UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Los Angeles

Raza Womyn Re-Constructing Revolution:

Exploring the Intersections of Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality in the Lives of Chicana/Latina Student Activists

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Anita Tijerina Revilla

2004

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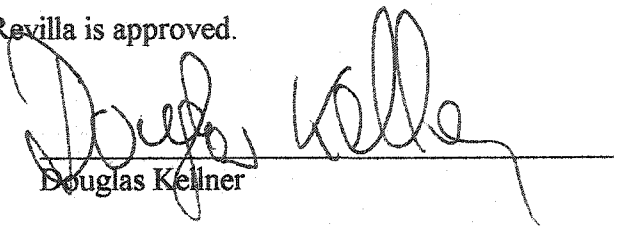
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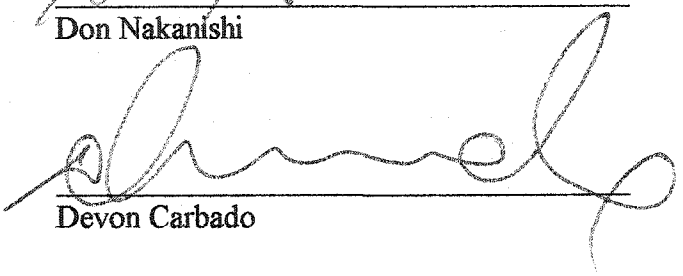
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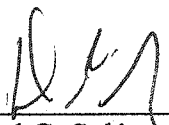
Douglas Kellner



Don Nakanishi



Devon Carbado



Daniel G. Solórzano, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2004

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DEDICATION PAGE

This dissertation is dedicated to all the beautiful and fierce *mujeres* of Raza Womyn.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES/PICTURES ..... **VII**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **IX**

CHAPTER 1 ..... **1**

INTRODUCTION **1**

Statement of the Problem & Its Significance 1

Background Information 6

Research Questions 11

CHAPTER 2 ..... **13**

LITERATURE REVIEW **13**

Theoretical Frameworks 13

Latina/Chicana/Queer Feminist Theory *15*

Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Theory *20*

Resistance and Critical Theories in Education *26*

CHAPTER 3 ..... **41**

METHODOLOGY: FIELDSITE, METHODS, & ANALYSIS **41**

Fieldsite Description and Selection Process 41

Access into Fieldsite 43

Research Methodology 44

Participant Observation 53

Interviews 54

Portraiture and Testimonio 55

Researcher's Role, Reflexivity in Research, and Ethics 60

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Researcher's Role 60

Reflexivity in Research 62

Ethics 64

Data Management & Analysis 65

Data Management 65

Analysis 67

Raza Womyn Major Participants of the Study 69

CHAPTER 4 ..... **88**

RAZA WOMYN *MUJERSTORIA* **88**

The Early Years (1979-1981) 90

Growing out of MEChA 90

Raza Womyn seeking university recognition 92

Raza Womyn during the late 1980s 93

Latinas Guiding Latinas, a community service branch of Raza Womyn 93

Establishing a Separate Identity and a Physical Space at the University 95

Raza Womyn in the early 90s 98

The first annual Chicana/Latina conference 103

The most recent break between Raza Womyn and MEChA and La Familia 105

A QUEER *MUJERSTORIA*: COMING OUT IN RAZA WOMYN **111**

CHAPTER 5 ..... **122**

LOVE AND REVOLUTION **122**

Carmen's Testimonio 124

Familia 125

Navigating the Educational Pipeline 128

The Catalyst for Conscientización 142

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Carmen's Experience at UCLA 146

Conscientización de mujer en Raza Womyn 151

The Coming Out Process 157

Love and Revolution 165

CHICANA IDENTITY POLITICS: A CONVERSATION OF SORTS 174

CHAPTER 6 175

***SOY REVOLUCIONARIA* (I AM A REVOLUTIONARY) 175**

My initial encounter with delia 176

delia's Testimonio 178

Raza Womyn experience 193

Soy Revolucionaria 195

CHAPTER 7 198

CONCLUSION 198

Marginalization 198

Raza Womyn/Muxerista Pedagogy and Conscientización 203

"Re-Constructing Revolution" 207

Implications of this Research 212

APPENDIX A 215

APPENDIX B 238

APPENDIX C 239

APPENDIX D 240

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LIST OF FIGURES/PICTURES

Figure 1. This diagram represents the theoretical frameworks drawn upon for the development of this research project 13

Figure 2. Various political posters and cultural decorations adorn the Raza Womyn student office on the university campus. (2001-2004)..... 41

Figure 3. *Mujeres* working in the Raza Womyn office. (2002) 43

Figure 4. Research methodologies used in this study are represented in the above diagram. 44

Figure 5. This diagram represents the different methods that were used to collect the data. 46

Figure 6. This diagram represents the data that were collected for this project..... 60

Figure 7. *Mujeres en Resistencia*: Raza Womyn at Affirmative Action Rally. (2001) 88

Figure 8. Raza Womyn organizers of the first annual Chicana/Latina conference (1996).... 103

Figure 9. Carmen and Angelica in high school. (1996).. 122

Figure 10. Carmen and Angelica senior year in high school. (1996)..... 133

Figure 11. Angelica and Carmen at the Banning High School Graduation. (1996) 134

Figure 12. Carmen and Angelica while students at UCLA. (2001).....141

Figure 13. Erica and Carmen living in Oakland. (2002).....172

Figure 14. This is delia in her third year at UCLA. (2001)..... 175

Figure 15. This is a picture of delia at the *Mujer a Mujer* film festival at UCLA. (2001).....176

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Figure 16. delia sits with her mother and father after a Raza Womyn conference. (2000)…

……181

Figure 17. delia at a protest at the NACCS conference in Arizona. (2001)……195

Figure 18. 4th Annual Chicana/Latina Conference Program Cover (1998)……207

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VITA

February 28, 1973	Born, San Antonio, Texas
1995	A.B., Religion, minor in Latin American, African American, and American Studies Princeton University Princeton, New Jersey
1994-1996	Rockefeller Brothers Fund Fellow
1996	M.A., Anthropology and Education Teachers College, Columbia University New York, New York
1996-98	Education/Research Assistant and Gender Equity Coordinator, Intercultural Development Research Association, San Antonio, Texas
1998-2001	Title VII, Bilingual Education Fellow University of California, Los Angeles
1998-1999	Graduate Student Researcher, Studying the Effects of Proposition 227 with Professor Kris Gutierrez, University of California, Los Angeles
1999-2001	Teaching Assistant Department of Education and Chicana/o Studies University of California, Los Angeles
1999-2002	Graduate Student Researcher, Understanding Race and Education with Professor Amy Stuart Wells, University of California, Los Angeles
2000-2002	Gates Millennium Scholar
2001	Woodrow Wilson Dissertation Grant Award
2001-2002	Ford Dissertation Year Fellow
2000-2001	Instructor Department of Chicana/Chicano Studies California State University, Northridge

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2002	Instructor, Department of Education & Chicana/o Studies University of California, Los Angeles
2003-2004	Irvine Visiting Scholar, Gender & Feminist Studies and Chicana/o Studies Pitzer College
2004	Ph.D., Social Sciences and Comparative Education, Race and Ethnic Studies University of California, Los Angeles Los Angeles, California

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Raza Womyn Re-constructing Revolution:

Exploring the Intersection of Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality in the Lives of Chicana/Latina Student Activists

By

Anita Tijerina Revilla

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2004

Professor Daniel G. Solórzano, Chair

Using Chicana/Latina/Queer[1] Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Theory as theoretical frameworks, this research utilizes participant observation, interviews, surveys, and document examination to examine Chicana/Latina student activists' experiences in college. The study focuses on the members of a student organization called Raza Womyn. The research illuminates the way Chicanas/Latinas deal with racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia in their academic, home, and community settings. I investigate their personal histories and academic trajectories to develop an understanding of triumphs and obstacles involved with their pursuit of a higher education.

[1] The use of "Chicana/Latina/Queer" implies that the women who produced the theory may identify with all of these or any one of these identities. They may or may not be Queer or straight-identified and are all of Mexican, Caribbean or Latin American heritage.

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Using these methods and foci, I analyze concepts of activism, critical consciousness, and social justice to concentrate on the potential of race-based and women-identified student organizations to foster positive educational experiences inside and outside of the classroom. After describing the organization, I discuss and analyze a series of in-depth interviews with the participants of Raza Womyn.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem & Its Significance

The goal of this research is to better understand the role of race/racism, ethnicity/nativism, class/classism, gender/sexism, and sexuality/homophobia in the lives and academic experiences of Chicana/Latina[2] college students as they make their way from secondary education through higher education. It includes the documentation of their life histories and academic trajectories, their college choice process, and their transition from high school to the university. Finally, it explores the involvement of these students in social justice movements at the university and in their communities. Student activism is the point of entry into the lives of the participants of the study because their activism is directly focused on the major areas of interest of this research—that is, race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. This is a qualitative case study of a group of Chicana/Latina student activists at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) who participate or have participated in an organization called Raza Womyn de UCLA,[3] a

---

[2] I use the term Latina as a pan-ethnic term that can include Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Caribbean, and Central and South American origin people, but most of the examples used throughout this study will be specific to Mexican-origin women. The majority of the participants of the study self identify as Chicanas. Chicana is a historically and politically significant term used to signify ethnic pride and critical consciousness about the history of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S.

[3] In 1979, the organization was called Raza Women. It was created as an organization for women of Chicana/Latina ancestry on campus. In the 2000-2001 academic year, they decided to change the name of the organization to Raza Womyn—taking the "e" out of the word women and replacing it with a "y" to remove the word "men" in "women." This was done as a feminist statement to reinforce a woman-centered ideology for the organization.

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Chicana/Latina student organization founded in 1979 by undergraduate female students. According to the Raza Womyn constitution, Raza Womyn "unite in the spirit of a collective movement to achieve sexual, political, educational, cultural, social and self-determination."

Because of the antisubordination and social justice discourse that takes place in many activist spaces such as race and gender-based student organizations that are actively involved in social justice movements, I believe that these students can best speak to the effects of discrimination on their lives. Social justice and activist/activism are complex terms with fluid definitions that take shape based on the location and positionality of the individuals who are defining them. For the purpose of this study, social justice can be defined as the struggle to dismantle the structures of inequality that perpetuate sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, as well as other forms of subordination. Activist can be defined as an individual who engages in a struggle for social justice. Race, class, gender and sexuality discrimination is a major issue of concern in schools and in particular at institutions of higher education. Hence, many student activists at universities and colleges organize at their schools to struggle against these forms of prejudice. Raza Womyn is one of these organizations that is involved in a social movement against racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia.

It is important to document the stories of people who are dealing with these aspects of subordination in their educational experiences because it is through their perspectives and stories that we learn how to improve the educational experiences of marginalized students. By exploring the lived experiences of Chicanas/Latinas, I examine

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how these women perceive and respond to the intersection of multiple forms of oppression and how these factors affect their views of and commitment to education and social justice. Using interviews, surveys, document examination and day-to-day observations, I capture the participants' perceptions about activism, injustice, and education. Using these data, I am better able to understand the way these women construct their lives and claim their identities. These women's stories are both counternarratives and *testimonios* (Delgado, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Alba Acevedo, *et. al.*, 2001).

I examine the triumphs and obstacles of social justice efforts in their lives, and therefore, fully grasp their complexities and impact on the participants. A qualitative study enables me to explore the lived experiences of the participants, and it allows their individual narratives, or voices, to shape our understanding of these experiences. The methodology of this study weaves together data from in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observations to develop a portrait of a Chicana/Latina student activist group and several *testimonios* of the individual members (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Alba Acevedo, *et. al.*, 2001).

For social justice educators, there is a fundamental need to develop antisubordination and social justice education, but for many people there is much uncertainty as to what the best way to do this is. I have known many students, teachers, professors, and community activists who express their beliefs that social justice and empowerment of the oppressed are their goals, but rarely do they articulate how those concepts manifest themselves into day to day practice. Very seldom are people's visions

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of social justice explained, invoked, or heeded in an organized and strategic fashion, especially in academia.

At times talk of justice has become a call for "revolution." Reminiscent of early Socialist movements, during the Civil Rights Movement antiracist and anti-imperialist people claimed "revolution" as a vision of justice—of a better, just world, free of racist and imperialist subordination. At the time, activists envisioned revolution as peaceful and/or armed struggle, (depending on the organization). Many saw revolution as an institutional and/or individual process of social change that would eliminate social oppression (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2002; Espinoza, 2001). Because some people believe that the Civil Rights Movement (including the Chicano Movement[4]) ended in the 1970s, many people from that earlier generation of activists view the call for revolution amongst activists of today as naïve. Some early activists indicate that they "remember when they used to be revolutionaries," implying that they no longer have the vision of revolution they once had—that they no longer aspire to change the world. This is a great loss for it implies defeat or changes in their grand visions of justice. Furthermore, what does this signify to the new generation of activists if they no longer believe in revolution as a means of social justice? This study shows that the movement did not end in the 70s. In fact, it continues today as activists keep on rallying around cries for revolution as they protest the unfair treatment of people of color, laborers, students, poor people,

[4] I write "Chicano Movement" as opposed to Chicano/a Movement to indicate that what most people acknowledge as the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was male-dominated and patriarchal.

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immigrants, women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, elderly, disabled, and many other marginalized communities.

It is imperative that as antisubordination educators and scholars we further investigate the significance of the concept of revolution as it translates into social justice. Thus, one of the elements of activism central to my study is this phenomenon of advocating "revolution" by contemporary activists. I investigate the language of revolution as it reveals strategies for moving towards social justice action. I engage the participants in a dialogue that seeks to explore the implications and meaning of the call for revolution as a means for developing social change through action. The significance of this analysis is to understand why people continue to speak about revolution as a means for creating a society free of racist, sexist, classist, and/or homophobic subordination.

The study has a two-pronged focus: (1) to document the roles of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality on Chicana/Latina schooling experiences, and (2) to learn what function student activism and social justice movements play in the academic experiences of Chicana/Latina college students.

This research contributes to the fields of Education, Social Sciences, Ethnic Studies, Women Studies, and Queer Studies. There are many students of color, including Chicanas/Latinas, who engage in social justice activities or other acts of resistance in college because they feel marginalized in institutions of higher education that they perceive as hostile and alienating. This study looks at ways that Chicana/Latina student activists are dealing with oppression and/or marginalization, as well as resistance,

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empowerment, liberation, and privilege. Furthermore, I document the experiences of these student activists to share them with new and long-time activists; so that they will know that they are not alone in their struggles and that the struggle for change is both immediate *and* long term.

Background Information

The reason I chose Raza Womyn as a case study is because they defined themselves as an organization committed to creating solidarity that collectively challenges obstacles such as racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia (Raza Womyn, 1999). This was the first student activist organization I encountered that made a claim to address all of these aspects of subordination at the same time. Often, race-based organizations have addressed race and class issues, while marginalizing issues of sexuality and gender. Likewise, many women-based and gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender organizations have ignored race and/or class; however, Raza Womyn addresses all of these areas. Upon learning this, I became interested in learning more about the organizational practices that would or would not reflect these commitments. According to the members of Raza Womyn, they are dedicated to creating consciousness about issues pertaining to Chicanas/Latinas and Chicana/Latina/o communities. They assert that their work is guided by the desire to "carry on the tradition of struggle of economic, political, and social justice" (Raza Women, 1999).

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My first encounter with the organization, on March 6, 1999, was at their Fourth Annual Chicana/Latina conference. The theme of the conference was "*El Fuego de Nuestro Espiritu Continua la Llama de Revolución Colectiva* [The Fire of our Spirit Continues the Flame of Collective Revolution]." They invited women of all ages to participate in a one-day conference from 8 AM to 5:00 PM. The entire conference dealt with issues that specifically affect Chicana/Latina/o communities. The target population of the conference included women of all ages throughout Southern California. They invited middle school, high school, community college, and university students to participate, as well as their mothers, daughters, grandmothers, aunts, friends, and neighbors. Men were not excluded; however, there was an explicit outreach to *mujeres*.[5] Approximately four hundred women attended that Saturday conference. Every year, the number of participants at the conference has increased. (The ninth annual Chicana/Latina conference that took place on March 6, 2004 had over 600 participants.)

The opening speaker for the fourth annual conference was world-renowned Chicana lesbian feminist, writer, and playwright Cherríe Moraga. Moraga is one of the highest acclaimed scholars in the fields of Chicana/Latina/o studies and women's studies, and her presence at the conference speaks to the politics and goals of the organizers. The following 19 workshops were offered for the participants:

1) Get Out, Act Out, Speak Out: A Personal Herstory of Familia and Revolution

[5] The words "*mujer*" and "*mujeres*," meaning "woman" and "women," are generally used by the participants of Raza Womyn to refer to women of Chicana, Mexicana, and Latina ancestry, but beyond that these words imply a connection and a sense of identity between Chicanas/Latinas. I will use these words to refer to the women in the organization and other women involved in Chicana/Latina activism, as is common amongst Raza Womyn.

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2) Identifying Domestic Violence in a Relationship

3) Redefining Gender Roles of *Mujeres* in *Charreria* [Rodeos]

4) Our Minds, Our Bodies, and our Girlfriends

5) Chicana Dykenamics: Explaining and Talking Openly about Chicana/Latina Sexuality

6) Health and AIDS

7) I Want to Go to College

8) Teenage Pregnancy

9) Let's Talk About Sex

10) Bilingual Education

11) *Creatividad*/Creativity: nurturing the writers within us

12) Body Image

13) *La Virgen y La Puta* [The Virgin and the Whore]: *Deconstruyendo el Estereotipo* [Deconstructing the Stereotype]

14) Just Kick It—An Introduction to Self-Defense

15) How our Indigenous Grandmothers Welcomed the Sun

16) Children's Workshop

17) Show Me the Money! Financial Aid

18) *Mujeres* in the *Maquilas* [Factories]

19) *Teatro* Izcalli-*Sin Vergüenza* [Izcalli Theatre-Shameless]

Workshop presenters included undergraduate and graduate students; UCLA counselors, admissions officers, and financial aid advisors; community, labor, and women

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organizers and activists; as well as creative artists, writers, and performers. A wide array of resources and networks were drawn upon to bring all of these people together to volunteer their time on a Saturday morning and afternoon. Monica Palacios, another well-known Chicana lesbian performer, playwright, and scholar performed a piece for the closing of the conference. Finally, the day's events closed with the music of Quetzal—a popular Chicana/o music group bringing a variety of different Latino sounds they call "Chicano Groove."

I later learned that Raza Womyn had to complete long, bureaucratic processes of applying for UCLA funding to pay for breakfast, lunch, keynote speakers, entertainment, and numerous other expenses for this conference. The preparations for this conference begin in the summer or fall of the academic year, and they continue into the winter. Every year, the conferences are held in February or March at the end of the winter quarter at UCLA.

At the conference in 1999, I introduced myself to a couple of the members of the organization, and I praised their success with the conference. That day, all of the *mujeres* were wearing a t-shirt that read, "Re-Constructing Revolution" on the backside. The slogan captured my interests and essentially resulted in this study.

After the conference, I observed and talked with several of the members of Raza Womyn at other student-organized functions. One week later, Raza Womyn and 38 other organizations co-sponsored a commemoration to the lives of the late Black Panthers, John Huggins and Bunchy Carter, who were murdered at UCLA. On April 15, 1999, Raza Womyn co-sponsored and hosted (along with The Committee on Cuban Youth and

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Education, Undergraduate Students Association, and Samahang Filipino) a lecture given by two young communist leaders from Cuba. This gathering was a direct critique of capitalism and US imperialism, in solidarity with the Cuban revolution. On May 27, 1999, Raza Womyn held a forum, called "Recognizing and accepting Our *Belleza de Mujer* [Beauty as Women]," during which they challenged stereotypical and Eurocentric images of beauty.[6] Their work and involvement in student politics reflected their commitment to improve both their personal growth and their communities' growth. They addressed macro and micro level concerns as students, women, Chicanas/Latinas, people of color, and workers.

In the spring of 1999, I conducted a focus group interview with three members of the organization. They shared with me their perceptions of the purpose of the Chicana/Latina conference and defined the concept of "re-constructing revolution," and they talked about some of their personal experiences with race, class, gender, and sexuality.

I was a teaching assistant for Chicanas/os and Education, a class that three members of Raza Womyn took that spring, and this was where I first got a glimpse of how their social justice beliefs filtered into their classroom participation. Their group presentation addressed the negative conditions of continuation/alternative schools, where students with behavioral or attendance problems are sent because they are no longer wanted at their

[6] The invitation read "*Mujeres* are constantly bombarded by society's beauty standards, causing many women to transform their appearance for others. Consequently, eating disorders develop among women who feel the pressure to meet these standards."

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home schools.[7] The presenters were especially concerned with the victimization and demonization of the students and the lack of concern exhibited by teachers and administrators at these schools. I later learned that one of the members of the group worked in the alternative schools they studied for this project as a mentor and tutor, and she purposely chose to work with these students because she believed that these students were in most need of positive academic interaction.

As I learned more about the women and the work that they did through Raza Womyn, I became more and more intrigued. I was convinced that these women could best help answer my overall question, which was, how my research can improve the educational experiences of Chicana/Latina students dealing with racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia.

Research Questions

Specifically, the research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do Chicana/Latina college student activists **perceive** the role of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia in their lives?
2. How do Chicana/Latina college student activists **respond** to racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia in their lives?

[7] Students are sent to alternative schools for a variety of reasons. Essentially these students are pushed out of their home schools because the school administration and teachers feel themselves incapable or unwilling to work with these students.

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3. How do Chicana/Latina student activists work to **achieve** social justice in higher education?
4. How does social injustice **affect** the educational experiences of Chicana/Latina college students?
5. What role does student activism play in higher education for Chicanas/Latinas?

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is intricately linked with my personal conviction to help end racial, ethnic, gender, class, and sexual subordination in the United States, particularly in institutions of education. For this reason, I have chosen to align my work with several progressive camps of scholarship that recognize the need to develop research and action that directly struggles against subordination. They are Chicana/Latina/Queer Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) and various theories of education. This literature review will provide a working knowledge of these frameworks. The following reviewed literature served to frame the research questions, design, methodology, and purpose of the study.

Theoretical Frameworks

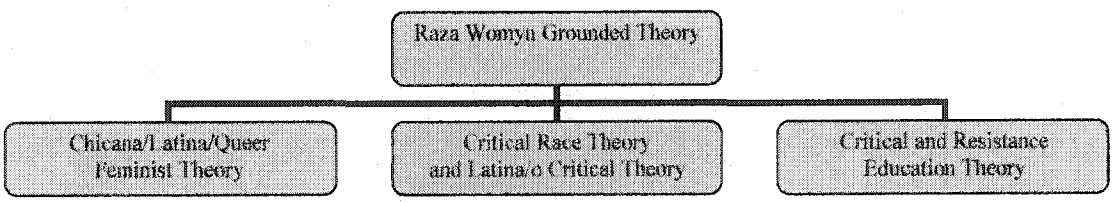


Figure 1. This diagram represents the theoretical frameworks drawn upon for the development of this research project.

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Raza Womyn members are actively engaged in creating and developing theory which explains their lived experiences. I have collected written and electronic documents, interviews, and oral communications from members of Raza Womyn in which they provide theoretical and philosophical explanations about their racial, class, gender, and sexual experiences. Thus, in the analysis of this research, I begin with grounded Raza Womyn theory (also referred to as *Muxerista*[8] theory), as you will see in the findings chapters and conclusion of this dissertation (For grounded theory, see Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I use the other theoretical frameworks to further contextualize phenomenon that I encountered, such as race, ethnicity, culture, Latina/Chicana experience, Queer experience, and feminism. Figure 1 shows that Raza Womyn grounded theory is the primary theoretical source for this project, while Chicana/Latina/Queer Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Latina/o Critical Theory provide more information in the areas of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. Likewise, the theories in education assist me to address issues of pedagogy and the schooling experiences of the research participants. This section provides a brief overview of the major theoretical frameworks that shape my research questions, methods, and purpose. It covers contributions from Chicana/Latina/Queer Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Latina/o Critical Theory.

[8] A *Muxerista* is a woman-identified Chicana/Latina who considers herself a feminist or womanist. The "x" replaces a "j" to signify a connection to the indigenous ancestry and languages of Mexico and Latin America.

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Latina/Chicana/Queer Feminist Theory

Chicanas/Latinas (as well as other women of color) in the 60s and 70s struggled with identifying themselves as feminists and continue to struggle with it today because both males and females have historically ostracized Chicana/Latina feminists for "selling out" to a White women's movement. It is a difficult task to deconstruct the idea of feminism as a White women's movement because of the strong critiques of racism and classism experienced by women of color in historical and contemporary feminist movements. As Anna Nieto-Gomez (1976) indicated early on, the issues of White middle-class feminist did not address welfare rights, labor struggles, racial discrimination, or affordable, bilingual and bicultural childcare in the 1970s. Furthermore, issues of citizenship, class, language, and ethnicity are still ignored by the majority of liberal White feminist literature and courses today. However, feminist scholars and activists of color have encouraged us to claim a space in feminist politics because of the need to expand feminism to all people.

