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**By:** Cinthya M. Saavedra & Ellen D. Nymark

**Edited by:** Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln & Linda Tuhiwai Smith

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## Borderland-Mestizaje Feminism: The New Tribalism

Cinthya M.Saavedra and Ellen D.Nymark

*A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.*

—Anzaldúa (1987, p. 80)

In this chapter, we wish to introduce and invite educational researchers to step out of their Western frame of reference and into a hybrid and multidimensional mode of thinking—borderland-*mestizaje* feminism (BMF). Borderland-mestizaje feminism emerges out of the important work of scholars who center Chicana *feminista* perspectives and cultural practices in their inquiries, examinations, and analyses. Beginning in the mid to late eighties, BMF continues to challenge and decolonize Western mode of research and investigations (Elenes, 2005). This chapter addresses how research is being embodied by Chicana(o)s and Latina(o)s *feminista* scholars who find it necessary to decolonize educational research and practice. Using multiple methods and epistemologies, Chicana feminists focus and analyze the gender, class, and race “blank spots” left (intentionally or not) by dominant ideology and discourse (Anzaldúa, 1990) in order to expose ways to maneuver through theory (making, living, and rebuilding) and create *nevas teorías*—teorías that reflect our understanding of the world and how to critically transform it. “We are articulating new positions in these ‘in-between,’ Borderland worlds of ethnic communities and academies, feminist and job worlds” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi).

What follows is our perspective of BMF and how it can make a significant contribution to the field of educational research and practice. The first part of the chapter situates and defines borderland-mestizaje feminism. In the second part, we attempt to unbraid the aspects of BMF that have decolonial possibility.

### Defining and Situating

#### Borderland-Mestizaje Feminism

In the provocative and influential book, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) crystallized, through autobiography, history, culture, poetics, and language, a hybrid mode of consciousness and meaning making that placed her Chicana feminist lesbian subjectivity, body, and material condition at the forefront of her scholarship. In this important piece, Anzaldúa envisioned and birthed *la conciencia de la mestiza*—a mestizaje *metodología* that attempts to uproot dualistic thinking, welcoming ambiguity and engendering an oppositional consciousness (Saldivar-Hull, 2000; Sandoval, 1991, 2000) as necessary engagements in the struggle against patriarchal, cultural, and imperialist domination. Thus, borderlands conceptualization comes from the experiences and lives of Chicanas/os or those living in the interstices of the geographical and

metaphorical spaces of *la fronteras*/borderlands (but not limited to the United States/Mexico). As such, we use C. Alejandra Elenes's (2005) definition of the borderlands; she articulates, the "border in its literal meaning refers to the historical and contemporary context under which Mexican American communities have been formed in the U.S." (p. 1). In addition, she also argues that the "border refers to the symbolic barriers that divide communities along race, class, gender and sexual orientation lines, academic disciplines, political ideologies, and organizational structures" (p. 1).

Resisting these symbolic barriers gives way to borderland-mestizaje theorizing that further involves a constant struggle against and resistance to the histories of colonialism and the interrogations of dominant cultural politics (Córdova, 1999; Mignolo, 2000; Villenas & Foley, 2002). Borderland theorizing seeks social transformation not only for Chicana(o) people but for all whose voices have been silenced—*la(o)s deslenguada(o)s* (Anzaldúa, 1987; Chabram-Dernersesian, 1999a; Demas & Saavedra, 2004; Kaplan, Alarcón, & Moallem, 1999) and for those whose bodies have been policed, regulated, and medicalized (Cruz, 2001) through Western lenses and ultimately produced colonized *mentes y cuerpos*.

Borderland-mestizaje "feminism," then, is an evolution, extension, or perhaps a mutation *que nace* from the bodies of Chicana feminists (Sandoval, 1998) who recognized the androcentric, nationalistic, and homophobic tendency of Chicana "o" border theory and cultural studies (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990; Córdova, 1999; Trujillo, 1998). Moreover, it is a critical observation of how the "praxis of feminists of color is often not recognized or sanctioned in the academy" (Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Najera-Ramirez, & Zavella, 2003, p.1). What makes BMF necessary and important is the in(corp)oration of the critical pedagogies found in the mundane (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Elenes, 1997; Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado Bernal, & Villenas, 2001; Rosaldo, 1989; Trinidad Galván, 2001; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). The definition of *pedagogy* is reworked by problematizing dominant perspectives and attitudes toward established ideas of pedagogical spaces (Trinidad Galván, 2001). Moreover, critical pedagogy is expanded, stretched, and problematized through a BMF lens by engaging in further discussions of what Elenes (1997) argues critical pedagogues have unintentionally marginalized—questions of difference and erasure. Those working within a critical pedagogy framework, according to Elenes, need to rethink and problematize the "usual suspects" (White America, men, and/or capitalism), move the critical dialogue beyond these visible enemies, and rearticulate the conversation to the invisible ideological and discursive regimes that privilege White maleness.

Furthermore, working within a BMF framework entails centering and listening to *el cuerpo y experiencias en nuestro analisis* (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cruz, 2001; Cruz & McLaren, 2002; Hurtado, 1998; Moraga, 1983; Saavedra, 2005; Trujillo, 1998; Yarbrow-Bejarano, 1999). The realization that theorizing must come from the everyday lives and bodies of people and not from abstract and detached perspectives makes BMF a decolonizing method and tool that "de-academize[s] theory and [connects] the community to the academy" (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi). *Nuestros cuerpos* and experiences can be powerful sources and sites of knowledge and identity negotiation and production (Cruz, 2001). BMF constitutes and constructs knowledge from the bottom (Elenes, 1997) and from the body (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cruz, 2001; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; Trujillo, 1998).

As a method, BMF allows epistemological mutations *que crean* critical tools *para usar contra* dominant ideologies and methods. We take what works for our survival and for our communities. Where a theory or method is not sufficient enough, we expand, perhaps fragment, the theoretical and methodological boundaries to fit our specific circumstance. In learning how to stretch dominant theories or methods, we also learn when and how to shift and maneuver through “currents of power” (Sandoval, 1991, p. 14) for our survival and coping strategies. Hence, working within this critical framework entails grappling with multiple epistemologies and rejecting binary, simplistic, and deterministic ways of theorizing and researching (Elenes, 1997; Sandoval, 1998) and instead forging intellectual dexterity (Arredondo et al., 2003). Likewise, Norma Gonzalez (2001) argues for a borderlands perspective and vision that should “accommodate contradiction and ambiguity” (p. 14). Although BMF may take a momentary stance (albeit ambiguous and fleeting), essentialist understandings and meaning making are not options. As Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem (1999) explain, “Our tasks as critics must revolve around a constant critique of the construction of all methods and disciplines” (p. 5), including our own.

Furthermore, BMF research and inquiry might lead us to illuminate the ways in which marginalized people are *already* living, struggling, and resisting multiple hegemonic forms of identity, patriarchy, and capitalist and sexual discourses (Elenes et al., 2001; Trinidad Galván, 2001).

