaking. Marina foregrounds these typically silenced voices when she shares her first experience giving a political speech:

You know, that first action was the first time made me feel like, you know, it didn’t matter that I don’t have a degree. It doesn’t matter that, that I don’t have the money, that I can still have, I can still make a difference... My voice counts.

Marina, Alicia, Verónica, and Aurora demonstrate, as Greider (1992) explains, “The politics of restoration will start, not in Washington, but in many other places, separately and together, when people decide to close the gap between what they believe

and what is” (p. 31). For Alicia, closing the gap between what they believe and what is is a responsibility:

I feel a responsibility... not just to myself but to my family. But I feel a responsibility to the people of my neighborhood and just across the board in the city. If I’m doing OK, and I make sure your kid’s doing OK or your family is doing OK, then we’re going to continue moving forward. But if I’m not doing OK, or I’m doing OK and you’re not OK, then what am I doing? What is my kind of work doing to help you?

By sharing these women’s stories of transformation, and by providing a model to describe how adult learning can contribute to a profound change in an individual’s civic identity, it is hoped that insight will be gained into how to increase civic capacity to affect school reform. In addition, it is hoped that this study will provide at least part of an answer to Lasch’s (1995) question: Does democracy have a future?

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VITA

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