Chicanas made early efforts to incorporate women's issues and feminism into Chicano Studies. This has been most evident in the shifts made in the National Association for Chicano and Chicana Studies (NACCS) and *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* (Women Active in Academics and Social Change] (MALCS)—two national organizations created by and for Chicana/o scholars. For the past 31 years, NACCS has been bringing together Chicana and Chicano scholars, activists, students, and educators from across the nation and across disciplines to share their research, community work, art, and culture at the annual conference. Within this intellectual and community

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space, women's and Queer issues have historically been marginalized. Over the years, women and Queer members have again and again pushed scholars (men and women) to recognize and eliminate the deep-rooted patriarchy and homophobia in NACCS. In 1984, for the first time ever at the insistence of Chicana scholars, the theme of the conference was completely dedicated to women's issues. The proceedings for this conference were published in a book entitled, Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender. It is important to note that at the time of the conference, the organization was still called the National Association for Chicano Studies. It was not until the mid-80s that women called for a deeper gender consciousness on the part of scholars, requiring the membership of the national organization to acknowledge Spanish as a patriarchic and gendered language that allows women to be subsumed under masculine terms such as Chicano. They proposed a resolution that included the term Chican*a* in the official name of the association; thus, becoming the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS).

The pieces submitted to the Chicana Voices manuscript reveal many of the unsettled concerns of Chicana scholars at the time. The most important article was written by a member of Raza Women de UCLA, which was only in its fifth year of existence when the piece was published in 1984. Cynthia Orozco,[9] a graduate student at UCLA, wrote a piece entitled, "Sexism in the Movimiento." Cynthia was amongst the earliest Chicana academics to call for "Chicana Studies." She worked actively in the mid-80s

[9] This year, I visited Cynthia Orozco at her home and interviewed her over the course of three days. She is professor at Eastern New Mexico University.

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with the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center's and coordinated the Women's Unit which was responsible for bringing the earliest Chicana scholars to UCLA to teach Chicana-related courses.

Many Chicanas/Latinas (and other women of color) have reclaimed feminism and connected feminist movements to their own reality bringing in their ethnicity, class, culture, and citizenship into their definitions of feminism. They have constructed alternative terms to reflect their ethnic identities, such as *Mujerista/Muxerista*, *Fronterizas* [Border Feminists], Xicanista/Xicanisma, and mestiza consciousness (Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Raza Womyn, 2002; Saldívar-Hull, 2000; Castillo, 1994; Anzaldúa, 1987.)

The experiences of women in male and female activist organizations throughout the Civil Rights Movement and into the present have consistently borne harsh critiques of sexism in ethnic movements. For example, Elaine Brown (1993) wrote about her experience in the Black Panther Party. She described the treatment she received from her male counterparts once she gained leadership in the party. Essentially, men who had previously supported her began to view her as a threat; consequently, she was forced to leave her leadership position in the movement. Likewise, in 1970 Gloria Arellanes, the minister of correspondence and finance of the East Los Angeles chapter of the Brown Berets, resigned from her position along with all the other women members of the chapter who felt that the male membership of the Brown Berets had not treated them as equals and "revolutionary sisters" in their movement (Espinoza, 2001). The members of Raza Womyn have similar stories, as they describe painful experiences in male/heterosexual-dominated, or patriarchal/ heteronormative-centered student organizations.

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Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1983) published a very important anthology that helped create a pathway towards the inclusion of gender and sexuality, (including lesbian experiences,) in race and feminist discourse (See also Moraga, 1983; Anzaldúa, 1987; Ramos, 1994; and Trujillo, 1991, 1997). Many of the contributors to this anthology wrote about the racism they experienced in the White liberal feminist movement, but they also included a harsh critique of homophobia amongst men and women in the race and class movements. Anzaldúa writes about an experience in which one of her Chicana friends was shunned for being a lesbian in a Chicano organization:

> Years ago, a roommate of mine fighting for gay rights told MAYO [Mexican American Youth Organization], a Chicano organization, that she and the president were gay. They were ostracized. When they left, MAYO fell apart. They too, [were] being forced to choose between the priorities of race, sexual preference, or gender. (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; p. 228)

Anzaldúa's struggle to be an advocate for women, gays, *and* people of color was difficult—as she notes that Chicanas "accused [her] of being more concerned with orgasms and the lesbian movement than with helping La Raza" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; p. xxxvii). Ironically, these accusations came during the landmark NACS (NACCS) conference in 1984 that was dedicated to "La Mujer." This occurs all too often—that people who are victims of oppression and subordination can also be oppressors of their counterparts. Nevertheless, twenty years after the first edition of This Bridge Called My Back, Anzaldúa (2002) wrote with great optimism:

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> To exclude is to close the bridge, invite separatism and hostilities. Instead we...must invite other groups to join us and together bring about social change...To trust the other...is hard when in the past they've betrayed us, and when our very lives have depended on not trusting. Though there are no longer pure victims or pure villains, differences in power and privilege are very real. (p. xxxvi)

These words ring true for women, people of color, Queer people, poor people and any other group that has experienced subordination by mainstream groups. It is common for people who first gain true understanding of their oppressed situations to get angry and to mistrust all members of the group or groups who hurt them or who inherit privilege by virtue of their disadvantage. However, some people who have long been entrenched in these struggles, who are attempting to move to a place of rebuilding and coalitions, are beginning to envision the possibility of trust and are relaxing the boundaries that they built to protect themselves. This is the most difficult element of social justice and coalitional movements. Many members of Raza Womyn struggle with this issue because pain and privilege continues to be reproduced year after year in spaces that have been historically hurtful, i.e., Chicano/a organizations, the university, white peers and faculty, the government, the workplace, and home.

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Critical Race Theory and Latina/o Critical Theory

I have selected Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) as tools of analysis because the scholars in these fields are not only theorists, but they are leaders and advocates of the struggle against racial inequality.

CRT is a field specifically established for studying race and racism in an effort to fight the impact and practice of racism. CRT is a legal movement that rejects notions of meritocracy, colorblindness, neutrality and objectivity as they are used in the institution of the law. CRT scholars maintain that especially when dealing with race, it is impossible to be detached or completely unaffected by the reality of racism, racial stereotypes, and racial power (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). They write, "scholarship—the formal production, identification, and organization, of what will be called 'knowledge'—is inevitably political" (Crenshaw *et. al.*, 1995, p. xiii). Thus, they state that their goal is to present scholarship that will challenge ideologies of white supremacy and help break the oppressive bond between law and racial power (Crenshaw *et. al.*, 1995). They further assert that America has mistakenly confused colorblindness with racial equality and racial consciousness with racist practice. In other words, by refusing to recognize that racism is a systematic form of oppression that permeates all aspects of society, America has sought to dismiss the historical, present, and future ramifications of racism and racial power.

CRT derived from a critique of an earlier movement called Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which had already begun to challenge the legal system's perpetuation of injustice. CLS, however, did not closely analyze racial power, oppression, and politics as part of the

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injustice. CRT also developed in response to the limitations of civil rights scholarship. Hence, began the journey to develop a new scholarship with the intention of evolving into a practice of racial liberation and justice.

In recent times, the concept of race has become highly contested. Scholars argue that race was socially created to further a system of oppression based on a racial hierarchy that privileges Whiteness (Banks, 1995; Fields, 1990). Ian Haney-Lopez (1995) wrote that:

> The categories of race previously considered objective, such as Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid, are now widely regarded as empty relics, persistent shadows of the social belief in races that permeated early scientific thought. Biological race is an illusion. Social race, however, is not...Race has its genesis and maintains its vigorous strength in the realm of social beliefs. (p. 200)

Race and ethnic studies scholars do not contest that race is socially constructed, but they do hold that race as an ideology is extremely powerful and can be used to understand human experience, expose racial power, and combat racism (Omi & Winant, 1993). They further believe that merely acknowledging it as a social construction will not eliminate its impact on people's lives. To understand the historical and social significance of race, Omi and Winant (1993) state that their "central work is to focus attention on *the continuing significance and changing meaning of race*" (p. 3). They argue that, "The longevity of the race concept, and the enormous number of effects race-thinking (and race-acting) have produced, guarantee that race will remain a feature of race reality across the globe...despite its lack of intrinsic or scientific merit (in the biological sense)" (p. 5).

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Thus, it is necessary to understand the concept of race to engage in the study (and elimination) of racism. Daniel Solórzano (1997) identifies three major points in the definition of racism as the following:

1. One group believes itself to be superior;
2. The group which believes itself to be superior has the power to carry out the racist behavior; and
3. Racism affects multiple racial/ethnic groups (p. 8).

He asserts that racism is a function of institutional power that people of color have never possessed in the United States.

Racism is not an illusion. It is the reality of people of color and is the reason that so many Latinos/as, African Americans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders are overrepresented in manual labor, living in poor conditions and poverty, suffering from the lack of medical care, and being denied quality education. Omi and Winant (1993) insist that the notion of race as an ideological construct:

> ...fails to recognize that the salience of a social construct can develop over half a millennium or more of diffusion, or should we say enforcement, as a fundamental principle of social organization and identity formation. (p. 5)

Thus, to say that race was constructed to justify slavery and colonialism and then to dismiss it, as an illusion, does not give us the tools we need to eliminate racism.

Our treatment of race issues must allow us to historically contextualize the way that race has affected different people's experiences, and it would be wise to do so

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without engaging in an 'oppression sweepstakes'(Moraga, 1983).[10] Thus, CRT has effectively argued against "vulgar anti-essentialism" (Crenshaw *et. al.*, 1995). Vulgar anti-essentialism is the attempt of critical scholars to demean the importance of race discourse by claiming that race is socially constructed, and therefore useless in fighting liberation struggles. While CRT scholars recognize race as a socially constructed phenomenon, they refuse to ignore the reality of racism, racial privilege, and racial oppression in American society (Crenshaw *et. al.*, 1995). Still the goal is not to essentialize race by purporting that there is one racial experience, nor is there one way that racism manifests itself. It is to explore the impact of race in the law and (for our purposes) in education.

Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) scholars have written extensively about the racialization process that Latinas/os undergo (Haney Lopez, 1995; Perea, 1997; Valdes *et. al.*, 2002). Much of the work that comes from the legal field of LatCrit has been instrumental for understanding the depth of racism as an historical and present day problem for Latinas/os. LatCrit is aligned with CRT and sometimes overlaps with CRT, but it further examines the intersection of race with ethnicity, culture, language, and citizenship to engage in analyses Latina/o experiences. LatCrit has "an overall commitment to social justice and the elimination of racism. [In this] struggle toward social justice, the abolition of racism or racial subordination is part of the broader goal of

[10] The oppression sweepstakes occurs when people of color or marginalized groups argue about who has experienced more racism or oppression in order to legitimize their pleas for justice.

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ending other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation" (Solórzano, 1999, class handout).

LatCrit has been developed as an anti-essentialist discourse that seeks to problematize Black and White binary thinking of race and identity that occurs in many race-centered spaces (including CRT). Leslie Espinoza (1997) writes:

> LatCrit theorists want to complicate our understanding of the mechanics of oppression. Racism is not only historical slavery, Jim Crow laws and gerrymandering voting districts in the South. It is also immigration laws and internment camps; it is stolen land grants and silenced languages; it is standardized tests based on standardized culture; it is invisibility and lost identity. (p. 1593)

Although, generally people recognize that racism occurs against Latinas/os, most race discourse deals with race using a Black and White dichotomy that does not account for the historical legacy of racism against Latinas/os. The belief that tackling only Black and White issues can dismantle racism assumes that racism occurs only in one way, (i.e., the way it is experienced by Black people). This approach falls short of a close analysis of the multiple shapes that racism takes in the lives of other people of color. Juan Perea (1997) asserts that a Black and White binary paradigm:

> interferes with liberation and equality. If Latinos/as and Asian Americans are presumed to be White by both White and Black writers (a presumption not borne out in the lived experience of most Latinas/os and Asians), then our claims to justice will not be heard or acknowledged. (p. 366)

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Perea (1997) further explains that discrimination against people of color that are not Black is not perceived as real racism. Several reasons account for this, including the perception that Latinas/os are more easily assimilated, the lack of knowledge about Latina/o history, and the overwhelming lack of discussion about non-Black and non-White people that occupy racialized America. Therefore, one of the goals of LatCrit is to ensure that Latinas/os are included in race discourse, but it is also invested in trying to understand the intersections and multiple identities that create the category of Latina/o.

LatCrit is of particular importance in work that explores the educational experiences of Latinas/os because it enables researchers to write about people who have been historically excluded from traditional research. It problematizes binary and dichotomized thinking and offers a clearer understanding of the complex social, historical, and political layers that affect an individual's life. For example, it allows us to discuss the exclusion of Latinas/os in race-based research rooted in the historical biological categories of race that include only Negroid, Caucasoid, and Mongoloid. LatCrit scholars have written extensively about the way that Latinos continue to be constructed as a "minority" racial group (Haney Lopez, 1995, 2000; Perea, 1995). Furthermore, Latinas/os have suffered extreme racism, in the legal and educational systems, because of the very *real* effects of the perceptions of Latinas/os in the United States. Because of this complex relationship of race (as it relates to Latinas/os), ethnicity is a very important extension of race.

Ethnicity can extend the race discourse to areas such as language, nationality, religion, culture, color, and other customs or characteristics specific to Chicana/Latina/o

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communities. For example, "racism" against a Chicana/Latina, is not only based on her heritage and/or her color (as African Americans usually experience racism). When a Chicana/Latina is discriminated against based on her language, culture, or national origin, the law opts not to protect her because these actions are not recognized as legitimate racist attacks by the law or by schools.[11] Language, culture, and national origin are believed to be mutable realities. They are believed to be changeable and not permanent (Cameron, 1997). However, LatCrit argues that language, culture, and family are immutable characteristics of Latina/os identity; therefore, racism against Chicanas/Latinas/os must take into account "racist" assaults based on all aspects of Chicana/Latina/o identity.

Resistance and Critical Theories in Education

The low educational achievement of students of color in the United States has undergone intensive interrogation for at least the past century. Most often, students and their families have been harshly criticized for being failures. The so-called "failures" of students of color have historically been explained by deficit theories that posit that some students have inferior genes, cultures, and/or environments (Valencia, 1997). To combat the widespread employment of deficit-thinking models that continue to pervade institutions of education, scholars have developed alternative theories that highlight other

[11] Legal scholar Christopher David Ruiz Cameron (1997) analyzes two major errors that U.S. institutions commit when considering language rights under the law. Cameron indicates that because of the use of "racial dualism" (based on a Black and White paradigm); the law regularly dismisses accounts of racism and nativism against bilingual people.

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factors affecting students of color in schools. This section of the literature review will discuss various models used to explain why students of color and low-income students struggle in schools.

Social Reproduction

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) counter deficit theories of students by offering a Marxist analysis of the hidden function of schools. They assert that students' educational inequalities are the result of capitalist goals manifested in schools. They suggest "that education should be viewed as reproducing inequality by legitimating the allocation of individuals to economic positions on the basis of ostensibly objective merit" (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 123). They argue that liberal education reforms have led to broken promises because inequity in schools is integrally connected to the unequal labor divisions of the capitalist economy. They believe that equality, democracy, and full human development cannot be realized in the educational school system because they conflict with the ultimate interest of a capitalist society, which is to maintain social and economic stratifications. According to their thesis, the social elite use schools to legitimize economic inequality by accepting meritocratic explanations for the division of economic conditions. They believe that schools create and reproduce worker's consciousness and behavior leading the children of the working class to continue in their parents' lead and the children of the elite likewise to follow their parents' paths. In essence, they believe that relationships in school highly correspond with relationships of work. Thus, purporting that while working class and ethnic minority students may attend

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school to achieve economic mobility and equity, elite students attend schools to maintain (or reproduce) their socio-economic status. The capitalist economic positions are reproduced through school curriculum. They charge that:

> By the time most students terminate schooling, they have been put down enough to convince them of their inability to succeed at the next highest level. Through competition, success, and defeat in the classroom, students are reconciled to their social positions. (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 106)

The practice of rewarding competitive and predatory styles of classroom interaction, according to Bowles and Gintis (1976), "is a monument not to a creative rationality, but to the need of a privileged class to justify an irrational, exploitative, and undemocratic society" (p. 108). Thus, the argument is that the organization of schools directly correlates with the organization of work and that especially school tracks and ability groups are designed to reinforce social class stratification (Mehan, 1992).

The limitations of the social reproduction theory have been discussed at length by several education scholars (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1998; Mehan, 1992; Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995). The major critique of this model is that it is over-deterministic, that is, it assumes a strict adherence to expected outcomes of an oppressive ideology. It does not consider issues such as the students' free-will, culture, ethnicity, opposition (or resistance), and numerous other factors that have an impact on the student's educational achievement. In other words, "...it reduces human actors—students, teachers, parents, workers, and employers—to passive role players, shaped exclusively by the demand of capital" (Mehan, 1992, p. 3). Furthermore, Giroux (1983) argues that macro level theory,

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such as social reproduction, ignores the interactions and occurrences that students are involved in daily. Giroux (1983) writes:

> [The] source of working-class student consciousness cannot be limited to such spheres as the workplace and the school. Working-class student social formations—groups organized around specific cultural experiences, values, and class, gender, and racial relations—with their combination of hegemonic and oppositional ideologies, are primarily formed in the family, the neighborhood, and in the mass- and class-mediated youth cultures. (p. 265)

Hence, while some scholars are willing to acknowledge that the economy has a significant role on educational institutions and their outcomes, they do not all readily embrace an overly deterministic theory. Still, another deterministic approach, (the cultural reproduction model,) was put forward by Pierre Bourdieu in 1973.

Cultural Reproduction

Bourdieu (1973) rejects the idea that schools are simply replicas of the economic system, but he recognizes the strong influence of the dominant culture on schools and students. He does not believe that the purpose of schools is solely to maintain an oppressive capitalist society. Instead he argues that schools "reproduce existing power relations more subtly through the reproduction and distribution of a dominant culture that tacitly confirms what it means to be educated" (Giroux, 1983, p. 267).

Bourdieu (1973) asserts that it is necessary to study the structure that allows for the reproduction of the accepted values of the dominant culture. Thus, he posits that while

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it is true that power and privilege are being transmitted intra- and inter-generations, it is concealed and covertly taking place through cultural reproduction. In his 1973 article, Bourdieu challenges the purely Marxist social reproduction theory and argues that children of the elite and higher economic classes not only inherit economic and social capital from their families, but they also inherit cultural capital from them. He identifies cultural capital as the ability to participate in and consume 'high' culture activities such as reading, theater, art, cinema, and museums. He believes that there are different levels of consumption of cultural capital measured by the extent of economic capital and power maintained by a family. He collected data from the year 1964 to analyze several aspects of his theory, including 1) the relationship between cultural activities attended and level of education; 2) the relationship between the French museum attendance and occupations; and 3) the relationship between reading habits and level of education and occupation. This data and other sets of data he collected helped him formulate his thesis that educational achievement has a high correlation to a child's parents' cultural capital. He concluded that:

> The existence of such a powerful and exclusive relationship between the level of education and cultural practice should not conceal the fact that, in view of the implicit presuppositions that govern it, the action of the educational system can attain full effectiveness only to the extent that it bears upon individuals that have been previously granted a certain familiarity with the world of art by their family upbringing. (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 493)

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In this light, Bourdieu's argument becomes extremely deterministic because he believes that students that do not possess the dominant culture have no possibility of succeeding in schools. Essentially, his argument is that only students that possess the dominant culture can profit from schooling because they have developed a linguistic and cultural competence with the only culture that is accepted in schools. He states, "the most culturally privileged find their ways into institutions capable of reinforcing their advantage. Institutions of higher education which endure or legitimate access to the ruling classes...are therefore to all intents and purposes the monopoly of the ruling class" (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 497). The cultural reproduction model reveals the fallacy of meritocracy by asserting that only the merit and talent of the dominant culture is rewarded in schools. Bourdieu (1973) attests that "the possession of a diploma, as prestigious as it may be, is in any case less and less capable of guaranteeing access to the highest positions, and is never sufficient to guarantee in itself access to economic power" (p. 507). He believes this to be true because unless the cultural capital of an individual matches his or her academic capital, he or she may still be unable to gain social and economic equity.

The cultural reproduction model and social reproduction models have received similar criticisms: that the theories are over-deterministic, one-sided, and lacking closer analysis that takes into account the actions and will of human participants. Bourdieu "has been criticized for not treating the cultural sphere as an object of critical inquiry in its own right, for depicting cultural forms and practices as largely the reflection of the structural forces conceptualized at the social level..." (Mehan, 1992, p. 8). Students,

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according to this theory, are viewed as "mainly bearers of cultural capital—as a bundle of abilities, knowledge, and attitudes furnished by parents" (Mehan, 1992, p. 4). While Bourdieu does not advocate 'high' culture as the most valuable form of culture, his theory lends itself to cultural deficit models that encourage changing a student's culture to better their educational experience. Nevertheless, studies have been conducted that further illustrate Bourdieu's point that the dominant culture and language of the classroom is often incompatible with the cultural practices and languages of minority students. Linguistic minority students, (e.g., dominant Spanish, Chinese, Native, or Haitian speakers) are an excellent example because not only do students and their families speak a different language, but their speech patterns and modes of interaction are also distinctively different from those practiced in the classroom. This theory has been tested with English speakers and the same has been found for African American, Native American, and Native Hawaiian students, that is, that their cultural norms, familial practices, interactional styles, and linguistic codes are devalued in traditional classroom settings (Mehan, 1992). This limits their academic achievement greatly, and researchers suggest that the solution is to: "Work cooperatively with parents and educators to modify the classroom learning in ways that are mutually beneficial for students and society" (Mehan, 1992, p. 7).

In response to the social and cultural reproduction models, other studies have been conducted that further develop or contest the theory (McLaren, 1998; MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977). These studies have been able to illustrate the complexity of school and lived experience and have highlighted students as active participants in their schooling

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experience as opposed to passively internalizing economic and cultural domination. These studies have developed into resistance models that are used to study oppositional behaviors in which students and other key players engage.

Resistance Theories

Paul Willis (1977) conducted a study of White working-class male students in a British school and found that the students rejected the dominant ideology of the school by dropping out of school and pursuing working class jobs like their parents. He believes that the students chose their career paths because of their critique of the academic ideologies within their school. Willis (1977) therefore holds that his study shows that "social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation, and a particular penetration of those structures" (p. 175). He further concludes that the power of capitalism to dominate without opposition is unrealistic. Although he does believe that people have the capacity to meet the needs of and reinforce the social stratifications of capitalism by what he calls 'self-damnation.' The limitation of Willis' finding is that it has the potential to re-direct the blame of low academic achievement to the student. He correctly points out that social and cultural reproduction do not occur in tidy and direct ways, that institutions are complex entities, and that absolutist theories must be rejected.

Building on ethnographic studies conducted to test reproduction theories, Henry Giroux (1983) focuses on instances of countercultural resistance. He writes, "Resistance, in these accounts, represents a significant critique of schools as an institution and points

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to social activities and practices whose meanings are ultimately political and cultural" (Giroux, 1983, p. 282). He does not view all acts of student opposition as acts of resistance because, as he speculates, all oppositional behaviors are not led by a critical analysis and understanding of domination and oppression. He ascertains that: "resistance may be the simple appropriation and display of power, and may manifest itself through the interests and discourse of the worst aspects of capitalist rationality" (Giroux, 1983, p. 285). For Giroux, resistance must be rooted in the interest of creating critical consciousness and action. He says, "I think resistance must be situated in a perspective that takes the notion of emancipation as its guiding interests" (Giroux 1983, p. 290). The reason for this is that his goal in studying resistance is to develop a radical pedagogy that builds student's abilities to engage in social justice struggles. He urges educators to understand resistance in schools because he views schools as social sites that have significant impacts on the experiences of subordinated groups. He determines that resistance allows for many ignored aspects of schooling to be studied because it necessitates consideration of three things:

> the dialectical notion of human agency;
>
> the understanding that power is not unidimensional (it can be a form of domination as well as resistance); and
>
> the belief that radical transformation can be achieved. (Giroux, 1983, p. 289-290)

Giroux (1983) discusses four major limitations of most resistance theories. First, they tend to homogenize the acts and behaviors of students, the working class, and the classroom; thus, failing to incorporate the notion of a dialectical resistance. Second,

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resistance theories often ignore the nuances and complexity involved with studying groups across gender and ethnicity. Third, resistance studies tend to focus on students' overt resistance, dismissing other forms of resistance. Fourth, they have not been able to identify the extent to which domination has affected individuals.