As Chela Sandoval (1998) captures borderlands feminism,

This “borderlands” feminism, many argue, calls up a syncretic form of consciousness made up of transversions and crossings; its recognition makes possible another kind of critical apparatus and political operation in which *mestiza* feminism comes to function as a working chiasmus (a mobile crossing) between races, genders, sexes, cultures, languages and nations. (p. 352)

BMF is, as Rosa Linda Fregoso (1993) asserts, “a paradigm of transcultural experience” (p. 65) that invites and welcomes hybrid forms of knowledge (de)construction, meaning, and maneuvering. BMF is also a way of living and existing for bodies caught between the intimate clash of two, three, or multiple discourses, cultures, languages, and sexual identities (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Borderlands-mestizaje feminism, then, is a tool, a methodology, and an epistemology. BMF is a tool insofar as it is used to travel and exist in our past and current sociopolitical borders and (multiple) *realidades*—the everyday lives we home-girls embody, the way we sway back and forth from strategic essentialism and dominant ideologies in the barrio, at school, at work *para sobrevivir*. As a methodology, BMF include the varied ways we rearticulate and reappropriate the hegemonic forms of knowledge, whether it is feminism, postmodernism, and so on in our theorizing, research, and writing. A BMF epistemology is the knowledge we embody that stems from our *cuerpos* and *vidas* as Third World feminists, outsiders, and insiders and guides our variegated understanding of knowledge and power. In our research endeavors, we are hesitant about standard and normal definitions of methodology. Our methodological approach tends to be interdisciplinary, subjective, and connected to our *vidas* and *cuerpos*. For example, Cinthya M. Saavedra (2006) uses multiple epistemologies of the body (Foucauldian, queer, feminist(s), and Chicana) to examine the (his)torical body

of the teacher. Her methodology includes maneuvering through deconstruction and genealogical analysis as well as producing a new methodology that arose from her body and *experiencias* as she connected with the discourse of the history of the feminization of teaching—carnal methodologies. Thus, we use what we need in order to be heard and better understand our endeavors.

## Buscando/Searching for *Teorías Hasta En La Cocina*

In order to develop BMF, we sought theories in places that normally are not found under the category of “high” theory. We searched in nontraditional places. As Sonia Saldivar-Hull (2000) urges,

Because our work has been ignored by the men and women in charge of the modes of cultural production, we must be innovative in our search.... As a consequence, we have to look in non-traditional places for our theories: in the prefaces to anthologies, in the interstices of autobiographies, in our cultural artifacts (the cuentos), and, if we are fortunate enough to have access to a good library, in the essays published in marginalized journals not widely distributed by the dominant institutions. (p. 46)

Therefore, this chapter attempts to find and highlight theory and theorizing in spaces perhaps not deemed “theoretical” from a Western academic perspective. Exciting borderlands-mestizaje feminist research is being implemented and constructed in educational circles (a field that is normally depoliticized). And because we (the authors) are educators, we want to present and introduce the important and critical borderland-mestizaje feminist work and theorizing that is taking place in educational spaces. From conversations, *entrevistas*, testimonials, and “discussions *en la cocina*” (Elenes et al., 2001, p.595), *vive la teoría y los momentos de pedagogía*.

*Las critical lecciones de todos los días* are important especially as they pertain to our reconceptualization of critical pedagogy, knowledge creation, and identity production (Trinidad Galván, 2001). Moreover, critical pedagogical lessons can be learned even in places where dominant ideologies seem to reign. Great examples are the works of Ruth Trinidad Galván (2001) and Sofia Villenas and Melissa Moreno (2001). The research of these Chicana feminists challenges and expands traditional modes of understanding and examining theorizing spaces. Trinidad Galván problematizes pedagogical spaces by emphasizing *la vida cotidiana y la convivencia* that transpires among rural *mujers*. Villenas and Moreno explore *madres e hijas* in traditional Latino homes and negotiate and navigate through race, capitalism, and patriarchy.

What we can learn from their research is how we can theorize from the bottom and in places and spaces not deemed theoretical. Theory, then, is *cotidiano*, mundane, and ordinary. These are “powerful sites for learning and teaching” (Trinidad Galván, 2001, p. 605). But it is in and through our search for theory in nontraditional places that allows us to explore and experience *lo cotidiano* as powerful learning and teaching sites. We must (un)learn and have the mental and bodily flexibility to stretch and challenge ideas and concepts that are rigid and unbending.

## Parto Y (His)Tory

### Parto

We attempt in this section to show the varied and complex moments that scholars have identified as the emergence of borderlands feminist theorizing. We contend that the search for origins is subjective at best.

For Hector Calderón and José David Saldívar (1991), borderlands epistemology began to be widely used as a tool to describe and research the cross-cultural, intellectual, sexual, and territorial (physically and symbolically) mobility of hybrid bodies in the mid-19th century. According to Calderón and Saldívar, the mid-19th century is when Chicanos, Mexicanos, and/or *la mestiza* began to deconstruct the deficient mestiza(o) and critically reconstruct and name their bilingual and bicultural experiences “as a resistive measure against Anglo-American economic domination and ideological hegemony” (p. 4). Sandoval (1998) maps the emergence of Third World feminism, “later transformed into U.S. third world feminism, mestizaje feminism, and now ‘borderlands’ theory and ‘diaspora’ studies, by the end of the [20th] century’s end” (p. 354). By the 1980s, U.S. Third World feminism had become an intellectual and bodily discourse that would influence the work, practice, and theorizing of Chicana feminism, borderlands epistemology, and the merging/mutation of all into borderlandsmestizaje feminism. Norma Alarcón (1999) argues that the Chicano political (sub)conscious awakening, although dominated by men, has always had Chicana feminists’ interventions and interruptions since the beginning of the Chicano movement. The erasure and exclusion of their work in the 1960s and 1970s is indicative of the lack of importance given to women of color in the cultural and political economy (Alarcón, 1999).

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Naomi Quiñonez (2003), in tracing their mestiza feminist consciousness, reject the Western search for traditional literate subjects who fit neatly in reference sections and instead, without apology, place the body of *la india* and *La Malinche* at the forefront as evidence and testimony of their resistive roots—perhaps an anticolonial tactic. Knowledge in the Western sense is cumulative. *Tenemos que* back up anything we say or write because somehow we are rendered incapable of producing and constructing knowledge. This is a way to privilege literate societies and those who have and had access to produce and construct knowledge. Anzaldúa (1987) and Quiñonez (2003) are good examples of what happens when we search for marginalized knowledges.

As a way to de-academize the search for origins, Gloria Anzaldúa poses a different way to trace origins. Anzaldúa (1987) traces her identity of struggle and resistance back to the body of *la mujer india*. She contends that the Aztec females’ “rites of mourning were rites of defiance protesting the cultural changes which disrupted the equality of and balance between female and male, and protesting their demotion to a lesser status, their denigration. Like *la Llorona*, the Indian woman’s only means of protest was wailing” (p. 21). Furthermore, Anzaldúa writes *la india* was “silenced, gagged, caged ... bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century ... a light shone through her veil of silence ... [and] she continues to

tend the flame” (pp. 22–23). If this flame and light continues to shine after centuries of atrocities committed against her and yet she still *existe*, then struggle and resistance and renegotiation have been a part of her, if not her total, being and existence of *la mujer india*.

Like Anzaldúa, Naomi Quiñonez (2003) traces contemporary Chicana feminism or what she calls the “postcolonial first wave” of Chicana writers to *La Malinche*, the first interpreter to Hernán Cortés. According to Quiñonez, *La Malinche* embodied the survival skills that are relevant and prevalent to Chicana feminist writers. “*La Malinche* embodies those personal characteristics—such as intelligence, initiative, adaptability, and leadership” (Candelaria, 1980, quoted in Quiñonez, 2003, p. 138). Important also is how the myth of *La Malinche*, “*la Chingada*,” whore and traitor, has been transformed by Chicana feminist writers. *El mexicano y Chicano* have used *La Malinche* to denote their tragic self-perception as *hijos de la chingada* and blame *La Malinche* for selling out their people. But as Anzaldúa (1987) reminds us

The worst kind of betrayal lies in making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer. We *indias y mestizas*, police the Indian in us, brutalize and condemn her. Male culture has done a good job on us. *Son las custumbres que traicionan. La india en mi es la sombra: La Chingada, Tlazolteotl, Coatlicue. Son ellas que oyemos lamentando a sus hijas perdidas.* (p. 22)

However, denied knowledge about ourselves is not the only quest. Naomi Quiñonez (2003) argues that, once she learned the history of her people, she was compelled to ask about the *mujeres* in that history—a much deeper examination of history. The postcolonial first-wave Chicana writers, *mujeres y hombres*, “participate in cultural resistance by utilizing their cultural production to reclaim buried histories. They also resist dominant discourses by appropriating, reconfiguring, and transforming it as part of their own” (Quiñonez, 2003, p. 141). In this way, Quiñonez explains, a politics of difference is engendered and “‘writing back to the empire’ not only involves resistance as a postcolonial subject but resolution as an empowered force” (p. 141). Contesting and writing back to empire is an important aspect of BMF and has influenced how BMF scholars conceptualize and perform research.

## Pedagogical Scars from Chicano Studies and White Feminism

Regardless of its ontology or what we think the exact time and origin of borderlands-mestizaje feminism, it emerges from contestations of colonialism and dominant cultural politics that have denied not only our *experiencias* but our *existencia* as, and *history* of, producers of culture. Teresa Córdova (1999), following Albert Memmi, argues that “colonialism has imbedded its memory in our spirits. After stripping us of our institutions, our resources, and our history, the colonizer asserts his superiority and declares us deficient and deserving of our own fate” (p. 11). Furthermore, due to our specific forced assignment in the symbolic geopolitical landscape of the United States and, like other groups who have been historically oppressed, borderlands-mestizaje feminism engenders the sensibility or the “cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1998) to see, feel, and experience counteroppressive patriarchal, racist, and sexist practices and politics. Our sensibility stems not from a utopian space we occupy that renders us some place above looking down

with our mestiza “expert” gaze. But because we are immersed *hasta el copete* in the hegemonic Chicano, White feminist, and colonialist/imperialist projects, we have learned counterdiscourses in order to justify our existence. Dolores Delgado Bernal argues (1998) that Chicanas and Latinas lead lives with considerably different opportunity structures and conditions than men, including Chicano males, and White women. And perhaps that is an advantage, as Delgado Bernal reminds us of the strength found in Chicanas, Latinas, and other marginalized bodies that live and experience the literal and metaphorical space called borderlands.

But it has not been easy to find, trace, and hear the voices of *las mujeres*. The Latino and Chicano engaged in silencing the voices and bodies as well as denying *las experiencias y contribuciones de las mujeres*. Saldivar-Hull (2000) reflects on how the *o* in *Chicano* subsumed her body, and her search in White feminist theory was futile. Neither feminism nor Chicano nationalism quenched her search for a way or method to “discern the complex interconnections between race or ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality” (p.25). As a response, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (2002), in their groundbreaking anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eloquently describe the need to create and speak out, be heard with our own voices. Their notion of a “theory in the flesh” describes the ways in which the physical realities of *las mujeres* shape their understandings of the world and are enacted as an embodied politics of resistance. Their “flesh and blood,” cultural/racial experiences bridge theory and practice and accept the body as a source of knowledge. They critique imperial feminism and make visible the ways race, class, gender, sexuality, language, and culture are integrated.

A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience:

We are the colored in a white feminist movement.

We are the feminist among the people of our culture.

We are often the lesbians among the straight.

We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words.

(Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 21)

### El Macho Academic

Feminism in the borderlands/fronteras stems from the recognition that our own culture (whether Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Nicaragüense), *nos traiciona*, betrays us (Anzaldúa, 1987). Although Chicano and other Latino scholars in the 1960s and 1970s from various disciplines and fields made remarkable contributions to outline, explore, and recover the lost voices and bodies of Chicana(o)s in history, politics, and literary representations, the voices and bodies of the *mujer Chicana* were too often ignored and more often in the footnote sections. As Saldivar-Hull (2000) argues, “If feminist scholars, activists, and writers—who have lived under the *o* in *Chicano*—had to rely on the historical record written by men and male-identified women,

Chicanas' roles in history would remain obscured" (p.27). Even though Chicanas struggled and resisted against *la cara palida del gringo* alongside the Chicano, the Chicano activist and scholar mimed the same patriarchal and sexist pedagogical practices toward and against *la mujer chicana*. Her place had been defined by *machista* understanding of women compiled with the patriarchal ideology of the Catholic Church that only reinforced the role of *la mujer* as servant to man (López, 1977).

## **Gringa Theory**

White feminism was/is a theory that left women of color *vacía* and often times excluded and denied women of color theorizing spaces (Anzaldúa, 1990; Saldivar-Hull, 2000). During the 1970s and 1980s, European and American feminists marginalized not only Chicana feminism but also feminisms expressed by U.S. women of color (Saldivar-Hull, 2000). Even when White Anglo feminists were willing to provide opportunities for woman of color, Lynet Uttal (1990) argues that White feminist research did not acknowledge or learn anything from voices and concerns of women of color. A Euro-American-centric notion of class and gender emerged as well as hegemonic forms of feminist theorizing that excluded instead of invited multiple ways of theorizing.

Saldivar-Hull (2000) acknowledges the political doors opened by U.S. White feminists in academia. However, Saldivar-Hull examines how Euro-American feminists' works inadvertently espouse a monolithic view of women's experiences. For example, her scrutiny of Catharine MacKinnon's work on feminism and Marxism highlights the negation and often times the erasure of the multiple experiences of *mujeres*. In Saldivar-Hull's analysis, MacKinnon's work addresses only the plight of Black women to refer to all marginalized women. Euro-American feminist erasure of the different locations of women of color is problematic. All marginalized voices are lumped together. Thus, the feminist/Marxist debates on gender and class are not the only pressing concerns confronted by Chicanas and Latinas. In only addressing politics of gender and class, middle-class Anglo-American feminists wipe out and deny the varied subject positions of feminists of color and ignore the complexity of the politics and the interstitial space where class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and language (for those who straddle two or more languages) collide and hybrid consciousness on multiple levels exists.

Sandoval (1991) has examined how hegemonic feminist theory scholars constructed the histories of feminist consciousness. According to Sandoval, these are represented and manifested in four different typologies or systematic categorization of "*all possible forms of feminist praxis*" (p.5, emphasis added). Sandoval argues how these feminist typologies (liberal, Marxists, radical/cultural, and socialist) have encapsulated *y han limitado*, "how the history of feminist activity can be conceptualized, while obstructing what can be perceived or even imagined by agents thinking within its constraints" (p.10). *No hay lugar* for constructing different spaces. Hegemonic feminist scholars act like the *migra* of feminist praxis, building *parades* to keep the *illegales* and illegitimate out.

Chicana feminists therefore have "created alternative avenues, 'safe spaces' to develop intellectually and continue the trajectory of political dissent," resulting in the development of "new categories of analysis

that reshape and expand established intellectual boundaries” (Pasquera & de la Torre, 1993, p.4) by reappropriating and renegotiating Euro-American feminist(s) and cultural theories (Pérez, 1998, 1999b; Sandoval, 2000). Thus, borderland-mestizaje feminism is traversing not among multiple epistemologies, theories, and methodologies but *in between* them. It is in this *in-between* space we inhabit where we “can negotiate an empowering racial, gendered, working-class, political terrain we also call mestizaje” (Saldivar-Hull, 2000, pp. 44–45). Mestizaje then becomes a methodology we can use to renegotiate and reconcile multiple ways of existing and researching. Furthermore, mestizaje becomes the bridge we often cross back and forth, a space from where we can theorize that attempts to engage rather than disengage with dominant and discursive ideologies.