Mehan (1992) notes that another limitation of resistance theories is that the areas under study, (i.e., cultural and structural forces), do not fully explore the occurrences within school. He feels that there are many micro level factors not connected to the demands of capitalism, such as school calendars and educators' work loads, that also play a role on student achievement, but for which resistance theories do not account.

Reproduction and resistance theories are at the forefront of educational research today because they attempt to contest schooling practices that maintain the subordination of working class, female, ethnic/linguistic minority, and gay/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual students. Giroux (1983) believes that a radical pedagogy will be achieved only when we better understand the relationships between power, resistance, and human agency (p. 293). Jay MacLeod (1987) accepted this as a challenge to conduct critical ethnography that explores the experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of students. His study attempted to make the link between acts of oppositional behavior and students' explanations of their actions. He further sought to understand the implications of the behavior in the context of students' peers, families, and work networks (p. 20).

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TRANSFORMATIONAL RESISTANCE

Chicana critical education scholar, Dolores Delgado Bernal (1997) further examines oppositional behavior of students from a critical race and feminist perspective. She documents the experiences of Chicana high school student activists that participated in the 1968 East Los Angeles Blowouts. Her work indicates that traditional forms of leadership in activist movements need to be reevaluated from a feminist perspective to include multiple forms of student leadership. She challenges traditional interpretations of women in student movements by acknowledging that women have been at the forefront of student movements all along, even when not recognized as such.

Her work reveals a side of history/herstory that has been silenced and ignored in the contemporary literature and historical writings that document the history of Chicana involvement in the 1968 East LA Blowouts. The Blowouts involved a massive walkout of protesting students in East LA who were fed up with the conditions in their schools. She conducted a case study of eight women who were involved in the Blowouts. Using oral history, historical narratives, focus group interviews, and archival research, she shares the experiences of the eight women in her study.

She does an elaborate literature review of the resistance literature, which she points out has often not dealt with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and class in the same forum. She states that to better understand the actions and thoughts of her informants an alternative theoretical analysis is needed. Thus, she draws from the resistance literature, critical feminist literature, and structuration theory. She expands on previous models of

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resistance and develops an alternative model that reveals the 1960s activist women's actions as "transformational resistance." According to Delgado Bernal (1997):

> Transformational resistance...is based on a conscious critique of domination and is motivated by an interest in liberation or social justice. It includes a deeper level of consciousness that allows agency to be manifested in ways that are more empowering than that of traditional notions of school resistance. (p. 91)

Delgado Bernal (1997) comes to the conclusion that her participants were engaged in transformational school resistance, and she calls for a paradigm shift that redefines leadership and recognizes the importance of her informants' involvement in the 1968 Blowouts. She challenges traditional stereotypes that label Mexican women as docile and passive by offering the stories the women provided her as evidence of leadership and transformational resistance. In a recent study of Chicana college students (2001), Delgado Bernal explains that she is most interested in studying "internal transformational resistance in which an individual's behavior is subtle or even silent and might go unnamed as resistance..." (p. 5). I use Delgado-Bernal's concept of transformational resistance to study both internal and external manifestations of transformational resistance exhibited by my participants.

FREIRIAN THEORY

This study also largely focuses on notions of critical consciousness, popularized in the field of education by Brazilian scholar, Paulo Freire. In 1970, Freire wrote a groundbreaking book entitled, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. This book and the theories put

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forward in it has had an enormous impact in various fields of study, but even more importantly in education. Freire was deeply concerned with social change—change for the "oppressed" population in his nation and around the world. Heavily based in Socialist thinking, Freire professed a theory for economic justice and revolutionary change that continues to evolve today. His work was a call to action on the part of educators and students advocating training courses and education systems that raise people's consciousness about their lived realities and struggles. According to Freire, education for the purpose of liberation begins with "*conscientização,*" also referred to as conscientización or critical consciousness. "The term *conscientização* refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to [taking] action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1994, p. 17). *Conscientização* is the first step toward the liberation of "oppressed"[12] people. It is the way in which people begin to question their location in life and history/herstory[13] so that they can change aspects of their individual and collective lives that are oppressive.

Many education scholars have written extensively about critical pedagogy as a means for reconstructing the field of education as a place of liberation for students of color, poor students, women, and other "oppressed" groups (see Darder *et. al.*, 2003). Some have conducted case studies of schools and teachers who use Freirian methods and theories (*e.g.,* Darder, 2002). Still, there is a need for more research that details

[12] I use the word "oppressed" as Freire does, but I would also like to recognize that "oppressed" people can also be privileged in some cases. For example, a heterosexual Black man can experience racial oppression at the same time he has gender and sexual privilege. The term "oppressed" can, at times, be essentialized to signify a one-dimensional experience for people that experience different levels of oppression.

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pedagogical methods and practices rooted in Freirian theories. Little research has documented the ways in which alternative spaces of education draw on and expand on Freirian thought. For example, social justice activists have long used Freirian practices to raise the consciousness of members of their community organizations. In these spaces, it is common to hear specific references to dialogue, conscientización, praxis, and many other Freirian notions. I found this to be true in the student organization of Raza Womyn.

Freire's work is particularly useful for this research because Raza Womyn was created with the goal of consciousness-raising for Chicanas/Latinas. Furthermore, they have developed practical uses of this theory. This is especially evident in their annual Chicana/Latina conferences. Members of the organization indicate that Raza Womyn is dedicated to raising people's consciousness about race, class, gender, and sexual oppression. A major critique of Freire's early work was that it was solely focused on class, and eventually on race and class. However, feminists and Queer scholars have been responsible for using Freirian thought to address gender and sexual oppression as well.

Freire's (1994) reference to revolution parallels the thinking of the members of Raza Womyn. In the same way that Freire identifies revolution as social justice, many of the women that I interviewed for this project identified themselves as revolutionaries or as women engaged in a process of individual and collective revolution. A very important element of this notion of revolution is its interconnection with love and hope. As you will see in the *testimonios* that follow, the love that the women have for their communities

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[13] I use the term herstory to make note of the fact that history continues to be male-dominated and patriarch-centered. Herstory consists of woman-centered stories of the past.

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and for each other is what fuels their commitment to social justice, or to what they refer to as revolution. The words spoken by the women in this study directly relate to those written by Freire in 1970. He wrote (1994):

> I am more and more convinced that true revolutionaries must perceive the revolution, because of its creative and liberating nature, as an act of love. For me, the revolution, which is not possible without a theory of revolution...is not irreconcilable with love. On the contrary: the revolution is made by people to achieve their humanization. (p. 70)

This commitment to love and revolution has been professed by many others who struggle against discrimination and injustice. Because this work of creating a society free of subordination is so difficult, the commitment to make these changes has to be rooted in a love of humanity and the hope that change is possible. Hence, people who do this work can easily identify with these sentiments, as do many of the members of Raza Womyn. I believe it is very important to document this experience because everyday new people join this struggle but few of them realize how deep-rooted and widespread this movement for revolution is.

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: FIELDSITE, METHODS, & ANALYSIS

The methods section of this proposal will discuss the fieldsite, a description of the methods that I use, and the process of analysis that I conduct. I also weave in my activist stance, as an activist researcher, and I provide examples of ways that other activist scholars envision the research methodology process.

Fieldsite Description and Selection Process



Figure 2. Various political posters and cultural decorations adorn the Raza Womyn student office on the university campus. (2001-2004)

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This research examines social justice practices and perceptions of Chicana/Latina student activists at UCLA using participant observations, surveys, document examination, and interviews. I conducted observations and interviews with Raza Womyn over the course of five years. I joined them at two to four hour evening meetings once a week, participated in on and off-campus scheduled activities, and assisted with organizing events.

Most of my contact with Raza Womyn took place during weekly meetings in their office, but was not restricted to this location alone. The Raza Womyn organization office is located on the third floor of Kerckhoff at UCLA. Raza Womyn share the office with two other student organizations. In the small office, there are six desks, three computers, seven file cabinets, ten chairs, and a round table. The women primarily use the roundtable as a meeting place and work table. (See figure 3 of the women working at the table the night before a conference.) An altar is set on the heater by the window. *Veladoras* [candles], a statue of the *Virgen* [Virgin of Guadalupe], Latina postcards, flowers, and a hand drum adorn the altar. A poster of the Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata and a raised fist (the symbol of Black liberation) decorate the left wall, along with an announcement about a testimony given by Maria Guardado, a Central American activist who was tortured by the government for her involvement in union organizing in Latin America. On the far wall, two posters with a woman symbol hang on the wall. On the right wall, a United Farm Workers' bumper sticker states, "*Uvas No* [No Grapes]," a picture of Subcomandante Marcos, a Chiapas revolutionary, shooting the middle finger is tacked to the board, and a huge six-foot white cloth with a woman symbol painted on it is

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taped to the right-hand wall. (Figure 2 is a collage of photos that I took in the Raza Womyn office of the political posters and art that decorate the office.) I describe the meeting place with such detail because it is filled with symbolism and political statements that are relevant to the goals, beliefs, and actions of this organization.



Figure 3. Mujeres working in the Raza Womyn office (2002).

Access into Fieldsite

After spending extensive time with several members of Raza Womyn, I was encouraged to continue attending the weekly meetings where I discussed with them on several occasions my intention and desire to conduct my research about Chicana/Latina activists, specifically focusing on the organization and participants of Raza Womyn. Since then, I have engaged in an on-going dialogue with them about the project. Not only did they assure me that they were very interested in being participants of the study, but they were instrumental in concretizing the focus of the study.

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The *mujeres* welcomed me into the space and urged me to document their experiences. They shared their personal and academic lives with me, and I am indebted to them for this. This is characteristic of the space—the *mujeres* welcome all new women and make them feel as if they have been long-awaiting their arrival.

Research Methodology

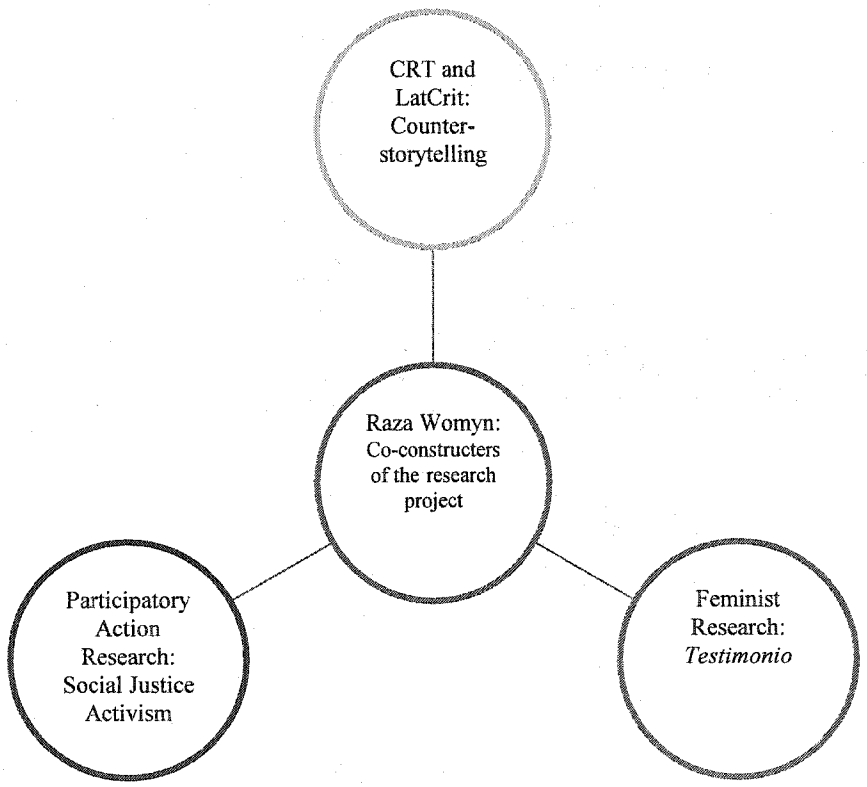


Figure 4. Research methodologies used in this study are represented in the above diagram.

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To conduct this research, I drew on various theoretical standings and research methodologies to counter traditional research approaches that did not adequately take into account the lived experiences of Chicanas/Latina student activists. Figure 4, above, provides a visual representation of the research methodologies I used to design the project, and the diagram below (Figure 5) represents the different methods I used to collect the data. The circle represents the fluidity of the project, indicating that there was not a chronological order for the data collection process. Instead, most of the data were collected simultaneously. I began with participant observations, conducted an initial focus group interview and some individual interviews. Then I sent out surveys, and continued my observations. As a new academic year started or new women came to the organization, I again conducted focus group and individual interviews and asked the women to complete surveys. Throughout the five years, I have consistently documented the Raza Womyn gatherings in photographs and/or on video. I conducted the in-depth interviews with three individual women after three years of contact, but I have had repeated contact and conversations with these three women over the entire five years.

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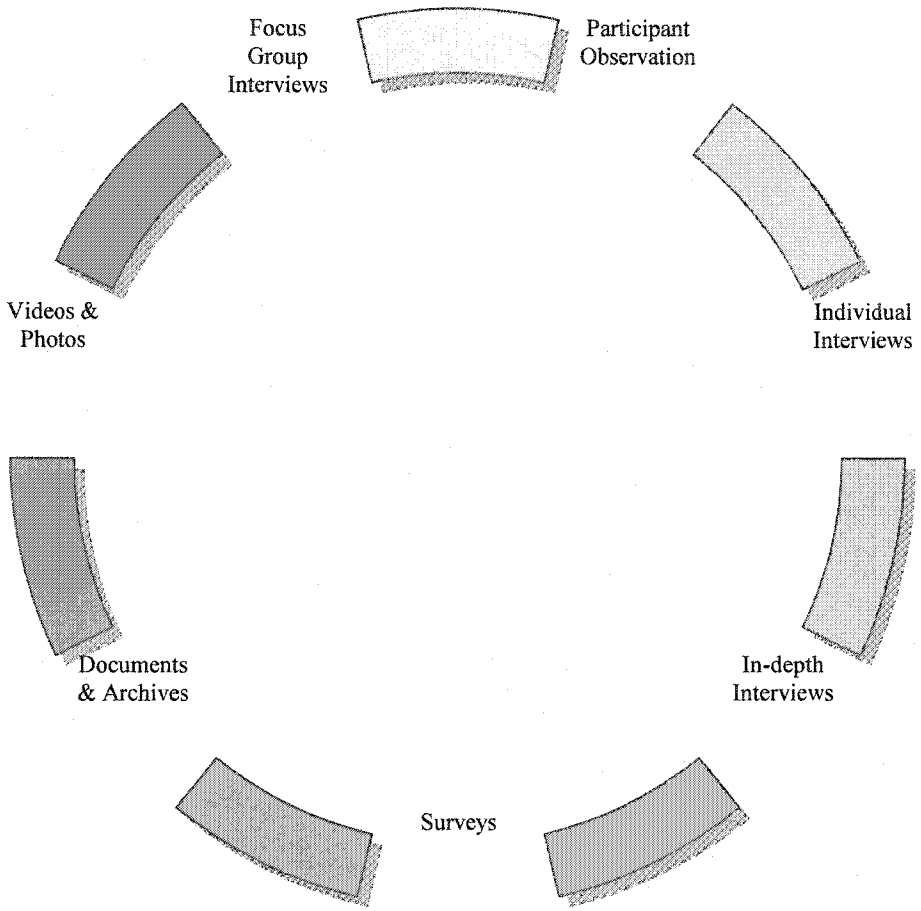


Figure 5. This diagram represents the different methods used to collect data for this project.

My research used a participatory action research (PAR) paradigm, which is a form of qualitative research that has been labeled as participatory inquiry (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Marshall and Rossman (1999) indicate that qualitative research tends to depend on four general data collection methods including participation, observations, in-depth interviewing, and document examinations. I use all of these methods as well as others discussed by Critical Race theorists and feminist researchers.

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The participatory inquiry approach is shaped in direct contrast to traditional positivistic approaches to research because the researcher is admittedly devoted to conducting research for the purpose of positive social change in the service of equality. Crabtree and Miller (1999) write: "It is apparent that participatory inquiry differs from other kinds of qualitative research in the degree of emphasis on participant control and personal and political [change]" (p. 273). They further provide several examples of PAR that are specifically applicable to my study. For example, my research is a collaborative project. I co-construct the concept, questions, methods, and purpose of the study with the participants. I also rely heavily on the advice and discussions that I have with my colleagues who are engaged in social justice endeavors. The research that I am conducting is, as Crabtree and Miller (1999) specify, "in and for the *community*" (p. 273). And the dilemma with using this approach is that traditional houses of academia often do not see it as "acceptable." Still, my purpose is to engage in social justice research that specifically seeks to produce valuable research that will contribute to the field and not dehumanize the participants into mere objects of study. I see the participants as part of my research team. They have helped me to name the study and to recognize the immense contribution and need of this kind of study. They helped me to solidify the themes of the study and focus on the issues that they deemed important to their communities.

I used both CRT and LatCrit theory research methodologies, which embrace social justice as an integral element of the research process. They do so by challenging objectivity and positivistic research traditions and by transforming the role of the researcher and the researched. CRT and LatCrit research methodologies necessitate re-

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visioning research as a more equitable process (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Pizarro, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Those of us that use LatCrit theory to develop our research methodology recognize the danger of focusing on dichotomies because we realize that people's lived experiences are affected by many different factors. Hence as researchers, we avoid one-dimensional analyses of people's lives; that is, we carefully examine the ways that different aspects of people's lives intersect, (e.g. ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, culture, language, nationality, and religion.) Education research must undertake careful examination of these intersections in order to make appropriate recommendations for the improvement of educational conditions of all students. Furthermore, researchers must push themselves to recognize the centrality of the voices of the researched.

Marc Pizarro (1998) has outlined a very useful approach to conducting CRT research in education, and I applied his recommendations for the conceptualization of a LatCrit research process. Pizarro believes that the researched and the researcher are co-creators of knowledge and analysis in equitable research projects. As he details a CRT methodology, he gives particular importance to the fact that CRT research seeks social justice as an outcome. He writes:

> Concerning methods, social justice refers to methods that seek knowledge and develop empowering strategies to move us toward greater equality through processes in which researcher and participant are equals at all stages of the data collection, analysis, and intervention. This requires that researchers and participants deconstruct the epistemology of the participants and use it as a basis

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for the entire project and that we redefine our role in institutions and daily life so that empowerment is central to our work and lives. (Pizarro, 1998, p. 74)

Using his own work with Chicana/o students as an example, he lays out the tenets of CRT and applies them to a plan for more efficient research methodology. He lists the central tenets of CRT as:

1. that racism is an endemic facet of life in our society
2. that neutrality objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy are all questionable and nebulous constructs while social reality is only created through the stories we tell as individuals and as a society
3. that context must be understood in searching for the deeper meanings that underlie contemporary social problems, and
4. that race and the experiential knowledge of people of color is critical to understanding law (or education) and society. (Pizarro, 1998, p. 62)

Pizarro (1998) believes that: "CRT provides examples of the strength of new narratives and perspectives and their contributions to the development of transformative knowledge. Critical race theorists argue that only by looking at the narratives of those who have been victimized by the legal system can we understand the 'socially ingrained' and 'systematic' forces at work in their oppression" (p. 62). He explains that positivistic epistemologies stand in direct opposition to work that seeks social justice for oppressed groups, and he defines social justice as "social relations that are based on equality. This contrasts sharply with life in modern U.S. society, which demands empowerment of

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selected groups at the expense of others through the abuse of power (e.g., via race-based hierarchies)" (p. 74).

Pizarro (1998) notes that some researchers (feminists, scholars of color, and others) have already introduced innovative research methods that challenge the old tradition of alienating and silencing the participants, but he points out that too many universities continue to restrict students from using these innovative methods. Moreover, he indicates that even when researchers "allow" people to tell their stories, they still make it impossible for those people to help analyze that experience. Researchers usually take the liberty of analyzing, categorizing, and criticizing as they see fit, and Pizarro warns against this. In taking his advice, my research includes the participants at every stage of the study. Early in the research, we discussed the title of the research, the need to tape record conversations and meetings, and ways in which the data could be used for Raza Womyn. Sometimes when I was unable to attend a meeting or a major activity, they offered to tape or video record it for me. For example, on the evening of March 10, 2000, a meeting was held with several representatives of different Latina/o student organizations on campus. The meeting became a three-hour debate on whether sexuality, specifically queer sensitivity, has a place in the annual *La Semana de la Raza*, (the week that all the Latina/o organizations on campus organize to celebrate Latina/o heritage). The women told me that it was imperative that I include the discussion from the meeting in my study. And since I was unable to attend the meeting, they recorded it for me. They have expressed their ideas about what the research should include in terms of what topics and themes I must include in the finished product. For instance, after a long evening of a

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circle of dialogue about sex, partners, relationships, and finally the role of our mothers, one woman said to me, "Well that's at least two more chapters for your dissertation Anita."

Social justice-oriented research must not only expose the world of students of color but it must also address the racist school structures that affect their schooling experiences, and this indeed is a major goal of CRT and LatCrit research in education. This study, for instance, examines the structures within higher education and their effects on students' schooling and life experiences. CRT and LatCrit education research seek to fight racism that permeates schools and help students to empower themselves and deal with the reality of racism in their schools. Pizarro (1998) insists that while the method is important, the intent of the research is even more important to the success of a research project. He states, "I realized that not only do we need to research *on* empowerment...but research *as* empowerment" (Pizarro, 1998, p. 61). He urges researchers not to wait and hope that their research will be used for empowering strategies in the future, but that they will ensure that they are using their work to develop those strategies in real ways for students and schools.

Finally, in CRT and LatCrit research, the researcher must define the project as one designed for the improvement of the researched community and/or experience. The research should be an extension of the participant's life, not an abstraction. To accomplish this, three conditions must be met. First, the researcher must attempt to share and understand the epistemological traditions of the participants. Secondly, the researcher

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must have a sincere interest and desire to learn from the participant. Lastly, the participants must see themselves as authorities.

CRT and LatCrit are by design self-reflective and self-critical fields because the purpose of these theoretical frameworks is to move beyond rhetoric toward action. They are, in fact, social movements in which activist scholars are engaged. However, very few people within the field provide hands-on approaches to conducting CRT and LatCrit praxis. There are exceptions, most of which are very recent and in the field of education (Lynn, 1999; Montoya, 1997; Padilla, 1997; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Nevertheless, this area calls for further development, especially as it relates to creating a bridge between academia and communities in need. This was a central goal of this study.

LatCrit and CRT as methodologies not only challenge positivistic research models, but they provide a framework self-conscious and critical of uneven power relations along multiple analytic lines (i.e., race, ethnicity, language, immigrant status, class, gender, and sexuality.) My work uses the method and theory that both CRT and LatCrit scholars advocate, but it also draws on the rich resources of feminist and Chicana/Latina feminists. And new research methods have been developed based on the input and recommendations of the participants.

I surveyed 32 women, conducted 20 two to four-hour interviews, held 5 focus group interviews and 3 in-depth interviews, studied documents and archives, and did five years of participant observation (as represented in figure 6). I transcribed all of the interviews and coded them to identify the major themes that arose throughout the data

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collection process. The focus group interviews were done on June 3, 1999, March 9, 2000, April 1, 2001, June 13, 2002, and October 6, 2003. Using these interviews, extensive observations, and discussions, I identified three women from the organization whose stories were most closely aligned with the major themes of the data. I conducted in-depth interviews with each of the three women that participated in the final portion of the study.

Participant Observation

I used participant observation to acquire data about day-to-day interactions and activities. Participant observation is "both an overall approach to inquiry and a data-gathering method" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 106). This means that the researcher must have close-up involvement in the field to learn about the social interactions of the participants in the site. Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that participant observation allows the researcher to "hear, see, and begin to experience the reality as the participants do" (p. 106). Participant observation allowed me to discern what issues and themes were significant to the experiences of the Raza Womyn members, and they informed the types of questions I asked. Most of my fieldnotes and research memos were written during the weekly meetings in the Raza Womyn office which began at five or six in the evening and generally lasted two to three hours. Other times I used audiocassette tapes and videotapes to document the conversations or activities taking place. Early in the data collection process, I received the approval of all of the participants to take notes and tape record

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during meetings or even casual conversations. In addition, I have an extensive visual portfolio, including photography and video, documenting Raza Womyn activities and gatherings. I have created several visual representations of the organization including posters, a videotape, albums, and a website. I have submitted some of the photography to Chicana activist scholar, Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez, for use in her upcoming book, 500 Years of Chicana History in Pictures.