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## Mestizaje as Metodologia

The critical and important work that is being embodied within a borderland-mestizaje feminist framework is varied and interdisciplinary. Multiple epistemologies inform and influence the work, perspectives, and inquiries. We use, embody, and borrow from queer, feminist, postmodern, post-colonial, and poststructuralist scholarship and epistemologies. We take and use and discard from dominant ideologies “to ensure that ethical commitment to egalitarian social relations enters into everyday, political sphere of culture” (Sandoval, 1998, p. 360). Perhaps the inclusive nature of borderland-mestizaje feminism stems in part from the exclusionary practices aimed at silencing, gagging, and eradicating marginalized *voces y cuerpos*. But struggle and resistance give way to theorizing, and in some ways, *nos abre a incluir en vez de excluir*. Not only do we include but we renegotiate, reappropriate to our needs, goals, and experiencias. We are not bound to any particular way of thinking but instead welcome multiple perspectives and epistemologies, allowing for mutations and transgressions to occur. Borderland-mestizaje feminist methodologies are important in order to move away from reconstructing new discursive ideologies that seem liberatory but are indeed colonizing and regurgitating the same hierarchical, patriarchal, homophobic, and capitalist relations that we so wish to *eliminar* and eradicate from our *mentes y cuerpos*, even when it is our own discourses.

Perhaps that is why literary and cultural critic Norma Alarcón (2003) questions the epistemologies that continue to marginalize women of color and therefore uses Anzaldúa's (1987) work as a deconstructive methodology to unbraid the colonizing potential that Western theories rein-scribe in our subjectivities and work. By centering Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Alarcón unleashes a borderlands-mestizaje feminist maneuvering that engages and reimagines new possibilities for the Western-based theories of Lacan, Derrida, Kristeva, and Butler. Furthermore, she provides alternate conceptualizations for Chicanas that reinvent the patriarchal, ethnonational Chicano appropriations. Influenced by Anzaldúa's use of a multifaceted feminine (Shadow Beast, Snake Woman, La Llorona, and many other figurations), Alarcón is able to use Anzaldúa's methodology to open up spaces for reworking both feminist theories and Chicano cultural studies.

Moreover, a borderland-mestizaje feminist methodology has the potential to highlight the complex nature of “doing” and experiencing research as academics and scholars of color (Bejarano, 2005; Delgado Bernal,

1998; Elenes et al., 2001; Saavedra, 2005; Villenas, 1996). Furthermore, articulations and examinations of race, class, gender, and privilege are central concerns at the interstices of queries for feminist mestizaje theorizing (Anzaldúa, 1990). Working within a borderland-mestizaje feminist framework places us in a position to question research practices and methodologies that ultimately serve to construct the “other” even within our own people and communities (Demas, 2004; Demas & Saavedra, 2004; Villenas, 1996). Illuminating and articulating the tensions surrounding the complicated space we occupy as researchers of color, privileged on one hand and marginalized on the other, is an important task and methodology that must be confronted and disrupted in educational research (Villenas, 1996).

Our research endeavors must at every step attempt to decenter Western modes of thinking, theorizing, and living, beginning with perhaps one of the major tenets of Western thinking—the bifurcation of the mind and body. We must center and sew together mind and body. As a methodology, BMF entails not forgetting the geography and history of the body (Pérez, 1999a). the Chicana feminist voice, in order to be heard, must first listen to her body (Anzaldúa, 1990). It is this carnal voice that can be used as a methodology of her own that dialogues with mainstream (educational) research and says “*y no se te olvide esto también*” (Saavedra, 2005) or perhaps as an invitation to Western modes of research to rethink, deconstruct, and reconstruct new and hybrid ways to know, be, and become. *Esperamos que*, this does not translate into invoking a new truth to research but only a different perspective to contemplate, thereby opening up multiple possibilities for educational research. BMF methodology revolves around the *constante crítica* of mainstream methodologies but also extends further to critique and challenge our own.

We contend that borderland-mestizaje feminism has important implications to consider in our (re)search. For example, we must acknowledge how research is potentially a colonizing tool (Cannella & Viruru 2004; Demas, 2004; Smith, 1999). Western research reifies the *nos/otros* (we/them) dichotomy. BMF also can create and construct moments of decolonial theorizing where critical resistance and social transformation are foregrounded and explored. And last, BMF provides possibilities for decolonizing research through the very act of illuminating and centering the body, sexuality, and subjectivities (Córdova, 1999; Cruz, 2001; Saavedra, 2005, 2006).

## Research as Colonization: Reinscribing Nos/Otras

Elenes (2001) contends that integral to borderland discourse is the rejection of “dualistic, essentialists, and oversimplified thinking” (p. 691). However, the “us/them” dichotomies are inherent in the subject positions we embody as scholars, researchers, and pedagogues. But as Elenes reminds us, we must ourselves “constantly engage in a process where first [we] must continuously be self-reflective of [our] participation in dualistic thinking” (p. 693). Rethinking and being reflexive of *nuestro* research and pedagogy might potentially allow us to question our research intentions and our complicity in dominant ideologies.

And that is why we must be reflective. As bell hooks (1989) observes, “When we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether

or not our work will be used to reinforce or perpetuate domination” (p. 43). We must therefore contemplate and acknowledge the possibility that even critical research conceived, constructed, and performed through Western lenses and frameworks has a colonizing potential. Research, concerned with generating and legitimizing knowledge, is crucial to the colonization process as it creates power and privilege for some over others (e.g., situated superiority of Western knowledge, “expert” researcher, and objectification of the Other; Demas, 2004; Smith, 1999). *Despues de todo*, it was through establishing a “positional superiority” that the West was able to colonize knowledges around *el mundo*. It is important to understand how we create the “subject” as Other and how our research legitimizes colonial practices such as surveillance, observations, policing, and xenophobic policies that can result in the Othering of people's cultures, languages, knowledges, and bodies (Demas, 2004).

Borderland-mestizaje feminist framework has critical implications to consider with regards to the subject/object duality that is inherent in Western modes of research. Chicana/o and Latina/os working under this frame of thinking foreground and interweave the personal, political, historical, and cultural into a messy text where the subject of our gaze may have started out as the participant but then ricochets back to the researcher, history, culture, and the political. For example, Delgado Bernal (1998), Telléz (2005), Villenas (1996), and Pérez (1999a) illustrate how working within a borderland-mestizaje feminist epistemology attempts to reject simplistic and dualistic research endeavors in order to complicate the research process, possibly providing decolonial moments and “moving beyond binaries and toward intersectionality and hybridity” (Arredondo et al., 2003, p. 2).

Delgado Bernal (1998) uses this complex mestizaje interweaving as a methodological tool she calls “cultural intuition.” By articulating the complicated and messy texts, Delgado Bernal's research avoids the “researcher as expert” position that ultimately perpetuates and reinscribes the us/them duality. For example, she included her participants in the analytical process, and equally shared that endeavor with her participants. She allowed her participants to really speak and interpret their own voices. The participants became “speaking subjects who [took] part in producing and validating knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p.15).

Michelle Téllez (2005) examines the tensions that Chicana feminists confront between activism/ scholarship, community/academia, and subject/researcher. Western social scientific methods inadvertently produce and prescribe a dichotomy between the latter. Her ethnographic research embodies a mestizaje lens that enables her to engage in complex issues of power, methods, and knowledges. For example, she challenges critical hermeneutic interpretation as potentially privileging literate participants who have access to formal education and are able to discuss interpretations with her. Also important in Telléz's work is the in(corp)oration of her experiencias as a border crosser. Sharing this aspect in her research contextualizes the whole process of research as “research of the particular” and avoids overgeneralization and essentialist understandings of the communities in which we work and research.

Sofia Villenas (1996) investigates how research projects are tenuous at best and at any one moment can be turned upside down and fragmented. Villenas's research project was funded for the purpose of examining the “apparent” educational and child-rearing practices that *impide* Latina/os from achieving educational

success. However, through a critical ethnography, she complicated the space she occupied as a researcher of color. She highlights her positionality as both colonizer and colonized. Villenas realized that she needed to renegotiate her role as researcher/ethnographer to one that embodies her racial and gendered memory and in her researcher gaze. Neutrality and detachment in the field were not options.

Pérez's (1999a), inquiry illuminate the complexity of the entrapment of occupying the in-between moments and spaces that categorize our subjectivities and our search for our own knowledge and histories. Pérez contends that our project is to negotiate between the colonized/ colonizer subjectivities that we inevitably embody and to seek out the disturbing distance where the "political project is to decolonize otherness" (p.6). Pérez argues that seeking the tension between colonize/colonizer spaces and bodies creates a third space where the "decolonial imaginary" is possible. We must venture into the uncomfortable, perhaps disturbing *espacios y cuerpos* to engender decolonial possibilities.

Ultimately, Delgado Bernal, Telléz, Villenas, and Pérez, in using a BMF methodology, are moving beyond the goals and scope of qualitative research. That is, all four Chicana scholars are engaging personally with their research by inviting emotion and personal experiences as well as resisting the *disembodied* nature of research. Furthermore, they attempt to fragment the dichotomous lines that are inherent in qualitative research such as researcher/ subject, academia/community, activism/scholarship, and colonized/colonizer.

## Theorizing *Desde Abajo*: Critical Resistance/Social Transformations

*Nuestro* research should be subversive acts. *Nuestras metodologías* and inquiries are not just to advance the literature and to be self-indulgent (Córdova, 1999) but to change and transform our local and global communities. We are but a microcosm of a broader hybrid transnational, multicolored, transformative feminist(s) pedagogies (Elenes, 2002; Kaplan, Alarcón, & Moallen, 1999; Sandoval, 2000). A Western framework of research alone will not accomplish our multiple transnational, transformative feminist(s) goals (Chabram-Dernersesian, 1999b). As Elenes et al. (2001) have articulated, "What we are concerned with is activist insurgent educators who interrogate social and educational theory and reproduction to create political and cultural projects to transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (p.595). It is in seeking and acknowledging this activist insurgent, who constructs critical spaces, that we can illuminate and transform oppressive or colonizing forms of existing. Critical resistance, then, is about interrogating dominant ideology *and* *nuestros* reactions to that ideology. We must also learn to self-critique.

Rosaldo (1989) argues that boundaries need to be distorted when engaging in social analysis. That is, the lines between social science and art are fragmented and zigzagged. According to Elenes (1997), borderlands theories use multiple, varied, and creative methodologies such as "life histories, testimonials, and interviews, along with other forms of cultural productions such as narratives, *corridos*, and visual arts" (p. 366). She contends that this translates into a borderlands theorizing that constructs knowledge from the bottom—a very important tactic that deacademizes theorizing and provides resistance and counterdiscourses found in the mundane. *En la vida cotidiana*, we can excavate multiple enactments of the "pedagogical forms" that exist and

are not found in traditional academic definitions (Trinidad Galván, 2001). Sites, knowledges, and resistance as we have come to know them through our academic training are problematized and extended. Nuestro research should include and examine multiple ways in which everyday people have embodied, negotiated, and reinvented resistance.

For example, Chicana feminists, working within (or in between) a borderland-mestizaje epistemology, problematize the sanctity of theorizing spaces (Hernandez, 1997) that occur and are dreamed up *en las "cabezas" de los academicos* (and we stress heads, *por que se olvidan que tienen cuerpos*). In a special issue of *Qualitative Studies in Education*, Elenes et al. (2001) set in motion such critique and possibility in educational research. By centering self-reflection, *el hogar, las madres e hijas y el cuerpo*, the authors of this special issue further expand male and Western definitions of praxis, critical pedagogies, and knowledge production. In a way, Elenes et al. have provided a fragile and fluid skeletal body that impels us to add more flesh to that body and advance the scholarship and *conocimientos de nuestras comunidades*.

In this special issue, Villenas and Moreno (2001) examine through oral life histories how mother-daughter pedagogies are spaces filled with tensions and contradictions but, at the same time, rip open a space for decolonial possibilities. Important is how traditional notions of *madres e hijas* are disrupted and reinvented when Villenas and Moreno are able to excavate how mother-daughter pedagogies in a *comunidad Latina* also serve as counterspaces for possibility. Moreover, Delgado Bernal (2001) centers *el hogar* as a space where critical pedagogies are engendered from cultural, historical, and political understandings found in the homes of Chicana college students. The critical lessons taught at home and through their communities via *corridos*, storytelling, and behavior provide Chicanas the *herramientas* to maneuver and resist multiple forms of domination. Delgado Bernal's study is an example of rethinking the deficit model that has been engrained in our memory and being. Latinas/ Chicanas are not as deficient as we have been made out to be. Theory, resistance, and transformation stems from the everyday lives and not only in your *cabezas!*

## **In(corp)orating the Body/Sexuality as Intellectual Counterdiscourse**

To completely understand the complexities of the Chicana and Chicano subjectivity in the greater borderlands of the United States, discussions of gender and sexuality are central in our oppositional and liberatory projects. (Saldivar-Hull, 2000, p. 33)

... pervasive homophobia constructs sociosexual power relations in society and pervasive homophobia in our Chicana/o community limits the potential for liberation and revolution. (Pérez, 1991, p.163)

For me, writing is a spiritual activity just as it's a political activity and a bodily act. (Anzaldúa, 2000, p.252)

Chicana and Latina feminist writers have contributed to the field of cultural studies (including but not limited to history, sociology, education, and philosophy), the speaking body, and sexuality. Teresa Córdova (1999)

asserts that by reclaiming self and space in their writing—and, we would like to add, the body—Chicana feminist writers *obsequian* anticolonial third space moments. For example, Córdova asserts that Chicanas' struggle for recovery and survival from the symbolic and literal rape by those who have silenced and maimed them has enabled *la Chicana* to unearth *una voz y cuerpo*,

to rename herself in her own image, to recover mythic and historical female symbols that reconnect her to her past, and to celebrate and learn to love herself ... to liberate [her] from the oppression of the colonialist construct whose only purpose is to debase her in order to control her. (p.12)

Cultural and Chicana/o studies have benefited from such anticolonial tactics as they serve as subversive *herramientas* to deconstruct patriarchal and colonial projects, especially the works of Chicana lesbians. For example, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Emma Pérez, Carla Trujillo, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, and many others has disturbed the clinical and the *de eso no se habla* mentality of Western theorizing. For example, personal experience, connections to our participants, emotions, *el cuerpo*, *lo sexual*, and critical self-reflection in quantitative research are taboos *y por eso el tema ni si toca*; we suppress them.

Córdova (1999) believes the lesbian voice has contributed significantly to the contestation of patriarchal and colonial conquest. Deena Gonzalez (1998) terms this *speaking secrets*. That is, giving voice to the experiences and conditions that negate the sexual and bodily existence. Speaking secrets is an uncomfortable, yet perhaps necessary, tactic needed to rip open spaces where critical dialogues and conversations can occur and where homophobia and misogyny can be, at the very least, unveiled in Chicana/o cultural studies. This also speaks to how, even in Chicana/o studies, we have subsumed the us/them dichotomy that prevents us from uniting without reservation and including all voices, gay and lesbian, in Chicana/o studies.