Interviews

While participant observations allowed me to gather information about Raza Womyn members' actions and activities, it did not allow me to directly ask questions from the whole group to learn about their different perspectives about questions specific to this research study. At times, individual members shared their perspectives and experiences with me on an individual basis, and many times during meetings all of the members in attendance discussed very serious issues such as queer sensitivity, the need to build campus coalitions, campus safety, and campus politics. Crabtree and Miller (1999) posit, "the individual interview captures the sole story of one participant, in contrast to a focus group, which, via the dynamic and interactive exchange among the participants, produces multiple stories and diverse experiences" (p. 112-113). Thus, to further my knowledge about the history and purpose of the organization, as well as multiple members' experiences in the organization, I held five three to four-hour focus group interviews. The focus groups included from 4-15 members of the organization. They

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tended to be strong figures and leaders of the organizations. All of the members were invited, but not all of them were available to meet at the same time. Because these meetings were held over the course of five years, different people represented the organization at the time that I was interviewing them. Thus, some of the participants remained the same, and some were different. The final focus group interview took place at the end of the study and included 15 members (past and present) of the organization. At this time, I brought my data back to the participants to get their responses, critiques, and analyses of the data.

Portraiture and *Testimonio*

In the final phase of data collection, I drew on the work of Sara Lawrence Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997) who created a social science research methodology called "portraiture." Portraiture relies on in-depth interviews, narrative inquiry, and observations, but it differs in that "it seeks to illuminate the complex dimensions of *goodness* and is designed to capture the attention of a broad and eclectic audience" (Lawrence Lightfoot & Davis 1997, p. *xvi*). The key to the difference between portraiture and the other methods is presentation. Portraiture rejects traditional positivistic notions of research, just as many of the other methods scholarship that I have already reviewed, but it also presents the whole story as a portrait of the participants' experiences. For example, for this project the frame of the portrait is Raza Womyn, the organization, and the activities in which the members are involved. It includes the voices of all of the

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members of the organization, the history/herstory of the organization, the social context of the university and of the time. Finally, the canvas of the portrait depicts complex and in-depth descriptions of the three women who I chose to represent the major themes. The other data serves as the context, or the frame. And the portraits are the center of the study. This portrait is a co-constructed, detailed account of human experience from the perspectives of three Chicana/Latina student activists. As Lawrence Lightfoot indicates, "The portrait, then, creates a narrative that is at once complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history" (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11).

I conducted three in-depth interviews lasting at least eight hours total with three different members of Raza Womyn to develop the portraiture section. The first interview took an oral history approach. Oral history is a composite of several modes of speaking, both interpretive and factual. Oral historians document personal narratives and people's explanations, and aim to reconstruct dates, facts, and an accurate time-line of a life. James Hoopes (1979) describes the process of collecting oral histories as: "the collecting of any individual's spoken memories of his [her] life, of people he [she] has known, and events he [she] has witnessed or participated in" (p. 7). Hoopes (1979) believes that oral history is not a replacement for written historical documents, but rather it is a complement to that documentation. I agree and feel that there is adequate research and documentation of historical Chicana activism (and some student activism), but at the same time, these oral histories reflect a different age of women. My research captures a picture of women activists at a young age. I have not found any contemporary literature that addresses

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Chicana/Latina student activism in recent times. Thus, this is one of the many contributions of this work.

The interviews took the form of a dialogue, but open-ended questions and a protocol guided the process. I felt that oral history would be useful for this project because as Hoopes indicates, "We are likely to be more spontaneous in talking about our feelings than in writing about them, and many people speak to the oral historian with great candor and courage. These spoken memories and ruminations are the essential human stuff of our time, for they reveal inner sources and motives" (Hoopes, 1979, p. 17).

The in-depth interviews for the three *testimonios* were guided by narrative inquiry techniques. Narrative inquiry differs from oral history in that it elicits narrating about personal moments and incidents. Riessman (1993) writes that narrative: "refers to talk organized around consequential events. A teller in a conversation takes a listener into a past time or 'world' and recapitulates what happened then to make a point, often a moral one" (p. 3). Through narrating, tellers interpret their experiences through the ways they express their feelings, perceptions, and actions.

Hence, narrative yields interpretive information about incidents and events in people's lives. In this case, I was especially interested in learning about the women's perceptions of their experience with race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality and their understanding of the impact these factors had on their educational experiences as Chicana/Latina college students. Other aspects of the narrative inquiry included issues related to student activism and socio-political movements in which many of the women

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were involved. Riessman (1993) indicates that narrative inquiry is useful for allowing the narrator to name injuries and triumphs involved in events such as social movements. She further notes, "Because the approach gives prominence to human agency and imagination, it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity (Riessman, 1993, p. 5)." Again, the idea of valuing individual subjectivities is frowned upon by mainstream academia, but among critical and activist researchers, the subjectivity and interpretations of the participants are fundamental for a collaborative research project. Narrative inquiry served as an excellent tool for gathering information related to the social and political consciousness and activism of the participants.

In Telling to Live: Latina Feminist *Testimonios*, the concepts of marginality, resistance, and critical navigation skills are embodied in the *testimonios* of 18 scholars, writers, activists, and/or Latina feminists. Alba Acevedo, *et. al.* (2001) write, "Creating spaces for Latina feminisms—latinidades feministas—means confronting established and contested terms, identities, frameworks, and coalitions that have emerged in particular historical contexts" (p. 2). They explain that as Latina feminists, they have long been active in Latina/o and feminist communities as activists, educators, artists, and writers, but as *mujeres*, they felt the need to organize a space for themselves where they could share and explore their lives together. They point out that *testimonios* can serve as both a method of consciousness-raising and a method of self-reflexive feminist research. The work of these women is a model for the data collection, analysis, and presentation of this study. Alba Acevedo, *et. al.* (2001) and many other Chicana/Latina scholars illuminate issues such as intersectionality, consciousness, and resistance.

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> Moving beyond the Black-White framework of racial discourse, Chicanas shed light on other facets of racialization, on those that form a continuum of color, phenotype, and privilege. Theorizing the intersection of racism, sexism, and heterosexism, Chicana writings contributed a new vocabulary of *mestizaje*, hybridity, oppositional consciousness, and the critical metaphor of 'borderlands.' These concepts helped mark a consciousness of resistance to the repression of language, culture, and race, and a recognition on the in-between spaces formed by those with complex identities. (p. 4)

The *testimonios* in this study seek to illustrate these concepts and capture the essence of a consciousness of resistance while recognizing the complexity of the multiple identities of Chicana/Latina student activists.

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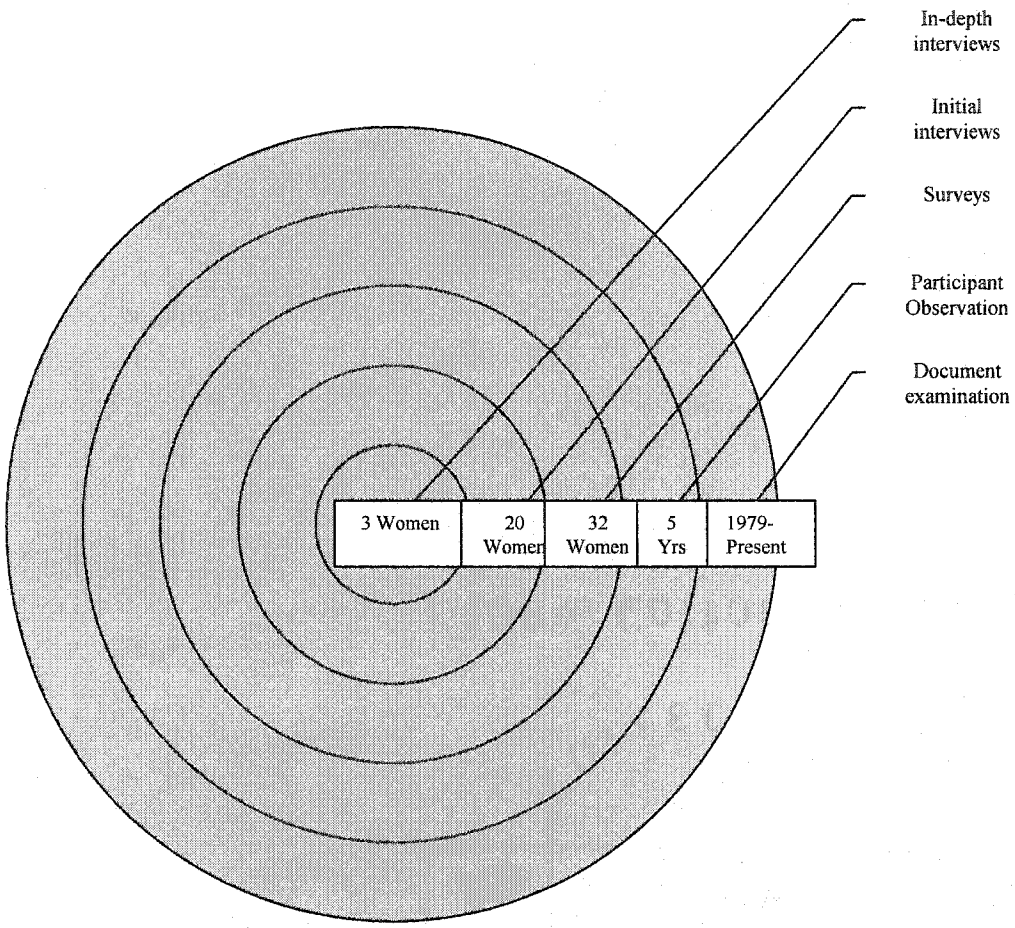


Figure 6. This diagram represents the data that were collected for this project.

Researcher's Role, Reflexivity in Research, and Ethics

Researcher's Role

Three years after I first started attending Raza Womyn meetings, one woman admitted to me that she did not trust me when I first came into the Raza Womyn space. She said, "Girl, you came in with your tape recorder and you were taking notes, and I was

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thinking infiltration." As a former member of MEChA, who has a hypersensitive reaction to "infiltration" because of a history of government and outsider infiltration in political organizations of color, she was keen to this idea of infiltration. And I, too, was subject to suspicion. But she soon embraced me and accepted me as a member of Raza Womyn. She openly shared her theories and life experiences with me. I was not aware of her suspicions of me because she was so warm, embracing, and nurturing to all of us. Luckily, I made the decision early on in the project to stop using the tape recorder and to limit my note taking until a later time when I felt that the women were more comfortable with my presence, aware of my purpose with the research, and when I was more involved as a member of the organization. This proved to be an excellent decision.

As mentioned earlier, this project is Participatory Action-Research (PAR), of which the goal is to learn something from the people who are being researched, to develop positive relationships, and to act more affectively for the development of social justice (Stoecker, 1997). Even more importantly, PAR includes the participants in every stage of the research process and the researcher partakes in the social justice agenda of the group that is being studied. Toward this effort, I attended weekly meetings with the women for at least four years, and I helped organize the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth annual Chicana/Latina conferences, as well as several other Raza Womyn events. I assisted with the development the conference programs, did extensive outreach to the community, presented workshops at the conference, videotaped five of the conferences, hosted annual retreats, and helped with the day-to-day activities and events. I joined the women on full days of community outreach and recruitment for the conferences. We

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delivered flyers to libraries, churches, and community centers in East Los Angeles, downtown Los Angeles, and to the bus riders union meeting in mid-town. The week before the conference days, we spent several late evenings in the Raza Womyn office making posters, answering phone calls, running errands, preparing conference materials, and stuffing conference bags. The day of the conference, we arrive at UCLA at six in the morning, and we usually stay until seven at night. My participation and involvement in these activities is a reflection of my commitment to the goals of the organization and it is also, in a sense, an attempt to meet the need of reciprocity in my research. The more time I was involved in these activities, the more I learned about the participants. Hence, I was simultaneously a research and a participant.

Reflexivity in Research

Reflexivity is the process of shaping research through the personal reflections of the researcher on the nature of the entire research process. It is a critical assessment of the implications of the research, an analysis of the roles of the researcher and the research participants, and careful consideration of the expected outcomes of the research (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Recognizing my potential subjectivities as a researcher, who also defines herself as a Chicana activist, I work to accurately represent the accounts of activities and experiences by grounding my findings and analysis on observation fieldnotes and interviews, which in this case directly reflect the actions and words of the women. I used research memos to document encounters and discussions, and they were rooted in the words or actions of the participants. I shared all of my data with the members of Raza

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Womyn and integrated their feedback into the finished product. I asked them several times to consider whether or not they wanted their names to be disclosed, and most decided to allow me to use their names and pictures for this research.

Intersubjectivity, often discussed in conjunction with reflexivity, emphasizes the importance of collaborative scholarship between women researchers to bring about a deeper analysis of women's experiences. Research shows that women writing about gender issues are more likely to do collaborative work, but are also more at a risk of being excluded from mainstream publishing (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Nevertheless, this research project is a collaborative effort, not between scholars, but between the researcher and the research participants. Finally, reflexivity includes exploring the unexamined stages of the research process (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Feminist researchers pay particular attention to: "the political and social contexts of the production of knowledge" (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 5). Following in this tradition, I collected information about the social and political events occurring on and off campus that related to the lives of the female participants of this study.

Feminist researchers pay close attention to ways that scholarship can be relayed to "lay" audiences and transformed into action. Again, this is why I use narrative inquiry and analysis because the women speak the language of their communities. Sometimes they use academic terms and sometimes they use the language that is spoken in their homes and neighborhoods. My analysis and data elicits all of the different ways that they express themselves. In turn, this research becomes more accessible, in terms of language, for students from similar backgrounds and concerns. The research documents action and

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reflection that these women are engaged in, and hopefully their stories will encourage other students, educators, or activists to become involved as well.

Feminists indicate that feminist research has an action orientation that is reflected in the statement of purpose, topic selection, theoretical orientation, choice of method, view of human nature, and definitions of the researcher's roles (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Political action is a primary focus because the aim of feminist research is liberation. Goals range from complete transformation of power relations to careful analysis of the impact of research on women. Feminists argue that research should be aligned with the political agenda for women's emancipation. This aspect of research encourages activist goals of social change. Also implied in this type of research is the desire to limit the gap between the researcher and the researched by joining in a common struggle. This results in a more detailed account of lived experience and it reduces the isolation between research participants.

Ethics

There are dilemmas of an activist stance. One is the possibility of disrupting the personal lives of research participants by intruding in their emotional and personal space. The danger comes in the fact that the researcher essentially has power, especially the power to leave the field at any time. While the participants can leave the organization and even graduate, there is a deeper sense of commitment that they have to accomplishing their goals as members of this organization, which does not allow them to easily walk away from Raza Womyn. "Participatory research is about living within a learning

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community" (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 275). In my case, I have committed myself to being a full participant of Raza Womyn, socially, politically, and emotionally. I have developed friendships with many of the members of the organization that have transformed into reciprocal relationships of sisterhood, and I have taken on very important responsibilities to the organization, which I have continued into the present.

An important ethical issue that I have considered is the tendency of PAR to try to "empower" oppressed groups. This is a dangerous goal because it assumes that the participants have no agency or ability to empower themselves. The researcher can also take on a very patronizing relationship with the participants when the goal is to "empower" a group. My research does not attempt to empower these women; rather the women and I are equal participants in a social justice endeavor that includes self-empowerment.

Data Management & Analysis

Data Management

I took fieldnotes during meetings and scheduled activities and recorded them in composition books dated and titled as "Raza Womyn observations" and stored the composition books in my personal files. I typed my fieldnotes and research memos on my home computer and saved the files in folders entitled, Raza Womyn 2000-2001, Raza Womyn 2001-2002, Raza Womyn 2002-2003, and Raza Womyn 2003-2004. I used a mini-tape recorder to tape all of Raza Womyn activities from the spring of 2001 to the

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spring of 2002 (and sporadically at other times during the past five years). I did not use the tape recorder immediately upon entering the research site because I wanted to gain the trust of the women first, and I wanted them to be completely comfortable with my presence in the space. Also, I wanted to be clear about my purpose and role in the Raza Womyn space, and it took several meetings and dialogues to accomplish this. Once we reached this point, the women were absolutely embracing of the project and often shared extremely intimate feelings and stories with me.

While asking the women for their definitions and explanations of particular theoretical concepts related to activism and social movements, I tape recorded our conversations (for which permission was granted.) I labeled each tape with a date, location, and number and assigned each tape a title to reflect the general themes discussed. All of the tapes are stored in file drawers in my home and transcriptions are saved in my personal computer files. All hard copies of transcriptions are also in my personal files. Over the past five years, I have collected and filed flyers, handouts, programs, brochures, and other written materials from Raza Womyn events and activities. I videotaped special activities sponsored by Raza Womyn, such as the annual conferences, the *Mujer* Expression nights, workshops, and events sponsored on campus (including some meetings). I also videotaped protests, vigils, retreats, and social events off campus. Video footage will be used for a small film that I will produce as a companion for the finished product of this work.

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Analysis

As recommended by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), at different intervals of data collection, I began to make sense of it all. First, I read all my written data including transcriptions and fieldnotes, and as I read it, I began to generate ideas and themes directly from the data. After an initial reading, I began an open coding process, that is, I read line by line to gather general ideas with no specific focus (p. 143). This process allowed me to identify the following general areas of discussion: Raza Womyn theory, *mujer* experience, sexuality, safe space, identity, race/culture/ethnicity, experience in school, desire for an education, activism, immigration, family, community, relationships, and experience at UCLA, and future goals. I realized that every interview in some way spoke to these areas of the participant's lives. Next, I began the process of focused coding. I specifically read though fieldnotes, memos, and transcriptions of the initial two-hour interviews, examining them as a data set, looking for specific themes that I had already identified as salient themes from the first round of open coding. As I conducted the coding process, I began to write "integrative memos," which are defined as memos that link analysis with specific themes from the data. Finally, once I coded several data and developed a considerable amount of integrative memos, I revisited the initial interviews and did another focused coding to identify three members of Raza Womyn that most represented or spoke to the salient themes (education, activism, love, and revolution). In other words, using my observations, initial interviews, and codes, I identified three women for the final phase of the project. I then conducted second and third in-depth interviews with these three women and collected their oral life histories and

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academic trajectories into college. During the in-depth interviews, I used open-ended questions to encourage the women to delve into their own construction of their personal experiences. Finally, I wrote oral histories of the three members of the organization using the portraiture method of Lawrence Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) and the *testimonio* method of the Latina Feminist Group (Acevedo, *et. al.*, 2000).

In the analytical phase, I reevaluated the entire research process and revisited the stories that the *mujeres* recounted. I shared copies of their transcripts and their *testimonios* with them, and I engaged them in another conversation to address the relevance of their story and to reflect on my analysis. During this phase, Pizarro (1998) advises the researcher to "consider the participants' perspectives and look to identify central themes and areas of concern. This should be done with the participants through researcher-participant conversations...the focus will be to identify the relationships that are critical to their own experiences" (p. 68). I did this throughout the research and writing process of this project, but especially during the final written phase.

This product was written in a dialogical fashion in order to capture the essence of the research process. I shared my writing with the participants and incorporated their responses, ideas, and suggestions. I even drew on their own written pieces, including diary entries, academic papers, poems, or emails. The most important tool in this process was respect, caring, and love. I respect and care about this community of women and about the importance of their input. "Ideally, the researcher and participants will work together in establishing intervention efforts designed to address the issues that came out of the research" (Pizarro, 1998, p. 71). Through my participation in the organization and

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the activities that I helped organize, such as conferences, workshops, cultural expression nights, and much more, I worked with the women to address their specific needs and interests as students and women in need of support at an institution that they perceive as hostile and alienating.

Raza Womyn Major Participants of the Study

"Gina"[14]- (1994-97)[15]

Gina helped restart Raza Womyn as a radical women's space. When she joined Raza Womyn, it was very social. She helped refocus it as a political, women's organization. She was one of the co-founders of the 1st annual MEChA Raza Youth Conference and the 1st Annual Chicana/Latina conference in 1996.



Cristina- (1994-1999)

Gender: "female"

Sexuality: "queer"

Race/ethnicity: "Chicana/Latina"

Socio-economic class: "working class"

Identifies as: "a feminist"

[14] "Gina" is a pseudonym.

[15] The years that I note in parenthesis after the participant's names represents their primary years of involvement with Raza Womyn while they were students, but many of the women continue their involvement well beyond the year in which they graduated.

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Cristina and Nena were the women that remained in Raza Womyn after a large group of *mujeres* graduated in 1995. She and Nena were the primary leaders and organizers of the 1st annual Chicana/Latina conference in 1996. She was very active in Raza Womyn and continues to participate and support Raza Womyn as a presenter and volunteer at the annual conferences and events. She received her bachelor degree in sociology, Chicana y Chicano studies, and women's studies with an emphasis on women of color and LGBT studies in 1999. She is currently an associate affiliate director of Future Leaders of America in Santa Barbara county, and she plans to pursue a graduate degree in public policy.

"Nena"[16]- (1995-1999)

Sexuality: "dykefabulous"

Race/ethnicity: "Chicana"

Socio-economic class: "working to mid, which is really dramatic"

Identifies as: "soft butch, dramatic impassioned lesbian teacher letting the educational system have it. I used to think I was a boy when I was a little Nena because I liked girls, but I'm a woman loving type of woman."

Nena was like the Godmother of Raza Womyn because she was left all alone after her cohort of fellow Raza Womyn graduated and she became the mentor for the *mujeres* that followed. Thus, she was the bearer of Raza Womyn mujerstoria. She was also one of

[16] "Nena" is a pseudonym.

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the first women to "come out"[17] as Queer in Raza Womyn, and she fought to create a Queer-friendly space in Raza Womyn. Nena graduated in 1999 from UCLA. She studied Chicana/o studies, women's studies, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) studies. She is currently pursuing a master's degree and teacher's credential from California State University, Los Angeles in education, curriculum and instruction with a specialization in literacy. She teaches social studies at Hollenbeck Middle School.



Cathy-(1995-1999)

Along with the other *mujeres*, Cathy was active in both MEChA and Raza Womyn until the split between the two organizations occurred in 1996. She continues to support Raza Womyn as a volunteer and participant at the conference and other Raza Womyn activities. She is a teacher at Stevenson Middle School, and in 2002 she and Nena brought 60 middle school women to the conference. She is pursuing a master's degree in education at California State University, Los Angeles.



Erica- (1997-2001)

Gender: "Female"

Sexuality: "Queer"

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[17] To "come out" indicates that a person is openly claiming a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or Queer identity. It derives from the phrase "to come out of the closet," which signifies an end to hiding one's sexual identity or a move to make one's sexual identity public as opposed to private. One can "come out" several times in their lives, including to themselves and to the people in their lives. In other words, "coming out" can also be a self-awareness and acceptance of one's sexuality.

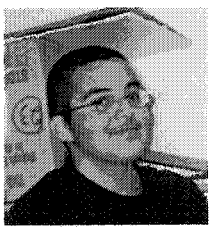
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Race/ethnicity: "Chicana"

Socio-economic class: "working class"

Identifies as: "lesbian, activist, teacher, Latina"

Erica was a very important leader within Raza Womyn. After Nena graduated, she was one of the few *mujeres* that had been trained in the ins and outs of the organization, and she took on many responsibilities such as finances and on campus organizing. She was actively involved in the affirmative action movement to repeal SP 1 and SP 2 in the University of California system. Erica graduated with degrees in American literature & culture and Chicana/o studies, with a minor in education at UCLA in 2001. She received an M.A. and teacher's credential in education at the University of California, Berkeley in 2003. She teaches middle school English as a Second Language (ESL) in Oakland.



delia[18] - (1997-2002)

Gender: "mujer"

Sexuality: "womyn lover"

Race/ethnicity: "chicana, *mexicana*"

Socio-economic class: "poor working class"

Identifies as: "chicana, *mexicana*, *immigrante*, *tortillera*, *revolucionaria*, *indigena*, *y mujerista*"

[18] I purposely do not capitalize delia's name because she does not do so. She asserts that rules and regulations, especially in the act of writing, are conformist and oppressive. She feels that in order to freely express herself she must break all the rules of writing. Therefore, in the tradition of Black feminist scholar bell hooks, she chooses not to capitalize her name.

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delia is an extreme activist—present at every protest and in opposition to many oppressive acts. She was mentored by Nena, Gina, and Cristina in her early days as a Raza Womyn. delia was in a sense Nena's protégé, and delia embraced Nena's mentorship fully and completely, as she credits her for much of the wisdom, bitterness, and passion that she feels ignites her desire to struggle for justice. After all of the early *mujeres* graduated, she was left to take on the torch. While Raza Womyn was one of her greatest commitments, she preferred to organize in the community and outside of the university. She studied Chicana/o studies, specializing in labor studies, and she says she resisted taking "any more classes in the white old boy eurocentric sociology program at UCLA." She graduated from UCLA in 2002 (and still needs three courses to receive her degree). She has worked in several community organizations since she left UCLA. She continues on her mission of protest.



aurora[19]- (1997-2003)

Gender: "female"

Sexuality: "bisexual"

Race/ethnicity: "chicana"

Socio-economic class: "working class"

Identities as: "feminista, chicana, fierce femme ☺"

[19] I do not capitalize aurora's name for the same reason—she and delia both came to the agreement that they would resist writing structures by not using capital letters.