That is why, in order to achieve, advance, and construct a transnational feminist imperative, *debemos de incorporar* carnal methods (Saavedra, 2006) as decolonizing discourses that confront the Western need to bifurcate the mind and body. Centering *el cuerpo*, sexuality, and carnal knowing further disrupts the Western's simplistic and dualistic tendencies of theory, research, and practice. Perhaps two of the most subversive and anticolonial contributions that borderland-mestizaje feminism potentially offers are the body and sexuality as mediums and tools to theorize (Córdova, 1999; Cruz, 2001; Trujillo, 1998; Yarbro-Bejarano, 1999). Even though the legacy of colonialism has scarred and split the body, it has, however, painfully forged possibilities for Chicana and Latina feminists from various disciplines to begin to include their own experiencias, spaces, and bodies in their work in order to reclaim self/space and body/mind—an anticolonial strategy (Córdova, 1999). Voice comes in a variety of ways. For some Chicana feminists, it is about listening to and voicing the body and desire (Pérez, 1999a). If unleashed, the body can speak through our work, writing, and practices, possibly even engendering new counter carnal discourses.

For Chicana feminist scholars, the body and sexuality are not only theorized and centered but are theorizing mediums as well. *Al escuchar y centrar el cuerpo*, in their analysis, counter, even decolonial, discourses can emerge. Following Anzaldúa (1987), Saavedra (2005, 2006), and Cindy Cruz (2001) have argued that

we must listen and center our bodies in our research endeavors. Carnal metodologías (Saavedra, 2006) can unleash ways to know that are radically and inherently different from sanctioned mind-oriented inquiries and methodologies. Similarly, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (1999) *nos suplica* that we must place sexuality at the forefront of Chicana/o cultural studies rather than just interject it as an afterthought. She contends that this would allow for deeper examinations and move us away from reproducing hegemonic scripts and more toward sites of critical contestation.

Engendering an epistemology of the brown body, Cruz (2001) contends that recovery “is not only a strategy to make visible Chicana voices and histories, but it is also the struggle to develop critical practices that can propel the brown body from a neocolonial past and into the embodiments of radical subjectivities” (p. 658). In other words, the work of borderland-mestizaje feminism is not just to engender critical practices but also to decolonize the brown body. And as Cruz asserts, “Nothing provokes the custodians of normality and objectivity more than the excessiveness of a body” (p. 659). Thus, highlighting and using the body and sexuality decenters the Western clinical sterilized approach to theory, research, and practice. *El messy cuerpo*, is a taboo best kept behind closed doors and out of theory. For this reason, the canon is suspicious of scholars who use carnal metodologías (Saavedra, 2006), as they serve as blasphemous tools against the sanctity of academia.

For example, Anzaldúa (1990) (em)bodies theory and allows the carnal to surface. Carnality is felt by all senses through her writings. She reunites mind and body, defying the Cartesian mind and body split that reigns in modernist and Enlightenment minds. In *Making Face, Making Soul*, she conjures up an image of theory made of flesh. For Anzaldúa, to theorize is to make face, *caras*. She explains:

For me, haciendo *caras* has the added connotation of making *gestos subversivos*, political subversive gestures, the piercing look that questions and challenges.... “Face” is the surface of the body that is most noticeably inscribed by social structures, marked with instructions on how to be *mujer*, macho, working class, Chicana. As *mestizos*—biologically and/or culturally mixed—we have different surfaces for each aspect of identity, each inscribed by a particular subculture. We are “written” all over, or should I say, carved and tattooed with the sharp needle of experience. (p. xv)

The *cara* and *cuerpo* have been carved on through/with discourses but ultimately enables her to produce theory. The power of dominant discourses interacts with the Chicana *cuerpo*, producing various forms of counterresistance, identities, and subjectivities. The potential to resist imposed borders, while at the same time allowing them to be fluid and fragmented, is *posible* through the body of the mestiza. The mestiza body becomes a metaphorical landscape where dominant discourses are constantly challenged (Saavedra, 2006).

Cherie Moraga (1983), in *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Paso por Sus Labios*, discusses how the body and pain are associated to her theory building. According to Paula Moya (1997), Moraga's “‘theory in the flesh’ is derived from, although not uniformly determined by, the ‘physical realities’ of her life, her ‘social location’” (p.150). In certain ways, the body manifests itself in Moraga's work. For example, of her chronic back pain, she writes,

Sometimes I feel my back will break from the pressure I feel to speak for others. A friend of mine told me once how no wonder I had called the first book I co-edited (with Gloria Anzaldúa), "This Bridge Called My Back." *You have chronic back trouble*, she says. Funny I had never considered this most obvious connection, all along my back giving me constant pain. And the spot that hurts the most is the muscle that controls the movement of my fingers and hands while typing. I feel it now straining at my desk. (Moraga, 1983, p. v)

Reevaluating the works of Anzaldúa and Moraga, Cruz (2001) welcomes the brown body as source and medium of deeper critical educational examination. She contends that because the brown body is at the interstices of multiple, often oppositional, sociopolitical locations, it has the potential to create new ways to know, examine, and create theorizing spaces. Further influenced by Michel Foucault and Bryan Turner, Cruz examines how the regulation of the brown body in Latina/o lesbian and gay youth can be rearticulated as an issue of the containment of the body. Subsequently, it allows us to contemplate and ask different questions with regards to the construction of pedagogy, identity, and bodies. And as Cruz justly states, "Understanding the brown body and the regulation of its movements is fundamental in reclaiming narrative and developing radical projects of transformation" (p. 664) otherwise denied in mind-oriented projects.

Following Anzaldúa, Saavedra (2005, 2006) has allowed her carnal *voz* (Anzaldúa, 1987) to infiltrate her own work as teacher and researcher. Her research questions *vienen de* her carnal experiences and feelings. For example, Saavedra (2006) grapples with the intricacies of listening to her carnal voice as a methodological *herramienta*. She contends that, if allowed, the carnal voice pierces through as a constant reminder that the body can theorize. Analyzing data and engaging in research are not just mind activities but bodily endeavors as well. However, Saavedra confronts not so much the problem of listening to the body but the problem of translating the carnal into a language that expresses and voices *el cuerpo*. As language is inextricably tied to Western positivistic rationalist thinking, it can sometimes become an obstacle and a nuisance, thereby contributing to the body's impossibility to speak. "Language is a male discourse," wrote Anzaldúa (1987, p. 54).

The body and sexuality are potential decolonizing tools that rupture and fragment the Western inorganic approach to theory. Listening and voicing *el cuerpo* and sexuality are important avenues that must be incorporated in order to forge new ways to increase our likelihood to build new *puentes* that connects as opposed to divides us. Important to mention is the groundbreaking work being produced on the body and performance *que nos puede ayudar* to examine multiple ways that our *cuerpos* perform dominant discursive ideologies. For example, Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (2006) have compiled works of scholars who explore and examine performance and performativity through history, politics, pedagogy, literature, ethnography, and theory. Performance studies *abre otra avenida* "of comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power and reinvent ways of being in the world" (Madison & Hamera, 2006, p. xii). Performance studies may contribute to a borderlands feminist framework different ways to approach research, perhaps even creating the type of *punte* where dominant discourses can dialogue with marginalized discourses in order to forge new mutated discourses of resistance.

## The New Tribalism: Mestizaje as Bridge

In this millennium we are called to renew and birth a more inclusive feminism, one committed to basic human rights, equality, respect for all people and creatures, and for the earth. As keepers of the fire of transformation we invite awareness of soul into our daily acts, call richness and beauty into our lives; bid spirit to stir our blood, dissolve the rigid walls between us, and gather us in. May our voices proclaim the bonds of bridges. (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p.xxxix)

The title in this portion of our chapter is inspired by the visions and aspiration of the late Gloria Anzaldúa (2000, pp. 214–215). For us, her work has always been about stretching our *mentes y cuerpos* in order to connect in transnational, transborder fashion. For Anzaldúa, the “New Tribalism” was not about engendering a politic based solely on a Latina Chicana prerogative but also about the omnipresences of the *nos/otras* concept. Anzaldúa explains,

Want to hear my rationale for my use of “New Tribalism”? I use the word *nos/otras* to illustrate how we’re in each other’s world, how we’re each affected by the other, and how we’re all dependent on the other. (p. 215)

The “New Tribalism,” then, is about how we/you/they can witness how we are all in each other. Although the concept of tribalism might seem like the ghettonization of ideas and concepts, on the contrary, it is about all of us (you, us, they) in the tribe. Therefore, the New Tribalism avoids essentialist notions of who we/they/us are and constantly challenges who we are, critiquing others as a way to also reevaluate ourselves. *Por eso nuestros proyectos* should not only be “community” self-serving but also form alliances with those who are also feeling and living the historical and contemporary effects of Western hegemonic policies, juridical discourses, and economic disenfranchisement.

In forming alliances, we must at the same time do as Alarcón (1998) believes: “locate the point of theoretical and political consensus with other feminists (and ‘feminist’ men), and on the other, continue with projects that position [us] in paradoxical binds” (p. 380). In a similar fashion, Angie Chabram-Dernersesian (1999b) urges us to continue to rethink, rework, and maneuver Chicana/o, Latina/o cultural studies in order to forge transnational alliances. She argues that we must not only celebrate the *nosotras* but also facilitate a space for the engagement of critical dialogues between and among the various multiple Chicana/os, Latina/os subjectivities and indigenous realities that are embodied, lived, and experienced. Chabram-Dernersesian argues that

[a] critical transnationalism of this sort must entertain other types of geopolitical and linguistic complexities, complexities that arise from making strategic connections with other people of colour in the Americas (here and there) and from engaging racial, class, sexual and gender dynamics that are often erased when referring to so-called “Spanishspeaking” groups. (p.183)

For Chela Sandoval (2000), alliance building emerges from the reworking and rebuilding of the works of

critical and cultural theorists who share an affinity for revolutionary resistance and critical liberation, even if they stem from the canon. Her (re)visioning of the works of Fredric Jameson, Donna Haraway, Michel Foucault, Hayden White, Jacques Derrida, Franz Fanon, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Paula Gunn Allen, and Roland Barthes allows her to seek out that which inspires them and draws from global feminist and ethnic scholars in order to illuminate “the lines of force and affinity such writing shares that link them with the theories, hopes, desires, and aims of decolonizing sex, gender, race, ethnic, and identity liberationists” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 5). Sandoval believes that Western theory also communicates a vision for a postcolonial 21st century. As Western theory has been influenced by U.S. Third World feminist criticism, a puente has opened that allows cultural and critical theory to usurp their decolonial voices that drive anti- and postcolonial yearning and possibility. What Sandoval does so well is to bridge multiple theories and methodologies through a method of differential consciousness in order to forge a coalitional consciousness of possibility and of postmodern love. Sandoval's work is an example of *mestizaje* as bridge and method and the type of “new tribalism” that Anzaldúa (2002b) envisioned and engendered:

To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without. To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded. Effective bridging comes from knowing when to close ranks to those outside our home, group, community, nation—and when to keep the gates open. (p.3)

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## Conclusions: *Nuevas Posibilidades*

As a tool, methodology, epistemology, and a way of existing, borderland-*mestizaje* feminism embodies a hybrid mode of consciousness that challenges researchers to rethink new ways to know and to be. Emerging from the lives and experiences of Chicanas/os living in the *in-between* geographical and metaphorical spaces of the borderlands, borderland-*mestizaje* theorizing is intimately concerned with unweaving the legacies of colonialism and rebuilding transformative *nuevas teorías*. By implicating Western research in the continued colonization of peoples, BMF offers possibilities for reconceptualizing research toward decolonial practice.

In the struggle to decolonize educational research, BMF invites researchers to reconstruct their research practices and to subvert the boundaries of social science. We are urged to critique dominant discourses and ideologies, deconstruct unidimensional notions of identity, problematize “white-washed” representations, and interrogate Western modes of inquiry. Central to Chicana feminist oppositional projects are self-reflection, collaboration, their own subjectivities, sexuality, and theorizing with the body. These insurgent researchers tear open new spaces from which to theorize—spaces from where they can destabilize imperialist assumptions and contest Western narratives of domination. Our purpose in this chapter is not to present borderland-*mestizaje* feminism as a new truth but rather to offer a different approach that supports decolonial

research agendas and emancipatory social transformation—that offers *nuevas posibilidades* for research and for being.

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## ***Platicas Y Conversaciones: The New End Notes***

This is what we call the new end notes where we bounce off, converse, *platicamos* about and reflect on our own unabridged understanding of borderland-mestizaje feminism. What follows is our attempt at understanding how borderlandmestizaje feminism is embedded in our everyday lives as *mujeres*, minorities, and researchers. Our *conversaciones* are examples of the struggles and complexities we recognize and acknowledge as we endeavor to make sense of our lives and work, not to mention borderland-mestizaje feminism itself. Our conversations may show ambiguity and contradictions, but we contend that they demonstrate that our intention is not to make BMF a new “truth” or a static and unbending critical framework. To the contrary, we hope they highlight its continuity and discontinuity as well as its malleability.

*CS: Lo que estamos haciendo no es una nueva teoría.* I don't want *la gente* to think that we have come up with some new theory. In fact, *yo veo esto como un* plea to rethink educational research with the work that incorporates borderland-mestizaje feminism as well as to think it a valid option for thinking about our research.

*ED:* I agree and I hope that readers/researchers understand that we are not trying to offer a static, “true” notion of BMF. My concern is that, by trying to describe BMF in one chapter, we run the risk of essentializing it. Rather, *espero que*, we illustrate its complexity and inspire qualitative researchers to want to learn more and to read the primary works of those BM feminists we cite, as well as others.

*CS:* Excellent point! I want *la gente* to get a “feel” for this type of critical work and not the “methodological steps” to BMF. I was even scared to use words in the title such as “the new tribalism” for risk of researchers dismissing it as too ethnically driven. But I hope that the opposite is true. Gloria Anzaldúa's work was once labeled as “the new tribalism” because it was seen like too Chicana, too focused on issues that only pertain to Chicanas. However, Anzaldúa reappropriated that term to mean *we(us/they) are all* in the tribe, so in a way is a new type of tribalism.

*ED:* I get what you're saying, but what do you mean when you say that you want people to “get a ‘feel’ for this type of critical work?”

*CS:* Maybe I'm trying to challenge myself and others to feel and learn with the body and to embark on a bodily engagement with intellectual constructs and discourses, whether it be BMF, postmodern, postcolonial, or whatever criticalist framework. *Por eso*, when we were creating the outline for this chapter, I wanted a section on the body since it is a subtext in most Chicana feminist work. And sometimes we just have to think differently, and for me, then, it requires that I use my body and *feel* that difference. *Ay*, does this make sense?

*ED:* It makes sense to me, but I worry that some researchers will be resistant to explore this type of work. Part of that has to do with our training. That is, many of us have internalized the idea that research is something of the mind, not the body. It is a very different (and maybe uncomfortable) way for some of us to approach research. I think feeling uncomfortable is a good thing. Of course, we have to be careful not to assume that using our body automatically frees us from dominant and colonial research practices. I don't think it's entirely liberating or controlling, but rather a site of struggle. The fact is, I have a white body. As a white body, I really struggle with trying to (un)do research. You know that I grapple with the fact that I am a White woman engaged with BMF. I constantly ask myself how I may inadvertently trivialize BMF theory—imposing Whiteness and diluting BMF into something “nice” and “safe” for mainstream researchers. Yet, I am so drawn to it.