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aurora is an "*horchata*-drinking femme fabulous *mujer* from boyle heights." She took on major leadership and responsibility roles as a Raza Womyn. She was extremely organized and helped the organization run smoothly because of it. She majored in history and Chicana/o studies, with a minor in education and graduated from UCLA in 2001. After graduating, she taught ESL at Belvedere Middle School and pursued her love of photography, art, and dance at ELAC. She is currently conducting research for UCLA. She plans to pursue a Ph.D. in history or women's studies and hopes to one day open a center for womyn and youth and work in the Boyle Heights community. She is also interested in teaching at a community college.



Yolanda-(1998-2004)

Gender: "Female"

Sexuality: "heterosexual"

Race/ethnicity: "Latina/Chicana/Mexican-American"

Socio-economic class: "below middle class"

Identifies as: "tomboy, stubborn, independent, strong, and determined"

Yolanda was involved in Raza Womyn for several years, but in 2002 she took on new leadership roles as one of the key organizers of the organization. She took on the responsibility that was left when most of the other *mujeres* from her cohort graduated. She was the primary coordinator of the 8th and 9th annual Chicana/Latina conferences. She was a political science major and Chicana/o studies and education minor, and she graduated in 2003. She plans to become an activist as a political member of the

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government. She wants to work for the poor in the areas of education, healthcare, and labor. She is also considering later becoming a university professor or high school teacher.



Marina-(1999-2000)

Gender: "Female"

Sexuality: "Heterosexual"

Race/ethnicity: "Chicana"

Socio-economic class: "middle-class (after I graduated)/ grew up working class"

Identifies as: "feminista, Chicana, counselor, y *artista*"

Marina coordinated outreach and publicity for Raza Womyn's annual conference, and she developed and participated in the conference's college planning for higher education workshop. She was a transfer student from Santa Monica College (SMC). In 2004, she completed a master's degree in Counseling and Student Affairs at the UCLA Graduate School of Education. She just got a job as a counselor at SMC.



Carmen- (2000-2001)

Gender: "F"

Sexuality: "queer"

Race/ethnicity: "Chicana"

Socio-economic class: "working class"

Identifies as: "leftist, organizer, muxer, lover, writer"

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Carmen transferred to UCLA from El Camino College in 1999 and became involved with Raza Womyn in the winter of 2000. She and her best friend Angelica came into Raza Womyn and introduced a new element of fun, love, and hugs, and it spread through the organization very quickly. She graduated in 2001 and studied communication studies with a minor in Spanish literature. After graduation, she became a union organizer for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in San Jose. She is currently working with Californians for Justice (CFJ) and working for quality education and racial justice in California schools. She is pursuing a career as an organizer and political journalist/writer.

Angelica- (2000-2003)



Gender: *muxer*

Sexuality: heterosexual

Race/ethnicity: mestiza/ Mexicana

Socio-economic class: I have more privileges than a working-class person (i.e. my parents), but I am definitely not middle-class

Identifies as: a Chicana, *feminista, Muxerista*, of working-class background, sister, daughter, *y amiga*.

Angelica also transferred from El Camino College and became involved with Raza Womyn through the 5th annual Chicana/Latina conference in the winter of 2000. She continues to organize and bring positive energy to Raza Womyn although she graduated in 2002. She majored in history and minored in Latin American studies and

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Spanish. She has remained active in Raza Womyn as a mentor and organizer after graduation. She plans to apply for graduate programs in journalism in New York and Berkeley. Currently, she works as a caseworker at a community organization called the Coalition Against Slavery and Trafficking (CAST).



Veronica- (2000-2001)

Gender: "female"

Sexuality: "heterosexual"

Race/ethnicity: "Chicana"

Identifies as: Chicana, Latina, *mujer*, *pochita*, daughter, and sister.

Veronica became involved with Raza Womyn for a short time after her sister, Angelica, encouraged her to come to the organization. She began to travel and write for *La Gente* newsmagazine and stopped coming to Raza Womyn meetings. She received her bachelor's degree in Chicana/o studies in 2004 and plans to pursue a career as a journalist.



Araceli- (2000-2001)

Gender: "female"

Sexuality: "heterosexual"

Race/ethnicity: "Mexican"

Class: "lower-middle"

Identifies as: "Chicana"

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Araceli was a transfer student from East LA College, and she was looking for a space or an organization to become involved with when she came to Raza Womyn. She was involved for about a year and then started writing with *La Gente* and was involved with Latinas Guiding Latinas. She is studying International Development Studies and Chicana/o studies and plans to one day go to law school.



Cynthia- (2000-2001)

Gender: "female"

Sexuality: "heterosexual"

Race/ethnicity: "Mexicana/Chicana"

Socio-economic class: "working class"

Identifies as: "Chicana, progressive, mujer, activist, sister, daughter, friend, student, listener, and artist"

Cynthia was involved with Raza Womyn for about a year, and she came back a few times in her last year at UCLA. She was extremely involved in a student organization called *Conciencia Libre*, which focuses on local and international, immigrant justice issues. Cynthia was studying Chicana/o studies and International Development Studies, with a Spanish minor. She graduated in 2004.



Morelia - (2000-2002)

Gender: "mujer!!"

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Sexuality: "heterosexual (??!!)"

Race/ethnicity: "Mexicana, Latina, Chicana, brown"

Socio-economic class: "*media*"

Identifies as: "*loca, mujer, bella, inteligente*, sister, daughter, *tia*, role model, *indigena, nacionalista, internacionalista, organizadora, enojona*, stubborn, baby, critical, *hocicona, chingona, desmadrosa, cabrona*, HERstorian, *nieta*, friend, student, teacher, y *revolucionaria*"

Morelia was a member of both *Conciencia Libre* and Raza Womyn. She was very involved in Latin American social justice issues and worked extensively with the Day Laborers Center in Los Angeles. *Conciencia Libre* asked her to leave the organization because they did not believe she was committed enough to their cause, but she believes she was asked to leave because of her feminist perspectives and outspokenness. She received her bachelor's degree in 2002. Morelia is pursuing an M.A. in Latin American Studies at UCLA and plans to do a Ph.D. program in Latin American studies and/or Spanish and Portuguese in the future. She would like to become a university professor.



Claudia- (2000-2003)

Gender: "Female"

Sexuality: "Tortillera, lesbian, queer"

Race/ethnicity: "Chicana"

Socio-economic class: "working class"

Identifies as: "Claudia, *mujer*, Chicana, *tortillera*, lesbian, femmebutch, sister, daughter,

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aunt, worker, student, immigrant, *chaparrita*, lover, queer, *Mexicana*, womyn of color, farmworker, *vaquera*, *norteña* lover, *activista*, political, *hocicona*, super senior, *tortillera del norte...*"

Claudia was involved in Raza Womyn of and on since the fall of 2000. She is most often a worker rather than a student, so she is not always able to be as active as she might like. She is also a strong supporter of *La Familia* because of her commitment to Queer issues and her alliances in the organization. Claudia is pursuing her bachelor's degree with a major in Chicana/o studies, sociology, and public policy. She would like a career as a community college professor or a director of a community organization to serve the needs of battered womyn/youth and queer youth.



Coral-(2000-2002)

Coral came into Raza Womyn at a time when many of the women were questioning their sexuality. Her openness and "in your face" manner helped open up much of the discussion that was already taking place around these issues. She was a financial coordinator of Raza Womyn and began to take leadership in the organizing of the 7th annual conference. However, she became ill that winter and suddenly stopped coming to Raza Womyn meetings. Coral graduated from UCLA in 2002. She studied Chicana/o studies with a minor in urban planning. She is currently living I Oakland with her partner Adelina. She plans to pursue a master's degree in social welfare and would one day like to earn a Ph.D.

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Liz and Desiree-(2000-2002)

Gender: "Mujer"

Sexuality: "Heterosexual (but not by choice, I can't help I was born this way☺)"

Race/ethnicity: "Chicana"

Socio-economic class: "Low"

Identifies as: "Chicana, daughter, Queer friendly, lover, mother, friend, sister, and *mujerista.*"

Liz came to Raza Womyn with her good friend, Coral. She became very involved in the leadership and organizing of the 7th Annual Chicana/Latina conference, and she was very committed to ensuring that the conference was a success. Liz was also a full-time mother, partner, and student. She was a Chicana/o Studies major and urban planning minor and graduated in 2002 from UCLA.



Alejandra - (2000-2002)

Gender: "female"

Sexuality: "heterosexual"

Race/ethnicity: "Guatemalteca"

Socio-economic class: "lower"

Identifies as: "strong, independent woman, sister, traveler, and confidant"

Alejandra came to Raza Womyn briefly in 2000, but then she left to study abroad in Chile. As soon as she returned to the university, she came back to Raza Womyn. She

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enjoyed the safe space and felt that she grew from her encounters with the *mujeres*. Although in the beginning she tended to be less vocal, towards the end she came out of her shell and took several leadership and activist roles within Raza Womyn and in the community. Alejandra graduated in 2002 with a double major in International Development Studies and comparative literature. She is currently working as a community organizer, and is possibly interested in a career in law.



Rosa- (1999-2002)

Gender: "Female"

Sexuality: "bi-"

Race/ethnicity: "I identify as Chicana because I am identified as brown by society. But I am Bi-cultural my mother is French-Canadian and Irish."

Socio-economic class: "po'"

Identifies as: "womyn, visionary, student, friend, revolutionary, funky hip-hop rocker, emerging artist, singer, dancer, master of words, Freirian disciple, lover/fucker, progressive, and urbanite"

Rosa was involved with Raza Womyn since 1999 off and on until 2001 when she became involved more consistently. She was also busy working and being involved with several other activities including *La Familia*, undergraduate student government, her band, and other off campus activities. Rosa graduated in 2002 with an individual major in the "Politics of Public Urban Education in California," a minor in policy studies, and a

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concentration in social welfare. She plans to pursue a career as an education activist/advocate.



Leilani- (2001-2002)

Gender: "female"

Sexuality: "heterosexual"

Race/ethnicity: "race-black/white, ethnicity-Cuban/Guatemalan"

Socio-economic class: "middle"

Identifies as: "a *mujer*, sister, daughter, friend, girlfriend, Latina, underrepresented ethnic group, feminist, catholic, student, and worker"

Leilani was involved in Raza Womyn her final year in college. She had never heard of Raza Womyn before then, but she became very involved in organizing the 7th annual conference and remained active until she graduated in 2002. At UCLA, she was an English major, with a world literature concentration and a Spanish and women's studies minor. She is currently pursuing a master's degree and teachers credential at California State University, Dominguez Hills. She plans to become a teacher and later pursue a career in law.



Susana-Raza Womyn member (2001-2003)

Gender: "F"

Sexuality: "Heterosexual"

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Race/ethnicity: "Salvadoran-American"

Socio-economic class: "Lower middle class"

Identifies as: "Salvadoran-American, 1st generation American, student, daughter, big sister, granddaughter, girlfriend, rock-climber, scuba-diver, taste tester, traveler, planner, peace-keeper, child of divorce, single-parented child, feminist, resource provider, list maker, ghetto child, and sharer"

Susana was looking for a women's space at UCLA, so when Angelica invited her to Raza Womyn she felt right at home. She became very involved and was one of only three graduate students in the organization. She earned her master's degree in Latin American studies with a concentration in women's studies in 2002. She has continued to participate in Raza Womyn after graduation and helped organize the 8th and 9th annual conferences. She is currently the executive director of a non-profit organization called Women and Youth Supporting Each other (WYSE). She plans to one day pursue a career as a professor.



Desirré, Emilio (Milo), and Marisol- (2001-2004)

Gender: "female"

Sexuality: "presumed heterosexual but I don't like to identify"

Race/ethnicity: "Chicana, Mexican American but with ethnicity more Mexican than American aside from the loss of language"

Socio-economic class: "at the moment very poor and if I were to mess up at school with my grants and aid I would be in the poverty margin until I figured out what to do next"

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Identifies as: "Chicana, feminist, mother, daughter, sister, *prima*, lover, girlfriend, friend, *compañera*, *comadre*, artist, writer, *pensetiva*, loner, laugher, crier, atheist (but perform and respect many rituals within my personal life), observer, listener, lover of life and *familia*"

Desirré came to Raza Womyn in 2001 seeking a safe, women's space. She had recently moved to Los Angeles with her 5 year old son, Milo, leaving all of her family and friends in Northern California. Desirré was initially a quiet participant, supporter, and magnificent artist, but in 2002 because only she and Yolanda were left behind after the other *mujeres* graduated, she stepped up to accept many new responsibilities and leadership roles. She became a major organizer of the 8th and 9th annual conferences. During the eighth conference, she was a eight months pregnant with Marisol, she organized over 20 workshops for the conference, conducted her own workshop, designed the program, and was absolutely crucial to the success of the conference. In 2004, she graduated with a major in women's studies major, and she plans to eventually pursue a doctoral degree in women's studies.



Anayvette (2002-2004)

Gender: "mujer"

Sexuality: "two-spirited" [bisexual]

Race/ethnicity: "Centro-Americana (Gua-Nica)" [Salvadorian and Nicaraguan]

Socio-economic class: "working class"

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Identifies as: "'Gua-Nica', Bi-sexual ("two-spirited"), *Muxerista*, writer, poet, artist, activist, lover, fierce femme, mariposa femme

Anayvette was a wonderful addition to Raza Womyn. As she pointed out, Raza Womyn was her space from day one. She had heard that Raza Womyn was an organization made up of radical feminist lesbians and immediately she wanted to join. She transferred from Santa Barbara Community College after applying to UCLA three times. At UCLA, she majored in Chicana/o Studies and graduated in June, 2004. Her senior year, she was the editor-in-chief of *La Gente* newsmagazine, (one of the first Latina/o student run newspaper in the country) and a strong leader of Raza Womyn. A month after graduation, she gave birth to her first child, Lupita, and she has plans to marry her partner, Jose, in August. Next year, she will begin a masters program in Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, and she plans to continue her education to receive a Ph.D. and teach at the university level.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

Self-identifications based on Survey Data
Responses were collected from 32 participants

32 Women
29 Undergraduates
3 Graduate Students
Ages: 18-31

Generation in the U.S.
- Immigrated to the US: 6
- 1st Generation: 19.5
- 2nd Generation: 2.5
- 3rd Generation: .5
- 4th Generation: 2.5
- Multiple Generations: .5

Socio-economic Status
- Poor To Working Class: 21
- Working Class To Middle Class: 7
- Middle Class: 4

Ethnic/Racial Identities
- Chicana-20.5
- Latina-6
- Mexicana-10
- Guatemalteca-1
- Centro Americana-1
- Salvadoreña-2
- Mestiza-1
- Mexican American-3
- Mixed 5 (Cuban and Guatemalan-1; Black & White-1; Chicana and Samoan-1; Salvadoran and Nicaraguan (GuaNica)-1; French & Chicana-1)
- Hispanic-1
- American-1

Sexual Identities
- Queer-9
- Bisexual-5
- Two-spirited [Bisexual term amongst indigenous people]-1
- Lesbian-4
- *Tortillera* [Lesbian term in Mexico]-4
- Heterosexual-17
- "Presumed heterosexual, but I don't like to identify"-1
- "Heterosexual, but not by choice"-1

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CHAPTER 4

RAZA WOMYN *MUJERSTORIA*



Figure 7 Mujeres en Resistencia: Raza Womyn at Affirmative Action Rally. (2001)

"Raza Womyn was born out of a struggle. The struggle was for equal rights and recognition for the women who were members of a Chicano/Chicana group at UCLA but who did not receive the same rights and benefits as the male members. Instead of continuing to be pushed aside and having their specific Chicana issues ignored, in 1981, these women created their own organization, and Raza Womyn was born." (Raza Womyn coordinators, 1997)

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On the evening of February 10, 2000 after a weekly Raza Womyn meeting, I walked from Kerckhoff Hall to Bunche Hall with five *mujeres* (women) to a Raza social mixer for undergraduate students hosted by the César Chávez Center for the interdisciplinary study of Chicanas and Chicanos. After the gathering, a discussion commenced about previous experiences between MEChA and Raza Womyn. According to the *mujeres*, Raza Womyn formed in response to the sexism and homophobia that many Chicanas and Latinas encountered in MEChA. They shared their own experiences and their belief that their encounter with sexism and homophobia in MEChA were part of an on-going problem within the organization that had reoccurred throughout the years. When they were dealing with the sexist and/or homophobic incidents, the *mujeres* had no idea that these were shared experiences that other women and Queer people had gone through. But as they left the organization and were able to reflect on their experiences, they came across other *mujeres* who had been through similar struggles. The more they shared their stories, the more they heard and collected new ones. They came to identify these stories as the herstory of *mujeres* in the *Movimiento* [Movement]. At the end of our conversation, they said that this herstory needed to be documented because they were sure that other *mujeres* would one day be faced with the same issues in male and female activist organizations, and they did not want them to go through it thinking that they were alone. They urged me to include their stories in this dissertation. The following is a collection of Raza Womyn *cuentos* [stories] or "*mujerstorias,*"[20] narratives, and

[20] delia, a Raza Womyn, often reconstructs language to create words that she can identify with and that she feels comfortable using to describe her experiences. In an email, where she was referring to the herstory of

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interviews, written and oral, formal and informal — it is a *mujerstoria* of Raza Womyn collected from and by the *mujeres* that I have studied in the organization for the past five years.[21]

The Early Years (1979-1981)

Growing out of MEChA

In 1979, a group of women who were involved in the UCLA student organization, *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana y Chicano de Aztlán* (MEChA),[22] created a sub-committee for the female members of the organization to focus on women's issues. They felt they needed a "space" where they could address these issues separately from the entire membership of the organization. As a sub-committee, the desire to speak openly and consistently about women's issues became more pronounced, so they began to consider the creation of a separate women's organization. As these women approached the male membership of MEChA to advise them of the need for this space, they were met with harsh resistance. The men were against the creation of the new space and argued that these issues could be addressed within MEChA. According to one of the founding

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Raza Womyn, she used the word "*mujerstoria,*" as a Spanish equivalent of herstory. But the significance of replacing "her" with "woman" is meaningful because it literally means woman-story or women's stories. This term has a direct connection to delia's feminist/*mujerista* politics.

[21] There will be some glaring gaps and fragments in this herstory, as is usually the case in the re-telling and re-collecting of silenced women's stories, but this is an attempt to begin piecing it together.

[22] MEChA is a national organization that exists at many colleges, universities, and high schools throughout the nation. MEChA is an acronym for *el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana y Chicano de Aztlán*, which roughly translates to the Chicana and Chicano student movement of Aztlán. Aztlán refers to the land, a sacred ground, of the Southwest that was appropriated from Mexico by the United States. MEChA was founded in 1969, when students, faculty, and community leaders came together at the University of

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members, Isabel Vasquez, the men said that they wanted to learn about women's issue as well. "We want to be sensitive to your needs...We wanna figure out what this women issue is about, so let us participate," they argued. Isabel felt that the men were not "evil, super duper macho" men, but rather they were men that wanted to be taken care of and taught by women while still refusing to focus on the issues that women found most pertinent. She said that "the women felt a strong need for an independent organization of Latina women."

A narrative that has been passed down through oral *mujerstoria* was that in the early days of the organization, the men in MEChA were so opposed to these separate meetings that they continuously showed up to meetings to disrupt them. In frustration, the *mujeres* began meeting in the women's restroom, knowing that this was the one place the men could not follow them and invade their space. Eventually the women made their first break from MEChA to become their own organization. They struggled over what to call the newly formed Chicana and Latina group. While many of them had a strong Chicana or Chicano identity because of their participation in MEChA, at least one member was Puerto Rican and another one was South American. The Chicanas and Mexicanas in the organization wanted the name to reflect their background, but they did not want to exclude the other Latinas. Furthermore, they were aware of the small, but growing populations of Central Americans and children of mixed heritage, (Mexican and Central American,) in Los Angeles. Although the *mujeres* were already beginning to redefine the

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California at Santa Barbara to create El Plan de Santa Barbara, which was considered a Chicano plan for higher education.

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terms 'Chicana' and 'Chicano' to incorporate others besides people of Mexican background, recognizing that the term signifies a political identity and solidarity with the *Movimiento* [Movement], they also wanted to give Latinas the right to define themselves and not feel forced into a Chicana identity. After many discussions, they decided on Raza Women because they felt that "Raza would encompass the spirit of the organization." While Raza also had Mexican origins and was widely used throughout Chicana/o communities, it was a term that could symbolize a Latina/Chicana community or a united "race."

Raza Womyn seeking university recognition

In 1981, the women decided to go through the university for recognition, but they were met with yet another obstacle, which was the university's resistance to the name of the organization. According to their advisor, the university felt that calling the group Raza Womyn "was a discriminatory practice because it sounded like [they] were being an exclusive organization." This was an unfounded accusation, considering that other "ethnic/racial" organizations such as MEChA or women's organizations already existed at the time. The *mujeres* stood by their decision and were able to maintain the name they chose and still receive recognition. At the time, the members had no critique of the word "women," spelled with an 'e'. Thus, the official name on all organization and university literature read "Raza Women." The change from Raza Women to Raza Womyn did not occur until 20 years later, during a Raza Womyn meeting, when everyone decided that

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they would write Raza Womyn with a *y* rather than *e* to make a feminist statement against being male-identified—taking the word "men" out of the word "women."

After splitting organizationally from MEChA, the women were able to concentrate on their internal development. They wanted an informal setting for their meetings, a space free of "rigid structure with motions, seconds, and Roberts Rules of Order" because that "was a very oppressive way to run meetings." They avoided strict voting procedures and instead concentrated on "talking, dialoguing, and consensus building." Isabel says that: "the goal was raising the consciousness of the women in the group, especially about why [they] needed [their] own space and why it was important to talk about [their] own issues, and for [them] to reflect, as women, on what [they] wanted out of the university and for [them]selves in [their] lives and on [their] identities as Latinas as Chicanas, as *mujeres*." From its inception, the organization developed in opposition to oppressive practices that they experienced in other organizations, particularly in MEChA. Nonetheless, a strong link between MEChA and Raza Womyn would last until the late 1980s, when a second symbolic and physical break occurred.

Raza Womyn during the late 1980s

Latinas Guiding Latinas, a community service branch of Raza Womyn

In 1987-88, Raza Womyn members Virginia, Martha, Haydee, and Esperanza created a community service branch of Raza Womyn. It was a group: "that would allow the *mujeres* of Raza Womyn to become mentors and reach out to the young Latinas in

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selected schools. Their vision was to empower young Latinas in public schools" (La Gente, The tutoring and mentoring program for high school and middle school students was called Latinas Guiding Latinas (LGL). Other organizations had created these kinds of program for Latino and Latina students, but the *mujeres* felt the need to provide mentorship and assistance in college access for Latinas by Latinas. According to an ad in *La Gente de Aztlán* (the people of Aztlán), a Chicana/Latina/o university student newsmagazine:

> In response to the undereducation and high school dropout rate of Chicana and Latina students, Latinas Guiding Latinas was implemented by UCLA students with the intention of motivating young women to pursue higher education by:
>
> - providing a network in which LGL volunteers serve as mentors and resource aids for young Chicanas and Latinas
> - providing professional women in varied careers as speakers, guests and role models, [and]
> - ensuring that participants and volunteers are exposed to educational goals and opportunities. (*La Gente*, 1996, 33)

The need for a mentoring and tutoring program for *mujeres* by *mujeres* was immense. Hence, while it had its origins as a Raza Womyn project, LGL also developed into an independent organization that continues to bring together college, high school, and middle school *mujeres* toward the goal of increasing the numbers of Latinas in higher education.

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Establishing a Separate Identity and a Physical Space at the University

At around the same time that Latinas Guiding Latinas was founded Raza Womyn was met with another obstacle with regards to space. On paper, they were still a branch or extension of MEChA, and as a result they were being asked to share office space with MEChA. Isabel notes: "Knowing how important the organization was for Latinas at UCLA as a support group and the importance to have its separate identity from MEChA, which was male dominant for awhile, we fought to have our own office space. Unfortunately, that landed us in the second floor of the men's gym. However, with much struggle and resistance, the following year Raza Women became an independent group with its separate budget and thanks to Lisa our office became 324 Kerckhoff Hall." This would not be the last time that the Raza Womyn's office and physical space would be threatened, but it was the last time that Raza Womyn was forced to move.

As the leadership of the undergraduate student government (USAC) changes yearly, their politics change and student advocacy organizations are always amongst the first to be targeted in terms of funding and space changes. As recently as the 2000-01 school year, a white female (sorority-affiliated) student became the president of USAC, and she began talking about taking away certain privileges from student advocacy groups, namely office space. She felt that there was no distinction between the chess club and the ethnic and women-identified organizations on campus and that neither of these organizations should have offices. And if the student advocacy organizations did not occupy the office space, then the long-desired space that the Greeks requested of the

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university would become available. Luckily, she was not successful in her campaign against the advocacy organizations.

There is a long history of tension and hurtful politics between the sororities and fraternities and the student of color organizations on campus, which I learned by way of organizations that primarily serve students of color. Essentially, the leadership of the undergraduate student government largely determines what organizations and events that will be funded and supported by the university. As early as 1980, students of color at UCLA created a coalition and ran a slate of students for the USAC positions against "the Greek machine" that dominated student government prior to 1980 (Nijagal, 1995). The coalition has undergone several name changes, including the Third World slate, Students First, Praxis, and Student Empowerment, all of which have been focused on improving the educational environment for underrepresented students at the university. These coalitions were a result of increased student organizing and raised awareness around issues of social justice and change, coupled with the support of ethnic studies programs and race-based student organizations. I learned about students elections politics from candidates on the Praxis slate. They defined praxis as reflection and action (Freire, 1970), and their vision statement was a call for collective action:

> We believe that education is a right, not a privilege. This is why we believe that a student issue is anything that prevents a person from enrolling in or graduating from higher education. We are committed to working on all fronts to increase access by organizing students to represent themselves. As students, our power lies in our ability to act collectively for change, not through student government titles.

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The students of color that participated in this slate were self-identified critically conscious students who sought to implement their theoretical foundations of social justice into practice; hence the name of the slate—praxis. For five years Praxis successfully ran their candidates and won the elections. The slate of students that was in opposition to the students of color was made up of primarily of members from Pan-Hellenic Greek organizations on campus. According to the narrative of campus politics, the Greeks felt that as Praxis gained leadership of the student government, Greek social events and access to office space suffered. Many students of color, who often came from non-privileged backgrounds, opposed student funding of Greek-organized social activities because of the enormous privilege and wealth of most Greek organizations (especially those with large alumni endowments) and their members. In general, funding for Greeks meant increased spending on social events predominantly attended by White students, while funding for student of color organizations resulted in an increase in community service and consciousness-raising activities on and off campus primarily for students of color. This dynamic resulted in a tug of war between the two groups. It became a struggle for funding and university support on both sides but for very different agendas. In 2001, the students involved with the Praxis slate decided to change the name of the slate to Student Empowerment because of internal conflicts, shifting politics, and possibly the defeat of Praxis the previous year.

Raza Womyn has fluctuated in their level of involvement and support of the slate. Raza Womyn has usually endorsed Students First/Praxis/Student Empowerment, but they have consistently had serious concerns about the levels of sexism and homophobia

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exhibited by some of the members of the slate and/or the organizations represented in the coalition that makes up the slate. Raza Womyn has not always been a key participant of these campus politics. At times, this has been due to Raza Womyn's refusal to become involved in on-campus "drama."[23] Other times, Raza Womyn has been excluded or tokenized by the slate as the women and/or Queer representatives on the slate.

Raza Womyn in the early 90s

Throughout the years, the numbers of women that have participated in Raza Womyn have fluctuated, usually remaining in the area of 10-20, but sometimes decreasing to only a couple of members. At times, there were no members, but it always revitalized as the need for a woman and Chicana/Latina space returned. The members of the organization and their own individual goals and political inclinations have basically defined the goals and politics of the organization. Early on, the organization was believed to be extremely political and even radical. Isabel indicated that Raza Womyn: "was more about raising consciousness. We were very militant. We were very anti-racism, anti-classism, anti-sexism, and it was threatening to a lot of people." She says:

> We were militant in our approach. We wanted to push people's buttons. We wanted to make people feel uncomfortable. We wanted to be in people's

[23] Drama is one of many words terms that has become a part of Raza Womyn linguistic expressions. Drama signifies a multitude of things, but mostly it refers to things that are considered inappropriate, especially in terms of politics or consciousness. Sexism and homophobia are excellent examples of the "drama" that many of the women choose not to deal with in co-ed student organizations. For example, a lack of consciousness about women's and Queer people's social justice or equity issues is considered dramatic or drama.

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faces...We wanted other Latinas to feel uncomfortable and to think about stuff, to do things to challenge this whole idea of what success means, what being Latina means, and what a woman is. And I think we did that. We did it to ourselves and to other people.

Consciousness building or *conscientización*[24] has been a central focus and goal of Raza Womyn, but the definition of consciousness has shifted based on the different identities and politics of the members involved. C*onscientización* indicates that a person is aware of the historical/herstorical social and political implications of a particular aspect of a human beings life/identity, particularly in terms of the discrimination, subordination and oppression of a person based on that aspect of their lives. However, it should also include a critical assessment of the power dynamics, in terms of privilege and oppression, involved with that aspect of life/identity. The roots of *conscientización* are in lived experiences—that is, people develop their consciousness as a result of their lived struggles, but consciousness and awareness can also be learned or developed from theory shared in academic classes or amongst communities, families, friends, and other allies. This is the case in Raza Womyn and many other student organizations.

The four primary areas of *conscientización* that I was concerned with in this research are race, class, gender, and sexuality. The members of Raza Womyn have come into the organization at different levels of *conscientización*. Some Raza Womyn have had an awareness of race, but no awareness of gender, class/labor and sexuality issues or vice versa. But as the *mujeres* have come together, they have often engaged in Raza Womyn

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pedagogy, which is the process of sharing knowledge and increasing understanding through dialogue, *hermandad* [sisterhood], organizing, and activism; thus creating *conscientización* on different levels about different "isms", phobias, and other aspects of subordination and oppression.

Even though the early days of Raza Womyn and the more recent years of Raza Womyn have been defined as radical with a focus on raising consciousness, this was not always the case. Raza Womyn has also been a very social space with members that had no political stands on or off campus. At one time, Raza Womyn members were primarily sorority members, in which case Raza Womyn funds were primarily used to organize social activities. In 1994 (as well as other years), even men were involved in Raza Womyn. At one point, men from the Iranian Student Group (ISG), who share the office with Raza Womyn, were actually coordinators of Raza Womyn! This occurred because one of the female members of Raza Womyn had a boyfriend in ISG; consequently the boyfriend and some of his friends participated in Raza Womyn events and meetings.[25]

The Resurgence of Radical *Mujeres* in Raza Womyn, The Late 1990s

In 1994, the "Raza Women" members offered a scholarship to a woman named "Janie."[26] After being awarded the scholarship, she began attending the Raza Womyn meetings and learned about the men involved. She was unhappy with the dynamics of the

[24] For a deeper discussion about conscientización see Paulo Freire (1970) in the literature review.
[25] Based on lists of members that I found in Raza Womyn archives, there may have been male members at other times as well, but this is unconfirmed. They may have been male supporters rather than members.
[26] "Janie" is a pseudonym.

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space, in particular with the male membership, so she asked her friend, Gina, and some of the other *mujeres* from MEChA to come to Raza Womyn. Gina and the other women had major conflicts with the male membership and even with the male-identified women in the organization. Gina says that her purpose in Raza Womyn was solely to "kick the men out" of the organization. Soon Gina was left alone in Raza Womyn, and she worked to recreate it by outreaching to new *mujeres*. Because the new members were members of both Raza Womyn and MEChA, the link between the two organizations was reconnected. Gina was the internal coordinator for MEChA and Raza Womyn in the 1994-1995 school years; thus, her leadership in both organizations served as a direct link for collaboration between the two.

Raza Womyn and MEChA Working Together

Because members of Raza Womyn continued to participate as members and leaders of MEChA, the connection and allegiance to the organization was strong despite the reoccurring breaks between the two organizations. In the 1994-95 school year, the Raza Youth Conference (RYC), a conference that today draws over a thousand Chicana/Latina/o youth throughout Southern California was co-founded by two students. Gina, the Raza Womyn, was one of the co-founders of the RYC. Gina had been a member of MEChA since 1989 when she became involved with the San Diego chapter in her community college. But even while Gina was still a member of MEChA, she struggled with sexist politics in the organization. Since her early involvement in MEChA, she was outspoken and assertive about women's issues, and she refused to succumb to male

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dominance. As a result, in her final year at UCLA, as a MEChA coordinator and RYC co-chair, she had a falling out with the other leaders of MEChA.

The governing body of the organization, called the *Mesa Directiva* [Directive Table], met secretly to discuss whether or not to kick Gina out of the organization. A vote was officially taken, and they decided to allow her to remain in the organization. She was extremely unhappy in MEChA; however, she made the choice to continue working within them because of her strong commitment to the youth and the conference, but her participation in MEChA came to an end soon after. Although MEChA was the place where much of her activism and consciousness first began to flourish, she could no longer support what she came to regard as a hypocritical movement for social justice.

Gina reports that after she came out as a lesbian, she was "deleted from MEChA history as a co-founder of the conference," implying that her omission from this history was not an accident at all. In fact, she believes that because of their homophobia, MEChA members did not want to acknowledge her contributions to the RYC.

The year after she graduated she worked to rebuild Raza Womyn. Most of the earlier members of Raza Womyn had graduated, so Gina decided to continue working with the organization to mentor the two *mujeres* that she helped recruit, Nena and Cristina. When Gina was still a member of MEChA, she made a proposal to the women of the organization to create a conference similar to RYC but solely for women. The suggestion was put up for a vote, but due to the lack of interest, preparation, and commitment to women's issues, the conference was voted down.

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The first annual Chicana/Latina conference



Figure 8. Raza Womyn organizers of the first annual Chicana/Latina conference. (1996)

In 1996, her vision of a woman's conference organized by and for women became a reality, but it was planned by the *mujeres* of Raza Womyn rather than MEChA. Unfortunately, there were only two other active coordinators in Raza Womyn at the time, Nena and Cristina; but between the three of them, they were able to recruit a hand full of *mujeres* that offered their support. They organized the first annual Chicana/Latina conference on February 24, 1996, which was called "*La Liberación de Nuestras Mujeres,*" [The Liberation of our Women.] (Figure 8 is a picture of the women who helped organize the first annual Chicana/Latina conference in 1996. This picture was taken of the women after the conference at the customary celebration dinner in East LA.) Although the conference was held on the UCLA campus, it targeted a Chicana/Latina population off campus, primarily young women in middle school, high school and community college, but women of all ages participated in the conference. Raza Womyn

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received little or no funding for the conference from the university that year, but they sought donations from people off campus and used their own money to fund it. Less than a hundred women attended the first annual conference, but every year since the numbers have doubled and has gone up to 600 participants. The first conference program indicated:

> The theme of this year's conference is entitled, "**La Liberación de Nuestras Mujeres**". It is our belief that as Raza Women, we educate and motivate our *hermanas* to fight against the continuous attacks on our ***mujeres*** and our community. We will begin our step towards liberating ourselves through becoming aware and taking action in our struggle against the oppression that we face on a daily basis. However, we must first support each other in order to strengthen ourselves in ***nuestra lucha***. We ***mujeres*** carry that **determination** and ***corazón*** that is necessary for the betterment of ourselves and our communities.

The women clearly felt a strong sense of attack taking place against *mujeres* and their wider communities, and increasing consciousness amongst women and ultimately struggling for liberation were high priorities for the conference. Although the Chicana/Latina conference was held on the university campus, the presenters were from off-campus communities, including Chicana/Latina activists, artists, performers, resource centers, and students. The information shared specifically addressed the struggles of Chicanas/Latinas and various aspects of Chicana/Latina lives and was delivered in small group workshops that allowed for discussion and sharing. Furthermore, Raza Womyn expressed their desire to come together and struggle against assaults on them and their

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communities through consciousness-raising, dialogue, and activism. Every year since, the *mujeres* have organized an annual conference with a different theme, over twenty workshops, keynote and closing speakers, entertainment, and other activities—all in hopes of raising consciousness and awareness against the subordination of *mujeres*.

In 1996, MEChA (both men and women) were supportive of the Raza Womyn conference, but later that year, Nena and Cristina had a very negative and traumatizing experience as they helped organize the RYC for MEChA. Although Gina had left MEChA earlier, the younger *mujeres* had not. They had continued working with the organization. Janie (Nena's sister and also a member of Raza Womyn) became the coordinator for the women's unit of MEChA, and eventually she became the MEChA chair.

The most recent break between Raza Womyn and MEChA and La Familia

Nena and Cristina volunteered to organize the Raza Youth Conference for MEChA in 1996, so they became responsible for organizing and confirming all of the workshop presentations for the conference. They were asked to read the evaluations from the previous Raza Youth Conference and derive a list of recommendations for workshops for that year. Amongst the recommended workshops was one called "Queer Aztlán," which was conducted by *La Familia de UCLA*, the Queer Latina/o organization on campus, but when Nena and Cristina presented it as one the tentative workshops, they were told that they should reconsider the presenters. In other words, MEChA did not want *La Familia* to do the presentation. When the *mujeres* asked why, they received mixed

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messages. Eventually, Nena says that they were told that, "some members from *La Familia* [had] spoken out against MEChA and condemned [them] of homophobia and [MEChA felt that they were] not homophobic."

Nena believes that because there were a few openly gay people in MEChA, the organization was tokenizing those members and using them as "proof" that they were not homophobic. When Nena and Cristina argued that the participants of the conference specifically requested in their evaluations that *La Familia* return to conduct the workshop, the *Mesa* of MEChA called an emergency meeting to discuss the workshops. Nena recounted the event:

> So they ended up calling an emergency meeting with me and Cristina. They sat us down, my sister was there because she was chair, then you had "Lisa"[27] and "Enrique"[28] who were the chairs of the conference and you had "Emilio"[29] there, who was the "founder," or some shit like that, co-founder with Gina of RYC.
>
> So we had to justify for three hours why we needed every workshop. Three hours girl! We were going off. I was arguing with him the whole time. My sister just sat there. [Afterward,] I go 'Janie I can't believe you put me in here.' And she was like, 'Well we're here as MEChistas.' I'm like, fuck you man. You're still my sister. So it went personal. It went home… So after justifying for three hours, we

[27] "Lisa" is a pseudonym.
[28] "Enrique" is a pseudonym.
[29] "Emilio" is a pseudonym.

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came out of that meeting crying. We were like, 'What the fuck was that? That was fucked up!'"

Nena and Cristina were caught in a very difficult situation because they were feeling pressure from the MEChA leadership to throw out all workshops that were conducted by people who spoke critically about MEChA, but their conscience would not allow them to feel comfortable with that because they knew that these were valid experiences and perspectives that needed to be shared. This was an especially trying time for Nena because her sister, who had also been a member of Raza Womyn in the past, was now the MEChA chair, so both sisters were caught in a bind because of the politics of the organization. According to Nena, there was no space for self-criticism or balance—"either you were for MEChA or against MEChA." Consequently, Janie seemed to side with MEChA and Nena seemed to side against MEChA. Nena and Cristina felt that they were blacklisted for challenging the decisions and advice of the *Mesa*.

Right up until the day of the conference, the "drama" continued to build. "Mundo,"[30] (a member of *La Familia* and the previous coordinator of the gender and sexuality component of MEChA,) approached Nena to protest that *La Familia* was not going to be allowed to conduct the "Queer Aztlán" workshop. Nena was under the impression that *La Familia* was still going to present the workshop, but someone else from MEChA told Mundo that they were not. When Mundo went to MEChA to complain, another emergency meeting was held between MEChA and *La Familia* to discuss the issue; however, the *Mesa* did not ask Nena and Cristina to attend this meeting.

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It was supposed to be a closed meeting, but the *mujeres* showed up anyway. During the meeting, the MEChA chair (Janie) told Mundo that the workshop committee had decided not to ask *La Familia* to present at the conference—essentially she placed the blame for the exclusion of *La Familia* on Nena and Cristina who were the workshop committee. Nena and Cristina were devastated. On one hand, they had MEChA refusing to allow them to invite *La Familia* to present, and on the other hand, they had *La Familia* angry with them and accusing them of being homophobic.

After trying to argue their side of the story, Nena and Cristina were excluded from another meeting that consisted of only the members of the *Mesa* where a decision was made to have a "Queer Aztlán" workshop led by the gender and sexuality component of MEChA at California State University, Northridge. This was a closed meeting and the *mujeres* were purposely excluded, but *La Familia* continued to blame Nena and Cristina for their exclusion. As a result, on the day of the conference *La Familia* showed up to protest the whole incident. Nena describes the day's events:

> So we're at the day of the conference...And *La Familia* comes up with all their flags and everything...They're all Queered out. And they go, 'Are we doing the workshop?' I go, 'What are you talking about?' I go, 'Well you're doing what ever you guys discussed at the thing.' He's like, 'Well did Terry tell you we were doing it?' I go, 'Yeah, but MEChA didn't say anything about it. They wouldn't listen to me.'...

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[30] "Mundo" is a pseudonym.

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And they were videotaping me. They have a videotape of everything that went on, to document it…

And when it came down to the workshops, I guess security ends up going to the room where the Queer Aztlán workshop is at. And *La Familia* goes to where the workshop is at and they're like, 'You know what, we were supposed to do this workshop…' starting all kinds of shit. And they had their signs for the workshop too…I passed by them and they had their sign, 'Queer Aztlán' workshop. They were going to take them to workshop, no matter what…And so they got security…

A: So what happened at the workshop?

G: I wasn't there. I didn't want to go there. I go, 'No because they're going to point it at me,' so security ends up coming in, kicks them out—kicks out *La Familia*, and the other people proceeded with the workshop. So *La Familia's* just sitting there like, 'fuck this shit.' Videotaping every one. Saying shit about them.

After the RYC, Nena and Cristina had no choice but to distance themselves from MEChA. They felt that they were blacklisted for questioning the *Mesa* authority and for not remaining silent. Nena says that she went back a couple of times, but she never felt comfortable again amongst them. One of the last times she went to a meeting, she came out to them. She felt more distant from them than ever. She remembers their reaction to

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her coming out: "So after that, no one said anything. You know when people come out, you need to give them a hug, you need to show them love, that 'I'm so proud of you.' No..." Still, her commitment to MEChA was difficult to sever, and she tried going one more time, but after this visit, she never returned to MEChA:

> And I think I went back one more time, and I knew it wasn't going to happen. I was stared at. Like, 'Why are you here?' Like I had those looks, the 'Why are you here' looks. Besides I had nothing that I could grow from. There was nothing there that I could grow from anymore. It was just bitter, trying to be the best, really machismo shit. The sad thing was that it was embraced and reciprocated by all the women. So everyone eventually left MEChA and came out.

Eventually Nena completely left MEChA, and she rebuilt a space for herself within Raza Womyn. Raza Womyn allowed her to be herself, which was something that she was struggling with because she was trying to come out as a Queer woman as well. As Nena indicated, several students active in MEChA (both male and female) left the organization and soon after came out as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. A handful of them became members of Raza Womyn, and others became members of *La Familia.* They felt a strong need to feel accepted, supported, and understood based on all of their identities, including sexuality. They were unable to find that within MEChA; however, this has not been the experience of all Queer people in MEChA.

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A QUEER *MUJERSTORIA*: COMING OUT IN RAZA WOMYN

The person who was most responsible for opening up the conversation of sexuality in Raza Womyn during the time that I arrived in 1998 was Nena. She even made me feel safe enough to discuss my own sexuality in the safety of Raza Womyn. Before I came to Raza Womyn, I was not out as bisexual to anyone but my family. Likewise, many of the *mujeres* were unable to speak about sexuality freely before Raza Womyn for fear of using the wrong words or sounding uninformed and unaware, but Nena engaged in extensive dialogues with all of us, and finally we developed a sense of comfort with regards to sexuality. This was a powerful and liberating experience. Even after Nena graduated, the precedence she set led to so many more encounters and dialogues about sexuality with future *mujeres* of Raza Womyn. Queer is the most commonly used term amongst the *mujeres* in Raza Womyn because it is viewed as all-encompassing and as politically charged. Queer includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, and it is connected to a social political movement against sexual subordination. However, some of the *mujeres* prefer terms such as *lesbiana, jota*, two-spirited, or *tortillera*, which are more closely linked with their identities as Latinas, Chicanas, Mexicanas, or indigenous women.

Lesbiana is preferred because it is in Spanish, and the *mujeres* feel that the word lesbian is more closely identified with White women. *Jota* is a derogatory term used in Latina/o communities to identify lesbians and bisexual women, but it has been redefined by those women who choose to use it as a means of empowerment and to reject the negative use of the term. "Two-spirited" is a term that is intricately connected with an

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indigenous identity because indigenous people who house and can love both male and female spirits are referred to as two-spirited (Brown, 1997). *Tortillera* (tortilla maker) is a term that has gained popularity within lesbian and bisexual communities in Los Angeles (and other places). A professor at UCLA, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, has theorized the term and several of the women in Raza Womyn and the Los Angeles community have also taken it on as an identifier. When I asked delia (a Raza Womyn) where the term *tortillera* originated, she replied:

> I've heard it before when I was younger, but it didn't really mean anything to me, but then I started hearing it through Gaspar[31] and then through Claudia because she's taking that term too. The other day I was talking to my mom...And she was telling me, '*O, si mija*, [Yes, my daughter,] the other day I was talking to the lady that works in the *tortilleria* [tortilla factory].' And my mom asked the lady, '*Quien sabe como sera que las lesbianas hacen amor si no hay nada hay* [Who knows how lesbians make love if there's nothing there],' meaning that there's no penis involved. The lady told her, '*Pues, sera asi como haciendo tortillas, como tortilleras.* [Well, it must be like this, like making tortillas, like tortilla makers].'
>
> And that's where it actually comes from...*Tortillera* meaning two vaginas, two women's bodies making love. That's where Gaspar got it. It's not something that

[31] According to several of the *mujeres* of Raza Womyn, Alicia Gaspar de Alba ("Gaspar") has been their only professor at UCLA to deal with issues related to Chicanas/Latinas, feminist and Queer issues. She has been key in raising many students' feminist and Queer consciousness. In class, she popularized the term/identity, *tortillera*, which is used in Mexico and other Latin American countries to identity lesbians. See also Perpetusa-Seva, I. & Torres, L. (2003).

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she came up with or that Adelina came up with.[32] It's something that she learned through her *comunidad* [community], and she brought it into her academics and made a theory out of it. It is actually a term that is used within our *colonias* [neighborhoods] and our *comunidad* [community] to define our *gente* [people] to define *tortilleras*, to define lesbians.

Hence, *tortillera* was a term that originated in Mexican and Latina/o communities and which was used in derogatory terms as well, but which has been redefined and embraced by Chicana/Latina lesbians and bisexual women in the same manner that the word Chicano was redefined during the movement. Queer has a similar trajectory—it was once used in a demeaning manner to signify that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people were odd or abnormal, but today it is used frequently, especially amongst academics and activists, to signify an LGBT political movement. Still many people active in these communities do not want to limit people to specific terms, and they want to honor people's decision to identify as they wish. At the first ever Queer Youth of Color Conference[33] held in Los Angeles on April 2002, the student organizers referred to their community as LGBTQ; again this simultaneous use of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,

[32] Adelina is producer, playwright, and actress who is pursuing a Ph.D. in performance arts at Stanford University under the mentorship of Cherrie Moraga. She is a long-time Raza Womyn supporter and her partner (Coral) is a Raza Womyn. She wrote and performed a Chicana lesbian show called, "How to be a Tortillera 101."

[33] The Queer Youth of Color Conference was created by high school and middle school students from Los Angeles and by Raza Womyn members, Gina and Nena. It was held at Manual Arts High School in south central Los Angeles.

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and Queer signifies that every term is just as important as the other. They have also used the umbrella label, "LGBTQI," to include Intersexed people.[34]

As members of Raza Womyn have dealt with different social/political/economic issues internally, their events have reflected these issues. For example, the area of *conscientización* that was least developed by early participants/members of Raza Womyn was Queer sexuality. The founders and Raza Womyn members during the eighties and early nineties, for the most part, did not deal with Queer sexuality; in particular, they did not address homophobia. Several Raza Womyn alumnae have remarked that sexuality was never an issue that they dealt with or that they felt comfortable discussing. Naturally, this resulted in a homophobic and sexually repressive environment because in order to develop a sexually liberated and Queer-friendly space—that is, *conscientización* with regards to sexuality—dialogue, questioning, and educating must take place around that issue. And most often, these women came from homes, communities, and friendships where sexuality was also a taboo. Thus, this aspect of identity and life experience was sorely unexplored or ignored in the face of dealing with issues related primarily to race, class, and gender, including issues of family, immigration, religion, politics, and education.

Although the *mujeres* felt more comfortable in Raza Womyn than they did in MEChA, this did not mean that Raza Womyn was free of some of the same oppressive issues that they fled. Nena admits that much of the "chingon politics" that she learned in

[34] People who are born with both male and female organs are Intersexed.