*CS:* You know it's interesting how you feel like you have a white body. I have always seen you as a woman of color. Maybe it's because you and I in many ways “see” how inappropriate research can be with children and women of color. You have what Dolores Delgado Bernal terms a cultural intuition in your pedagogy and in your research endeavors, at least with those that you have engaged with me. Having said that, I also feel like I have embodied some Whiteness and it's probably inescapable. That is why Gloria's concept of *nos/otras* would be so relevant in this conversation. We are never just us (*nos*) but also part of the other (*otras*). The word *nosotras* in English literally translates into “usthem,” which means we or us. And no matter how much I can deconstruct White ways of being and existing, I have come to realize that I am that which I deconstruct constantly—body and mind. And you are right, the mind/body is a site of constant struggle; otherwise, our projects are just as colonizing as (post) positivist research and Euro-American male-dominated criticalist research.

*ED:* Yes! You know, only recently have I felt like I had a white body. My whole life I never felt “White” *porque soy morena*. However, as I became more engaged with BMF, I felt a need to disclose my “Whiteness.” Maybe so people wouldn't think that I was claiming to be something I wasn't (with a Spanish-sounding surname and all)? I guess I think of myself as an ally—much like Sandoval discusses. My affinity for BMF is perhaps my way of reworking and reconceptualizing my research practices. It is my bridge to forming alliances.

*CS:* The first time I presented with a panel of Chicana feminists, I had to disclose the fact that I was not of Mexican descent. Actually soy *Nicaragüense!* But I have lived in Texas since I was eight years old. I absorbed the tex-mex *cultura*. And the same thing goes for me: BMF is my way of rethinking my research and pedagogical practices. You know I was told once that I had the ability to shift between and among identities. Important in BMF is the strategic essentialism or knowing when and how to move between/among identities. Sometimes I have to argue from a Latina feminist perspective but also know that sometimes that standpoint can limit possibilities instead of expanding them.

*ED:* I feel that this is part of my struggle to resist the “us/them” dichotomies and the identity imposed on me (and by me), which serves only to limit my possibilities. I try to continually critique the ways

in which I engage in this dualistic thinking. It's not something that I will simply overcome, but rather have to continually reflect on and resist. Similarly, I try to continually critique my research and question what, how, and why I do it.

CS: A perfect example of this continuous reflection is one of the projects I am engaged in now. The purpose of the project is to identify the “needs” of immigrant mothers with regards to child care. Finding these “needs” will help us identify existing high-quality care programs and/or create new ones for immigrant mothers. I have real problems finding “needs” when “needs” are already embedded in the focus group questions. Here is where I think: Why are we doing this? Who will really benefit? Are we really going to address their needs or *our* need to get children under 5 “ready” for school? I think *otra vez*, colonizing hearts/minds/bodies with the rhetoric of finding needs. This all goes back to the value of engendering decolonizing methods, such as the ones presented in this chapter. Maybe, as we have discussed, research in and of itself *is* problematic perhaps even more now with our current political context, funding for research is not geared toward working with/for communities but more like for working on them to “fix” our perceived notions of their problems.

ED: I agree that we need to consider the possibility that research as construct is problematic. We must resist this legacy of Western modes of research—to “fix” Others. The project you mentioned is one among numerous examples of how seemingly benign research, in the name of “helping others,” may serve to perpetuate hegemonic discourses and agendas. That's why we need to continually critique the ways in which our work may create privilege for some over others. So, considering your objections to this project, do you know how you might negotiate or resist this potentially colonizing agenda?

CS: One of the ways I have decided to include “subversive” acts of resistance was to bring up the fact that the initial focus group questions to me didn't seem to make sense from a Latina perspective. I use that strategic essentialism to make a point about the Euro-American-centric nature of the questions. The purpose of the project is to identify cultural practices of immigrants that could be incorporated to create high-quality early childhood programs, yet the questions are all about *early English literacy!* The questions were constructed specifically to answer the importance of early English literacy in immigrant homes. How in the world would that get at identifying cultural practices? Needless to say, after our first meeting, people (nonacademics) who are part of the steering committee in this project and work with the different immigrant populations in the area began to bring up other issues with the questions. What was so interesting was that several people began to say, “Let's just ask one broad question like—how is taking care of children different here than from your country?—and you'll see the flood gates open.” Then others chimed in and said that health care was a major issue more so than English literacy. A woman who works with the Latino population suggested that the questions should be as broad as possible. What I have learned so far is that academia is disconnected from the community. Gloria Anzaldúa asks us in *Making Face, Making Soul* to de-academize theory and to connect the community to the academy. Supporting

the steering committee nonacademics in this project is my way to connect the community to the academy.

*ED:* Did you face much resistance from the “academics” in the steering committee? It can be difficult for some folks to give up their role as the “expert” and open up to other ways of doing research. It is amazing how the ideas and questions raised by you and the nonacademics changed the entire project.

It's funny you say that about using strategic essentialism because I've been doing that lately in working with both faculty and students. I mentioned before that I've come to see myself as a “white body,” so I've tried to use that to my/our advantage. I've “played up” my Whiteness because it seems that people are less threatened by and more open to these ideas when it comes from someone they see as “like them.” I wish that wasn't the case, but that's what I have experienced. These days, I feel like I have to try anything and everything to support critical work such as BMF or any social justice issue. I'm not sure if you are aware of what's happening here in Arizona, but a bill has been proposed that would ban K–12 teachers and professors in Arizona public colleges and universities from supporting or condoning any social, political, or cultural issue while teaching. Basically, banning any advocacy and all opinions, experience. All education, teaching, and knowledge must be “neutral.” The bill would impose penalties (fines, firings, lawsuits) on faculty that discuss political and controversial subjects in higher education. If it passes, then how would we teach students about BMF? How would we teach students about qualitative and criticalist research? How would we teach anything? This is a disturbing, dangerous bill and one of many recent moves from the political right to eliminate any opposing views. That's why I think it is so important that we form these alliances to actively combat the push to narrow what is considered legitimate knowledge/research.

*CS:* To answer your first questions, no, there was not much resistance from the PI [principal investigator] because in some ways, she was aware that she knew very little about the populations. But I often wonder about the PIs that go on their sole hunch without a sounding board. and I believe that is why we currently have so much research on the deficit skills of young English as a second/ third language children and such a focus on teaching parents how to interact with their children. It's a total colonization of the mind, heart, and soul. *¡Hasta me duele!* (it hurts me).

And with regards to Arizona, I have a feeling that's where the country is going. Arizona is just the white head on the pimple. And it is scary! But this is why you are right *necesitamos*, critical research and multiple ways to push the boundaries. I think one way is to try to make our research connect with the community in all aspects but done very critically. You know, attending critical qualitative conferences was inspiring; there are many great kinds of critical research being conducted all over the U.S. and internationally from many disciplines. I have to believe *que hay esperanza*. There is hope. We just have to find resistance in small spaces, unexpected places, and in different types of locations. *¡Que siga la lucha!*

And on a last note, *mil gracias* to C. Alejandra Elenes for her critical feedback on this chapter and her inspiring work that keeps us on our toes and pushes us to move beyond essentialist claims to/of anything!

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Last, we dedicate this chapter to the late Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa. We are forever indebted to her for her intellectual, spiritual, and carnal contributions to the field!

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