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MEChA followed her into Raza Womyn, and she and the other *mujeres* had to consciously work to create a different environment within Raza Womyn.[35]

Cristina notes that both she and Nena were growing inside and outside of Raza Womyn, especially with regards to sexuality. Nena was in a relationship with Gina although she was not out to everyone about it.[36] Cristina was slowly beginning to question her own sexuality. She recalls that she was attending several conferences through her role as a member of the student government, and within these conferences, the discussion of LGBT issues was common. She says, "It's natural that when you start talking about these issues, you begin to question. We're socialized to never consider these things by the environment that we're in, but once you start hearing people talk about it, you start thinking about it." She remembers discussing the issues with others at the conferences, then bringing these issues back to Raza Womyn. Eventually, they created a space where they could openly dialogue about sexuality, and they began to connect it to their Chicana experiences. It is not clear to me who came out first, but what is clear is that their coming out distinctly changed the Raza Womyn space.

The intimacy and closeness between the women that allowed them to discuss such private issues was not always welcomed by other women who came to the organization. Cristina believes that Raza Womyn has always had a small number of participants for this reason—because of the closeness and because it is a Queer friendly space. She

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[35] Nena defines chingon politics as "tough guy politics." She says, "Those are terms from Betita Martinez. 'Yo soy mas chingon.' Like, I'm the one who you can't fuck with because I'll fuck with you…It's very penis driven, phallic driven, patriarchy driven, and it is embraced and expected in many organizations." (See Martinez, 1998)

[36] Gina and Nena just had their 10th year anniversary.

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remembers being envious of the large membership of other organizations and thinking that Raza Womyn had to increase their numbers:

> And I remember at one point I was like 'We need to get more people involved.' Because I felt that it was a bad reflection on us. And then I had to go through my own process and be like, 'You know, we have to deal with a lot more of these issues, taboos that all these other organizations don't. They don't have the deep connections or the spaces and conversations that we do. Because half of our meetings would be check-ins with everyone's drama and supporting each other. And other organizations just did business, like 'This is what's going on. Thank you. Bye.' So we learned about all of our issues. We talked about our fears in a candid manner. And that's what I think is the beauty of Raza Womyn, but it was also why it was so small because all of people are afraid of that.

She adds that Raza Womyn was different because although they knew it was important to organize against Proposition 209, immigrant backlash in Los Angeles, sexual abuse from the Greek men on campus, and many other injustices, they also knew that it was even more important to provide support and understanding to each other. She thanks Nena for helping accept the small size of the organization and for helping her making sense of it. She remembers Nena telling her, "Yeah, our organization is small, but we're dedicated to one another one hundred percent. We're workers, we're there to support each other, and we may not be able to do that if the organization is big." She believes that especially because Raza Womyn dealt with the issue of sexuality directly

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and because they had open discussions about their own sexuality, many women may have been scared of that environment. She reconciles this issue saying, "The women were there definitely because they wanted to be there. Our group was not about building a resume at all…We got the really dedicated women."

Cristina and Nena began taking classes in LGBT studies, Chicana/o and women studies, and they brought the issues that they learned about in class to their meetings. They connected several things that they read about to their own traumatic experience within MEChA. They realized that what they experienced was not abnormal at all; rather, it was a historical reoccurrence in terms of the way that women and Queer people have been treated in Chicano organizations. Nena says that coming out in Raza Womyn was a natural process for her, and she distinctly remembers the night it happened:

> With Raza Womyn, it wasn't like 'let's have a meeting, I want to come out to you.' It was more like if you were there in our crying session [you knew]. One time we were just going through madness…We were in a meeting, and I go, 'I think we're all going through a lot of shit and I think it'll be good if we close the meeting right now and we just talk about what's going on in our life. So it must have been about 7 or 8 of us, and we sat around the round table and we were holding hands, going around, crying, everyone was crying. I was crying. I was telling them about me trying to come to my mom, how hard it is, and that's when I came out to every one else. No one judges me. No one treated me different. No one ignored me. We all gave each other a hug, then we did the cinnamon roll hug,

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all these little things that we did. I felt loved. And if you want a revolution, that's what you need. You need love.

Once Cristina and Nena came out, several other women followed. Cristina says she is not sure why that was, but she has some theories on the issue:

> Once you start talking about [sexuality] and you are open about it. The process of questioning in that safe space is just catchy. You start doing it with every thing. 'Am I really political? Am I really down?'...it's a natural process. Everyone starts questioning themselves... Sometimes we would just get really excited; we would just want everyone to be out. If we thought they were going through what we went through. We were like, 'you need to just come out.' But it wasn't their time. Everybody has to go through their own process. And so it was just like, 'We're going to keep talking about it. We're going to go to straight places, gay places. We're going to dance with whoever we want. And people just started slowly questioning themselves.

> I don't know if people that are questioning were particularly drawn to the organization, like subconsciously maybe they were drawn to it, or if it's just a natural thing that if you're in this kind of space that you just start questioning yourself. It could be two different things. But from what I've noticed is that everyone that really questions themselves, they become open to loving all sorts of people. They kind of release that barrier. And then it even transcends sexuality and just becomes the ability to love people at a different level.

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Again and again these sentiments that Cristina voiced have resonated and recreated themselves within Raza Womyn. Women that have never met Cristina, but have experienced the same thing she did years later, have voiced the same theories. Over the past six years, there have been at least three different waves of women coming out as Queer in Raza Womyn. Cristina and Nena were the first in 1997, and there were at least three other women in their cohort that followed. For some of them, it took place after they graduated. In 2000-2001, five women came out and three who were already out joined Raza Womyn. In 2001-2002 a woman who adamantly identified as straight was in a relationship with a woman by the spring quarter. In 2002-2003, no new women came out but a woman who identified as two-spirited found a welcoming environment in Raza Womyn. And throughout the years, there have been many, many more women who have questioned their sexuality but have not yet come out as Queer.

In 2001, four of the *mujeres* who had defined themselves and believed themselves to be "straight" or heterosexual before they became involved with Raza Womyn came out. At the same time, there were three women that were "out," meaning they already identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or Queer (LGBTQ) before they arrived at Raza Womyn, but were drawn to Raza Womyn because of the safety they felt in being out in that space. Two of them indicated that they did not feel safe in *La Familia*, the Queer Latina/o organization on campus because they felt that their Queer politics and identity were questioned by members of *La Familia*, often while they were still in the process of coming out and still unready to deal with those issues.

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Women who identified as bisexual were accused of being imposters by other Queer people, of being afraid to be out as lesbians and wanting to continue to be privileged because of their relationships with males. This issue has been discussed often by Raza Womyn members; especially amongst the women who came out in 2001, there was a general consensus that forcing bisexual women to choose heterosexuality or lesbianism was oppressive. These women have supported each other and been able to discuss their sexuality in the way that Cristina spoke of—they feel that they could transcend sexuality and love people at a different level. One *mujer* described her bisexual identity in the following manner:

> I don't want to or expect to identify as a lesbian today or ever because although I think it's politically strong for women to do so and I support that, my experience lately has been that it can be just as limiting as the identity of being heterosexual. And I have a problem with limits and I think it's time that we start embracing ambiguity and that gray space. We live in such a dichotomous world, where we're like, 'You're A or B and that's it,' and there's a space between A and B that we need to embrace. And like even the term bisexual, it's ambiguous enough, but honestly, in all honesty I fall in love with people, not with a guy or girl. And I want to embrace that. And just being a lesbian is being like, 'oh I can't be with men,' like why? What if I were to meet this guy that was great or that could understand me with my crazy ideals.

Similarly, other *mujeres* have indicated that they respect people's desires to love whomever they choose. In a sense, their sexual identities are in line with their visions of

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social justice because they resist oppressing themselves and others based on their sexual identities as they do with regards to race, class, and gender.[37]

Indeed, on an organizational level, Raza Womyn engage in *Muxerista* discourse and analysis that considers the roles of their multiple identities and positionalities. In the following chapters, we will take a closer examination of the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the individual experiences and *testimonios* of the *mujeres* in Raza Womyn.

[37] For more information of bisexuality, see Hutchin and Kaahumanu, 1991 and Tucker, 1995.

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CHAPTER 5

LOVE AND REVOLUTION



Figure 9. Carmen and Angelica in high school. (1996)

Carmen and Angelica came to Raza Womyn in the winter of 2000 during the fifth annual Chicana/Latina conference. They had both heard about Raza Womyn and were interested in learning about the organization. Angelica heard about a Raza Womyn presentation on the Zapatistas, and Carmen had met a member of Raza Womyn named Wendy on the bus who told her that she "should check Raza Womyn out because it was a really good women's space." Upon their arrival at the first Raza Womyn meeting, they were instantly embraced, and they fit in perfectly with Raza Womyn because they were loving and embracing as well. From that first meeting on, they took on a Raza Womyn identity and participated faithfully in the organization. The two of them brought life to the space. The intimacy they shared and their playfulness was contagious to us all. They had a true sense of humor and love that warmed the space. Initially, the women were so much

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alike that we could not even tell them apart, so I nicknamed them "*las cuatas*" (the twins). Eventually, their independence and uniqueness emerged, and we fell in love with each of them a second time. They grew and developed into separate identities, each pursuing their own paths. This *testimonio* is a glimpse into the lives of the *cuatas* who reveal important aspects of Chicana student activism, Raza Womyn conscientización, and *mujer a mujer*[38] love. While I focus primarily on Carmen's story, I weave Angelica's story in and out of it because of its importance to Carmen's college access story, as well as other aspects of her life.

I met Carmen for our first interview date (July, 2001) at an apartment in mid-Wilshire, where she was living while she was participating in the Summer Internship Program (SIP) sponsored by the University of California labor center. We planned to spend the day together and conduct the interview on a Sunday. We decided we would have lunch first, so we drove down Sunset Boulevard until we found a Colombian restaurant we wanted to try. The food was delicious, and we were the only customers there, so we enjoyed our meal and talked for at least two hours at the restaurant. Afterward, we stopped and bought some watermelon and strawberries at an outdoor swap meet, and we took them back to the apartment where we sat on the couch in the living room and began the interview. This was the first of two all-day interviews. The second took place three months later (October, 2001). Again, we spent the whole day together,

[38] Love from one woman to another.

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having lunch at Versailles Cuban restaurant, going for coffee, and finally settling down to talk for nearly six hours at my apartment.

I conducted the interview with Angelica in the Raza Womyn office on campus just before she left to Mexico to study abroad for six months (October, 2001). She was rushed and unfortunately unable to talk as long as I would have liked, but since then she has returned from Mexico City and we have spent whole days together, talking, laughing, missing Carmen (who moved to the Bay area in January), and "breaking down" the experiences and dynamics of Raza Womyn. Both women have helped me work through many of the themes central to this work, and their lived experiences illustrate the ways that they have dealt with injustices and subordination within their families, in their schools, communities, and personal lives. The following *testimonio* is based on the stories (struggles and triumphs) they have shared with me during interviews and personal conversations.

Carmen's *Testimonio*

As I asked Carmen to identify herself, she discussed the four most important aspects of her identity—race, gender, sexuality, and class. She answered:

A: How do you identify yourself and why?

C: Um, okay. That's not an easy question. I identify as a Chicana, which implies mujer...and as a Queer Chicana now... [She laughs again.] Do we need to get into that?

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A: Yes.

C: I guess I also sort of…consider myself lower, in terms of economics, lower class.

A: Anything else?

C: Really those are the things that mostly define me—Chicana, mujer, Queer, and lower class.

Carmen embraces her identity as a *mujer* and a Chicana. She comes from a working-class immigrant family, and continues to identify herself as low income. Carmen has recently "come out" as a Queer woman, and begun her first relationship with a woman. Throughout her interview, she connected her different identities to her experiences in school, home, and communities, as well as to a desire to struggle for social justice and to resist racism, sexism, homophobia and classism.

Familia

Carmen is the daughter of Mexican immigrant parents, who lived in very poor conditions and left their country to support their families economically. Her parents came from *ranchos* [ranches] in Jalisco, Mexico. She shares her parent's immigrant story,

C: Both my mom and my dad are from neighboring *ranchos*. They are from Jalisco. The closest city is Tepatitlan… My mom…the rancho that her parents live in right now is called *La Loma*, and my dad is from *Los Pollos*. They have a small amount of land on the *ranchos*, and they grow *maíz* [corn], both of my

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grandparents. I think on my dad's side, he has more cows. Like they do the milk thing. It's not a super big ranch thing where we have stables and drama like that. It's not like that...

A: Why did your parents come to the U.S.?

C: My dad...because his family was very poor, so as the oldest child...the whole idea, you know, of 'you can make it in America because there's jobs and there's opportunities to make money.' And he came, basically to make money to send back. And I think he was here for about 5 years, then went back to Mexico, married my mom, brought her over on their honeymoon—not really a honeymoon, just brought her over. The honeymoon supposedly didn't end. They didn't go back until 15 or 16 years later...so they came to make money because it was going to be impossible there. And then they had my brother a year after they were married, and they didn't have their papers. So they figured let's stay, and then they had my brother and I. We were all born here.

Carmen and her siblings were born and raised in Wilmington, California, just south of Los Angeles. Her parents moved here from their *ranchos* [ranches] in Jalisco to pursue dreams of advancement and to provide for their families in Mexico. Her earliest recollections are fond memories of her mother playing with her in a humble home that was actually a small studio containing simply a bed for her parents, a sofa bed for her two brothers, and a make-shift bed for her. She laughs as she describes it to me, "So my bed was this wooden bench, and we would add, I think it was either three or four chairs, and that was my bed, and then the *covijas* [blankets] and my *almuadas* [pillows], and that was

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my bed. I didn't have a bed. I was really bitter. I was like 'make my bed, I'm tired.' We literally had to make my bed, not just put the sheets on it, but make it." She laughs and shakes her head as she recalls the memory. Her family did not have much, but this was all the family of five could afford at the time.

Her father worked as a machinist and her mother worked at home "taking care of other people's children." They always struggled financially, and Carmen feels that this had a huge impact of how she views the world. She says, "Ever since I remember, money has been such a central part of my life because there hasn't been that much of it. And it's more the lack of money that's been the center of focus... And in everything that I do, I think that it can be linked back to it."

Carmen has a twin, her brother, Jesus, and an older brother, Ramon. She was raised in a very patriarchal environment, where she was expected to carry out prescribed female gender roles and chores. As she and her twin brother grew older, she noticed that he had much more freedom to leave home alone, to work and drive, and even to speak his mind. She distinctly recalls her frustration over not being able to work because she was not allowed to travel far distances alone and because she was not allowed to learn how to drive. These limits on her freedom created feelings of vulnerability and fear, and they served to silence her in her home.

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Navigating the Educational Pipeline[39]

Carmen's primary and secondary education were relatively pleasant because, as she explained, her older brother set the precedence for what she needed to do in school, which was to behave, follow orders, and do well academically. She resents that she was taught at an early age that being a conformist would result in rewards. Still, her good behavior would earn her entry into a track of accelerated classes, just as it had done for her brother.[40] She remarks:

> My brother Ramon, he's the first person, the first male, to graduate from college. I think even to graduate from high school, and come to think of it probably even from junior high and probably from elementary school too. Ramon has been a groundbreaker for all of that. And then it was me because I was sort of expected to do the same. I sort of always took the same, had the same teachers that my brother took. And Jesus has always been the black sheep in that sense, which is sad.

Her twin brother, Jesus, did not have the same experience as she and Ramon did in school. She explains that Jesus did not conform in the same way that they did in school. Rather he enjoyed talking in class and often did not obey teacher's orders, and for this he was punished. He was not offered entry into the high track classes, nor was he guided into a swift transition into college. When I asked Carmen why she thinks she was able to make it into the high track courses and her brother was not, she declares:

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[39] See Solórzano and Villalpando (1998).
[40] For a discussion on tracking, see Oakes, 1985.

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> I was a conformist! I was known for being a well-behaved child or paying attention in class...My thing was to behave as a little girl because I learned that from my mom. My brother too, it was about behaving. Jesus, on the other hand, was never about behaving because he was the one who was the troublemaker. He was the talker. He was the one who first learned how to turn on the television. He didn't give a fuck about teachers. I think it has to do a lot with that, that I was a conformist, that I did obey and that I did my work and did it on time. I did my projects, and Jesus didn't. And I think that's why. So he was placed in regular classes, which is crusty. There were always complaints about him.

She is quick to point out that Jesus is very intelligent and capable. In the classes he did enjoy, such as math, he excelled even when he exerted minimal effort. After graduation, he began school at California State University (Cal State), Dominguez Hills, but after a couple of years of going to school and struggling to pay for school, he decided to work full-time and go to school part-time. He has recently become a father, and Carmen feels that since school is not his priority or his passion, he will probably stop going to school altogether. She accepts his decision and understands his resistance to the institutions of higher education, but she notes that her parents are less understanding.

Her mother and father are staunch supporters of education. They came to the United States to improve their lives financially, but they also came here so their children could pursue an education. Carmen's mother is especially a motivating force in Carmen's desire for an education (Gandara, 1995). At least twice, Carmen has recounted the story of her mother being denied an education. She says, "I remember my mom telling me a lot

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of the stories of her growing up and the lack of money in her house growing up, and how because of that same reason, she never got a chance to go to school even though she wanted to. She was never allowed the opportunity to go to school." For Carmen this point is integral to her desire and persistence for an education. The first time she shared this with me, she cried; her pain was evident as she explained that her mother desperately wanted to go to school to receive an education but because of her poverty and because she was a woman, she was denied the right to an education. For Carmen and her mother, this continues to be a source of pain in their lives. The knowledge of this struggle is what motivates Carmen to continue with her education, but it also grounds her as a constant reminder that not everyone can enjoy the privilege of an education. She sadly recalls her mother's story:

> For my mom, it was always been very important that we go to school because, again, she didn't have that opportunity. And she's still very hurt about that. If I talk to her, to this day, she will cry about it. My mom is really sad about it. She's told me a few times about it, and every time it's the same thing. She'll start crying because she's like, 'I wanted to go. I wanted to go so bad, but no one allowed me to go because I had to be working.'... She's really hurt by that. So she was always really supportive, but at the same time she was very sad because she couldn't help us out because she didn't have an education herself. She couldn't help us with our homework. So that was really frustrating for her. And I remember when I would come home and ask her for help with a homework assignment, we would cry

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together because I didn't know how to do it and she didn't know how to help me. And she would always apologize to me for not knowing how to do it.

And my dad, he was always at work, but he expected us to do good, and if we didn't do good it was like not a good thing. They didn't know how to be supportive, so they didn't do it because they didn't know how to. My mom tried the hardest because she was with us the majority of the time, but my dad was sort of the one who came in and did the authority thing and sort of left everything else to my mom.

Because her mother's family and economic conditions in Mexico prevented her from going to school, Carmen's mother made a point of ensuring that her children would have that opportunity in the US. The lack of education has been a source of shame and frustration for her mother, and it has been difficult for Carmen and her siblings to navigate their way into college on their own. Nevertheless, the support and push for education that came from both parents, along with the guidance of their teachers and peers, resulted in all of them finding their own pathways into four-year universities and two of them graduating from college. In a traditional sense, teachers and schools might not recognize the level of impact that her parent's encouragement had, but Carmen fully acknowledges both of her parent's roles in her pursuit of a higher education. She says, "in terms of being supportive, they've done what they know to do. And it's not...I guess it hasn't been much other than saying, 'I hope you're doing okay.' We haven't had any

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other experiences in our family about college, so everything is very new and it's very complicated..."

Carmen explains Ramon's entry into college was the first time that her family was ever exposed to higher education, both in the US and in Mexico. Her family's humble background was rooted in the *ranchos* of Mexico. She understands that her parents were unable or unaware of how to be supportive of their academics. As Carmen notes, she and her mother cried together because neither of them could make sense of the schoolwork that Carmen was assigned. Even though this situation caused heartache and suffering in her family, it also resulted in a renewed commitment to education and advancement. For Carmen, it is a source of inspiration. In essence, it is what caused her to commit to pursuing a higher education.

Surprisingly, Ramon did not guide Carmen through the college choice process even though he attended and graduated from the University of California at Irvine as an engineer. Carmen believes this was probably because he was a reserved person, and he tended to stick to himself. While a teacher who took an interest in him guided Ramon through the process, Carmen 's peers in the high track classes influenced her. A very important person in Carmen's college access story is her best friend Angelica, whose two older siblings had attended and graduated from Loyola Marymount University (LMU).

Carmen and Angelica became best friends in their junior year of high school. Initially, both had separate groups of friends, but their strong affection for each other and quirky sense of humor brought them closer, leaving old and current friends envious. Angelica remembers that her best friend before Carmen was so angry about being

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replaced that she physically attacked Angelica. Luckily, Carmen was there to help pull the angry girl off of Angelica. They could not be separated, but they did enjoy having a large and diverse group of friends in high school. Amongst them was the only openly gay guy in the school, the prom queen, members of the band and drill team, and several others, including African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinas/os.

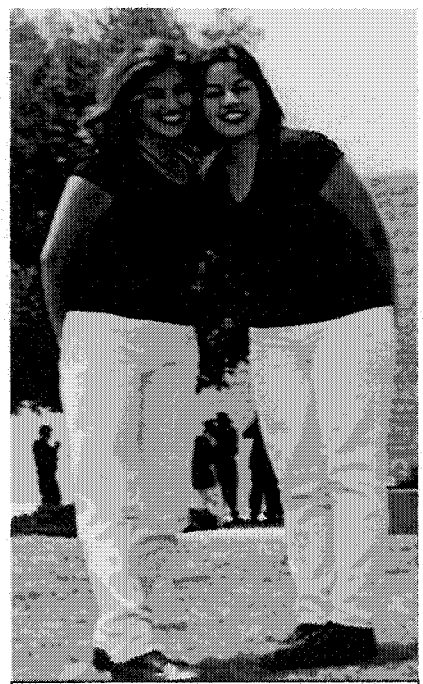


Figure 10. Carmen and Angelica senior year in high school. (1996)

Angelica and Carmen were so close that they even started to look alike. They often dressed alike to school, had similar haircuts, and joined the same school and community organizations. And although their dates objected, they even wore matching dresses to the prom! These two young women went through many things together. The experience that brought them together was their participation in a summer internship with the Labor Community Strategy Center in Wilmington where they began the long process of building their conscientización. Essentially, the two young women were inseparable at school and outside of school. People thought they were sisters and referred to them as twins. Angelica and Carmen became each other's "rock" during high school. Together they navigated their way through college curriculum courses, SAT tests, college applications, university visits, and college choices. They applied to several universities including UC Santa Cruz, UC Santa Barbara, UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC Berkeley, LMU and UCLA. LMU was their top choice, largely because of

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the great things Angelica's brother and sister told them about LMU and also because they decided that they would go there together. Once their applications were in, they anticipated replies from the universities and planned out every facet of their lives in college. They were going to buy matching bicycles and backpacks, and they even knew what they were going to stock their college refrigerator with, but much to their disappointment the path was not so smooth because Angelica was denied entry to Loyola Marymount University. LMU, UC Berkeley, and UC Santa Barbara accepted Carmen, but she had her heart set on LMU.

Carmen was faced with a difficult decision after learning that Angelica would not be going to LMU with her—whether or not to go to LMU without Angelica. She was convinced that LMU was a good school because of its size. She thought she wanted the small classes and intimate setting a private school could offer, so she decided to go to LMU without Angelica. And although they were both accepted to UC Santa Barbara (UCSB), they had visited UCSB and decided that it was not the place for them, so Angelica decided to begin her college career at California State, Dominguez Hills with a plan of transferring later. The two women were disappointed to be separated so suddenly after graduation, especially since the plan they had seemed so perfect.



Figure 11. Angelica and Carmen at the Banning High School Graduation. (1996)

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At their new schools, they both had disappointing experiences their first year. Carmen recalls the first year at LMU as her first experience of "culture shock."[41]

> ... I was scared of being in a big place [so I decided to go to LMU because it was smaller], and then I realized that worse than being scared of that, was the culture shock... It was just the deal of coming out of the dorm room and walking into...a sea of blonde hair, and then realizing, 'Oh shoot, these aren't the people that I'm used to looking at.' Of course elementary, middle, and high school was predominantly Latino. Wilmington is predominantly Latino...That's what I expected to see because I had never been anywhere outside of Wilmington...and it wasn't... And then the class issue again came up for me again because LMU is a private school, and I had loans. But the loans that I had and the grants they were giving me weren't enough to cover everything, so I had to work...I didn't have enough money to pay for extra things or groceries...And I thought, 'Okay, there's no way. I can't afford to be here, one, and two, I don't like it here.'

Class and race were huge factors in Carmen decision to leave LMU at the end of the school year, but beyond that was the fact that she no longer had the personal and emotional support of her best friend. The immense financial privilege of her peers was upsetting because it was a constant reminder of class differences between herself and the other students at her school. As she worked, took loans, and dealt with her family's

[41] Culture shock is a feeling of disorientation or alienation due to a person being immersed or exposed to a culture different from their own.

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financial problems, other students were obliviously spending money. She bitterly recalls one of her strongest memories of LMU,

> One thing that I will never forget because it was such a small campus (LMU's housing), I would see the same people at the cash machines all the time, and I remember barely having enough money to eat and literally counting my pennies to buy things... When I was there, I felt very deprived. And it was so blatantly clear because it's such a rich university, as a private institution. All the students, the majority of them being White and rich also... It was so clear to me coming from a school that was predominantly Latino and Black. That was such a huge contrast. No one was really rich in Banning High.

The low numbers of Chicanas/Latinas at LMU in comparison to her friends and classmates at Banning High School was unbearable for Carmen in spite of the fact that she made efforts to join the Ballet Folklorico group and the MEChA tutoring program called *Espejo* at LMU. Undoubtedly, the fact that Angelica was no longer at her side in this new setting was also a huge factor in her unhappiness at the school.

Meanwhile, Angelica was also struggling at Dominguez Hills. She describes her disappointment at not being able to go her top choice:

> I was getting really crazy my senior year. I was homecoming princess and president of this and whatever of that. And my grades went down a little bit, and that kind of affected me a little bit. I ended up with a 3.8, and I didn't get into UCLA. I didn't get into UC Berkeley. I got into UCSB and UC Davis, but I didn't want to go there. Oh, I didn't get into Loyola. That was my school. I wanted to go

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to Loyola because both my brother and my sister went to Loyola, so of course I wanted to go there too. And I didn't get in. So I was really sad, and I didn't know what I was gonna do. I didn't go to UCSB even though they were giving me a free ride. They called me, and they wanted me to visit, but I was really set on Loyola. I think my brother and sister had a really big influence on me because they're the only ones in my whole entire family to have gone to college. So they're my hugest influence, and I wanted to be just like them. So I didn't want to go anywhere else, so when they didn't accept me, I went to Dominguez Hills. I don't know why, but I did. That was a big waste because it didn't challenge me in any way—academically, socially… There was really no activism on campus at all.

And I always felt that I wanted a campus where I could be active because in high school I was so active and in the community. I really wanted that. That was my main thing. I remember on Columbus Day, we had this idea to dress in black and we painted our faces white in memory of all the indigenous people who had died. And at lunchtime, we all got together at the hill at Banning High and we all had a moment of silence. And that's the kind of stuff I wanted to do—to make people aware of what's going on.

Although Angelica was at the top of her class, took several AP courses, had a 3.8 GPA, and took all the necessary steps to go to a competitive four-year university, she was denied the opportunity, and her dream of going to LMU (like her bother and sister) was shattered. As an undergraduate at Dominguez Hills, she was nostalgic of the organizing

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she did in Wilmington. She felt that because Dominguez Hills was predominantly a commuter school it was lacking the community and student activism and sense of belonging she had in Wilmington, and she wanted to continue her newfound identity as an activist in college. Angelica felt that she had finally come out of her shell in high school. She says:

> *Sali de mi concha* [I came out of my shell], and I started doing what I wanted to do. And I was more vocal...the internship [with the Strategy Center] really opened me up to talk to people...I got comfortable, and I knew that my opinion was valuable because I had been learning a lot. I gained a lot of communication skills. So I was really involved because that's what I really liked to do. I really wanted to get more active and involved...

But she was unable to find a space like this at Dominguez Hills, so she was extremely disappointed.

Carmen tells me that during their first year in college she and Angelica began their plan to leave their institutions in an effort to find a better place to earn their degrees. "We were talking about how unhappy we both were. So we started talking about getting out of there, and so we did...we thought that we had it all planned out." They decided that they would transfer to UCLA. After doing a little research, they learned that they had a better chance of getting into UCLA if they transferred from a community college rather than a four-year university.

When I asked Angelica why she wanted to go to UCLA, she said she always had fond memories of UCLA because in 1993 her brother took her to a vigil on the UCLA

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campus where she learned about the student's struggle for Chicana/o studies. She vividly recalls seeing the students who were involved in the hunger strike in protest to the denial of Chicana/o studies department at UCLA. She says:

> I also came for the hunger strike [at UCLA]. My brother brought me, and I was like, 'Wow! This is what I want to do.' I came for a vigil. They had such a huge impact on me. I was like, wow, these students are starving themselves to get a Chicano department, and I thought that was so fierce. So I think subconsciously and consciously that was always on my mind. That's what I saw. I didn't see that the majority of the students are not Latino. I didn't know that we had to fight for space. I didn't see all of that. I really related it to a lot of Chicana and Chicano activism, a space for political activism. So it really stems from that. That's why I wanted to transfer to UCLA.

Inevitably, Angelica's enthusiasm to go to UCLA also influenced Carmen, but for Carmen, her main motivation to transfer to UCLA was to get out of LMU. She wanted to be at a school and at place that would be more racially diverse.

Hence began the new plan—first they would transfer to El Camino Community College, then they would major in sociology, earn an associates degree, and finally transfer to UCLA. Sadly, the plan was not as simple as they wished this time either. Angelica says:

> I think it's very easy to stray away from your goal in community college. That's one thing I realized. I really wasn't living up to my potential at all, and I think it has to do with the community college culture. Even a lot of professors would tell

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us things like, 'You have books at 10th grade level.' They make you feel less than. And you start feeling like you're not as good as people at UCLA of whatever. To me, it was just a stepping-stone. I went to El Camino College because it would be harder for me to transfer to UCLA from Dominguez Hills than from El Camino College because it's this hierarchy that they use. First they pick freshman, then they pick transfers and if you're from a four year university, you're last in line because you can get you degree from that university versus a community college where you can't because you can only get your Associates. That's another thing. I really researched the transfer idea. Carmen and I did together. We left our four-year universities because we were both really unhappy, so I researched and that was the best option. And I lost a year because none of my classes transferred to El Camino.

Amazingly, these two women, who come from working-class Mexican immigrant backgrounds, with parents who had no higher education, were able to gather information, carefully investigate, and plan their transfer process to the University of California, Los Angeles. This is a process that is very inaccessible and foreign to many students of color from low-income backgrounds that begin the college process at two-year institutions. According to 1994 census data, out of every one hundred Chicana/o students that begin elementary school, 13 percent begin their academic careers in community colleges, and only 1 percent of those students transfer to a four-year university (Solórzano, 1998; Ornelas, 2000).

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At El Camino, Carmen also felt unchallenged and unmotivated because of the general attitude of the professors. She believes that the professors had very low expectations of them and very few of them encouraged them to transfer to a UC. Luckily, Angelica had an edge on the transfer process because she followed the advice of her older siblings and visited the transfer counselors at both UCLA and the community college.

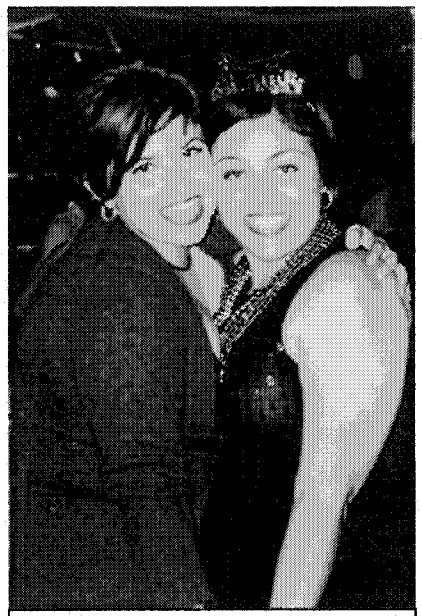


Figure 12. Carmen and Angelica while students at UCLA. (2001)

Angelica recognizes that having an awareness of these resources was an advantage and privilege that most other community college students do not have, especially at El Camino Community College (Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004).

From the research they did, they learned that sociology majors had a good transfer rate to UCLA. However, the year that they applied, the major was impacted. Too many students had applied as sociology majors, and as a result the grade and course requirements had increased. So while Carmen started school at the UCLA that fall, Angelica was again denied entry because she was almost a year behind since her classes at Dominguez Hills did not transfer to El Camino. The women were traumatized a second time! But they did not give up on their dream of going to college together. They spent the entire fall petitioning UCLA to reconsider Angelica's application. She was forced to take a few more required courses in the sociology major at El Camino. Finally, she was accepted and began attending the university the spring after Carmen started at UCLA.

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Eventually, they joined forces again at UCLA, became roommates, joined Raza Womyn, and lived together until the spring of 2001.

The Catalyst for Conscientización

Carmen and Angelica came into Raza Womyn with a particularly defined consciousness in terms of class and race/ethnic consciousness. As high school students at Banning High, they had participated in the high school chapter of MEChA. (Angelica was the chair of MEChA as she followed in her older siblings footsteps.) Unfortunately, their experience in MEChA was not very good because, as Carmen points out, the sponsor was incredibly sexist and behaved inappropriately towards the females in the organization. Despite the fact that she had an extremely negative experience in MEChA, Carmen acknowledges that in MEChA she learned about the Chican*o* Movement and about the meaning of the word, Chicano. However, the MEChA at their high school centered on a male-specific Chicano ideology and consequently, she rejected the Chicano nationalist perspectives that the MEChA sponsor preached. When she got to LMU and UCLA, she had no interest in getting involved with MEChA at all.

Angelica agrees, but feels that even though they did encounter sexism and "Chicano nationalist crap" in MEChA, she was enabled to think about her identity as a Chican*a*. She says, "it really influenced me in terms of thinking where I come from, my class, and comparing myself to other people and why as a person coming from Wilmas,

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why I'm less privileged than someone else and why we need affirmative action and why we need programs like EOP or other programs."

As a member of MEChA, Angelica was able to attend UCLA's first annual Raza Youth conference (which was organized and co-founded by Raza Womyn, Gina). She remembers attending a workshop on Chicana identity and realizing for the first time that there was a difference between being a Chicana and a Chicano:

> I remember the workshops at the RYC. I went to a workshop about Chicana identity, and there were some fierce Chicanas there. And they were talking about sexism, and how they weren't incorporated into the Chicano Movement and how it became a separate movement. And that's how I started realizing that I wasn't Chicano. I thought I was 'Chicano.' And I realized that it was different. It's Chicana, not Chicano. I'm not under that umbrella. I remember it being so new to me. I was like, Wow!

While MEChA was not directly responsible for creating Chicana awareness for the *mujeres*, they were both exposed to a Chicano identity early on through their high school experience in MEChA. Many Chicana and Chicano students have no exposure to anything Chicana or Chicano, including history, identity, or conscientización. However, the male dominant perspectives of the MEChA sponsor and the male membership in the organization prevented them from building a Chicana conscientización or a fully developed Chicana identity.

They both had a much more positive consciousness-raising experience with the Strategy Center, where they developed a racial justice and community activist

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consciousness. They were members of the Green Club of Banning High, (Carmen was the president and Angelica was the vice president.) As a result of their involvement with environmental issues in the Green Club, Carmen and Angelica became active in the Watch Dog, a component of the Labor Community Strategy Center in Wilmington where they worked on a campaign to organize against Texaco for polluting and endangering the lives of the community members of Wilmington.

Carmen remembers that the issues that they dealt with as the Green Club were not very political prior to their involvement in the campaign with the Strategy Center. The process began when a young woman named Kikanza visited the students at the high school during their Green Club meeting. She spoke to them at length about an incident that had occurred in their community during which a Texaco oil refinery had had an explosion in Wilmington and their entire community had to be evacuated. Several families were paid unofficial settlements by Texaco for their inconvenience, but little was done to ensure the future safety of the community. Kikanza helped bring the students to awareness about the fact that the people in their community were not being informed about the increasing amount of pollution in Wilmington resulting from all of the neighboring refineries, and she urged them to become involved in a campaign to raise awareness about these injustices. The Strategy Center Watch Dog initiated a boycott and education campaign against Texaco and recruited the students from the Green Club to become involved in the campaign to educate others in the community. The students went door to door to share this information with the adults in Wilmington. The campaign pushed the students to look beyond the "pollution is bad" motto and to think critically

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about why serious pollution conditions were targeted in working class communities of color. As a member of the Green Club, Carmen, Angelica, and the other students went from 'save the whales' and 'hug a tree' campaigns to fighting environmental racism in Wilmington—their very own community. In the summer, Carmen started an internship with the Strategy Center. She says:

> It was the summer before my junior year. So when I got involved with the Strategy Center, they explained to me what was going on…I know Kikanza, specifically, was really good. I consider her my mentor during that time. She was really good about making sure I understood the terminology. I was 15 years old, and they were talking about stuff that went over my head. I know that sometimes I would sit in the meetings, not knowing what was being said, and being too afraid to ask, so she would make it a point to ask me if I understood. She would explain it to me and break shit down for me and really allow me to understand things. In working with them, it was really good because it became this place where I was able to develop the ability to be critical about things.
>
> And I think back to that. You know how people say that once you've gotten to a certain place of consciousness, or once you've realized something, you just can't go back? And I felt like that was really the catalyst for me. I started seeing a lot of things that I didn't see before in Wilmington. I had lived there all my life, but I hadn't really noticed, 'Okay there's refineries all around here, and maybe it does stink here.' And then realizing the connection and why it was in this particular

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community of color, working class, that this was happening. And then I was like, 'Whoa. That's really interesting. Why isn't there a refinery in Beverly Hills? And why isn't there a refinery in Palos Verdes, which is not that far away from us?'

That summer was the turning point for Carmen. As she points out, it was the catalyst that begun her pathway to *conscientización*. The Strategy Center was her point of entry into building consciousness around issues related to her community, racial background, and socioeconomic status. Thus, she begun to develop a class and racial consciousness, which continues to expand as she encounters and make sense of her different struggles with race and class. Because the Strategy Center was both Carmen and Angelica's first point of conscientización, they have a strong allegiance to it. They continued to work with other campaigns for the Strategy Center beyond high school. In particular, they organized with the Strategy Center's Bus Riders Union (BRU) campaign to fight for better transportation for poor and working class riders of public transportation.

Carmen's Experience at UCLA

While at UCLA, Carmen's critique of racial privilege continued to develop based on her experiences in classes and on campus in general. She often felt isolated and silenced in her classes, especially in her major, communication studies, which was primarily White and male dominated. The few times that she was exposed to other Latinas/os in her courses were in her Spanish minor classes. In the entire time she was at UCLA, she was never able to solidify close relationships with her White peers. When I asked her why, she answered:

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> I'm very distrustful of White people, and it's not that I've had such horrible experiences with White people, but it's because I'm just really upset that they're so privileged. I'm angered at that, and I feel that they are uncritical because they are so privileged... Whether they admit to it or not, or whether they think that they are or not, I feel that they are racist because they have so much privilege and because of the comments that they can make. And I hate especially hearing White people say, 'But I'm not racist.' ...So I haven't had much interaction with White people, except professors.

She has a few White professors who she feels have been able to relate to the issues about women, poor people, or people of color and who are also self-critical of their own privileges. The ability to be self-critical is an important aspect of conscientización. Often, people with privilege are in denial or do not recognize their privileges, thus allowing them to partake in their privileges while subordinating people less privileged. Therefore, Carmen aspires to be self-critical of her privilege, while also being aware of the multiple ways that she experiences oppression or subordination, and she strives to surround herself with friends and allies who do the same. She particularly liked one of her professors who not only taught courses about African American history and the Civil Rights Movement, but also engaged in the struggle against racism in the 60s, long before becoming a professor. She says:

> I feel that he has proven himself as a progressive White man because he has struggled against racism for so long. Also he incorporates people of color into his lectures. Because he's a man, he still has some issues, but he has great classes on

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African American history, on Paul Robeson, on resistance art, and things like that. I feel like he's proven his worth. I really like this man.

Hence, while Carmen admits she is distrustful of White people, and men in particular, and therefore has limited interactions with them, she also recognizes that some White men and women have actively participated in the struggle against racial subordination. She maintains her suspicions though, and depending on conversations that she has with them, whether or not they say or engage in racist, sexist, classist, or homophobic remarks or actions determines whether or not she begins to trust them and have genuine relationships with them. She is very reluctant to allow "dysconscious" people into her personal space.[42]

The suspicion that she has of White people is extended to men and people of color as well, especially if they also lack the conscientización of recognizing their privileges and as a consequence exhibit oppressive behavior and actions. This is characteristic of many of the other members of Raza Womyn because as they develop bonds and friendships with people who understand them and have high levels of conscientización, it becomes more and more difficult to work with and deal with people who are obliviously racist, classist, sexist, or homophobic. However, some Raza Womyn are engaged in a struggle of balance that necessitates patience and understanding with people who may not

[42] Dysconscious racism was defined by Joyce King (1991) as a term that describes the lack of consciousness or awareness about race and racial discrimination that results in racism. Here dysconscious is used to signify a lack of critical consciousness about many different types of oppression, including racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.

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yet be conscious or aware of their inherent prejudices. An example of how this occurred with Carmen will be shared below.

When I asked Carmen what group of people she feels most comfortable with, she answered:

> Chicanas. And I think it's really important to share spaces with the people who you most relate with, who feel what you feel and who can relate with the drama in your house, who can relate to me when I talk about my father and say that he really wasn't there even though he was there. And they can nod their heads, and sort of be like, 'yeah my dad too.' As opposed to somebody else who is like, 'oh well, I didn't experience that.' And I've discovered that they have sort of similar experiences to me, and so that's why I've stuck with these people.

This has been the overwhelming response of all the *mujeres* involved in this study. It is important to recognize the power of allies and commonality. For many of the members of Raza Womyn, they indicate that having similar or common family (especially ethnic, economic, and linguistic) backgrounds, with the other *mujeres* allows them to feel comfortable enough to share and learn together. The women feel marginalized at the university and in many of their classes, which results in limited class participation and interaction in predominantly White populated classrooms (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). However, in the Raza Womyn space, the *mujeres* feel safe to participate, to question, and to educate and create a Raza Womyn conscientización.

I was surprised when Carmen's shared with me that she had a fear of public speaking because in Raza Womyn meetings she was always extremely outspoken,

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eloquent and passionate about many issues. Nevertheless, I remember one day she came looking for me at work. The urgency in her demeanor made me feel that something awful had occurred, and she told me that she had this intense fear and hatred of speaking in front of people in her class. She went on to describe a painstaking experience in her speech class. I would never have imagined her to be quiet or fearful of speaking in a classroom. She explained that one of the reasons she felt it was difficult for her to share in class was because she felt that her White peers would not care about what she had to say because they would not be able to connect with her. She also said:

> ...I sometimes feel that I'm not able to speak up [in the classroom] because...this is something that I really felt my first year in college. I didn't want to speak up because I felt that people knew so much more than I did, and I didn't feel like I could contribute anything to conversations, or if I did, I felt like it wasn't as articulate as someone else or just feeling that anxiety to speak in larger crowds because I was a woman, and because as a woman, I probably didn't have anything good to say. And then I would kick myself in the ass when something that I was thinking would be said by somebody else.

In her first year of college, she chose not to speak in class for fear that she would not be articulate enough, and she carried with her feelings of inferiority because of her gender. In her final year of college, she continued to fear public speaking, but her fear was focused more on her audience rather than herself. She was afraid that the White students in her class would not be interested in her experiences and perspectives as a Chicana. She explained that in Raza Womyn she did not have that fear. She knew that the

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other members of Raza Womyn could "connect" with her and understand her experiences because they shared similar backgrounds. This allowed her to overcome some of her fears of public speaking.

Conscientización de mujer en Raza Womyn

In comparison to LMU, Carmen felt more comfortable at UCLA because she felt that there were at least some people who she could relate to at UCLA. She especially found that to be true in her encounters with Raza Womyn. In March of 2000, Carmen and Angelica began attending Raza Womyn meetings. Carmen met a woman named Wendy on the bus one day when she was going to school. Wendy started chatting with her and asked her if she was involved in any organizations, when Carmen answered no, Wendy recruited her to come to the next Raza Womyn meeting. She remembers attending her first Raza Womyn meeting and automatically feeling a connection with the other *mujeres*. She described it to me:

> But I remember that the person that I remember the most was Nena because I walked into the room, and she came up to me to say hi. And she gave me a hug, and it was one of those very genuine Nena hugs. And I was like, 'Awww, that's so sweet.' And I felt like, 'Wow, this is such a nice woman.' And all the other women who were there, too, were really nice. And I thought, 'Awww, I like the way this feels.' And then we came back, and it was so nice to hear about the goal to have a safe space. And that was such a good feeling. And I didn't know I

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wanted it. And I didn't know it was possible, so when I felt it, I was like, 'I'm coming back, and we're [Angelica and I are] going to be involved with putting on this conference. And we just got here, and they're already asking what we can do.'

Carmen fell in love with the feeling of inclusion and safety, and it came as a welcomed surprise. She says she did not know that it was something she was searching for, but as soon as she found it, she knew it was a space that she enjoyed and needed. The warm embrace, physically and emotionally, of Raza Womyn has been the beckoning aspect of the organization. Many women have described it as a "safe space." In fact, there is an on-going conversation that calls upon the members to revisit the issue of safe space every year. A safe space has been defined and established in meetings, conversations, group dialogues, and via email.

When asked to describe Raza Womyn, Carmen says:

> We are a collective of women that provides a safe space for us to talk about issues that pertain to women and pertain to women of color, Chicanas and Latinas, where we begin to talk about things that are not talked about within our families, within our cultures, or within other spaces where women feel like they're silenced. So this is a space where we can begin to talk about those things, and also where we can come together to organize. Because I think that organizing is one of the things that I think is really important from Raza Womyn, to plug ourselves into the community and to see the larger picture. I think the thing that is really important is that Raza Womyn is a collective of women.

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Raza Womyn has become a sort of home base for many of its members like Carmen because while many of the women are busy with their education, family, and communities, they often come to Raza Womyn for nourishment, support, and for a safe space.

Before Carmen began attending Raza Womyn meetings she was not sure that she wanted to define herself as a feminist. It wasn't until much later that she became comfortable with calling herself a *feminista*. At UCLA, she developed a Chicana feminist consciousness that she took home with her. In a conversation with her mother, she tried to explain what it means to be a *feminista*:

> Being a *feminista*, for me, means that I have rights. That as a woman, I am not second class… I am not second-class to anybody, and I have rights, and I have opinions. I have convictions, and I have ideas. I have my own thoughts, and I don't need to be taken care of by a man'—I don't need to be submissive to a man. I can do anything as well, better, or whatever, than any other person.
>
> As a *mujer*, I am oppressed because I'm not, especially within my family and in relation to my mom, I am not subscribing to the role that my mom has subscribed to or what she has been socialized to. And it's very difficult for her to accept me rejecting that. And as a mujer, I think I am viewed differently. I am expected to… and not just by my mom but I think by other people too, by men…I am expected to behave a certain way. I am expected to act a certain way. And I am always aware that I'm a mujer when my ideas or my thoughts are challenged by men, or

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when they are challenged by authority figures, which don't assume me to be either an independent woman or a strong woman or to have my own convictions and to have my own opinion even.

While Carmen's mother strongly influenced and encouraged her to pursue an education, she also pressures Carmen to subscribe to patriarchal notions of womanhood. Hence, Carmen's family has served as both a site of empowerment and a site of repression. Up until very recently, her mother still had visions of Carmen leaving home in a "white dress" with a man. Carmen says her mother is "...anti-feminist and anti-Queer. She thinks that people are living in sin if they're not married and if they're living together, you know, sex before marriage. She still tells me up until this day. She hasn't said it recently, the whole idea of leave this house in a white dress drama. And I'm like mom, 'not gonna happen.'"

Her relationship with her mother is an intimate connection between mother and daughter, and Carmen values the relationship she has with her because her mother was always there for her, especially because Carmen is her only daughter. Carmen admits that she is a *chiquiada*, which she defines in the following manner, "For me, a *chiquiada*, the way that I see it is that my mom and I have always been very affectionate. My mom has always called me her little *gatito* [cat] because I'm always either on top of her or on top of somebody else. And I like being close to people and I like being affectionate, so for me that's what *chiquiada* is." Her mother showers her with love, but as Carmen builds her political, feminist, and Queer identities, she knows that her mother will be displeased and

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may possibly reject her. She is not "out" to her mother yet.[43] In spite of the very close relationship that she has with her mother, she still fears rejection because of the most forbidden aspect of her identity—her sexuality.

In her final year at UCLA and into the summer afterward, Carmen began discussing issues of sexuality and feminism with her mother. Much to Carmen's disappointment, her mother told her that she had spoken to the priest at her church and that he warned her that there were many feminists and atheists at the university, and that these two things were very bad sins.

> Like I remember my mom telling me that the priest had warned her, he told her: '*Aconseja tu hija.* Give her good advice. Talk with her because there are a lot of atheists and lesbians at the university.' And I thought, 'Okay, well these two sets of groups that he mentioned, atheist and lesbians...' Oh, it was feminists actually. 'These are the women who have questioned and have been marginalized and who don't go along with the restrictions of the church and who have challenged those ideologies. And so these are people who are not just blindly believing in religion and whatever.'

Another time Carmen tried to talk to her mother about gays and lesbians, her mother's response was that "the idea of being gay made her sick, and that's just the way it

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[43] This is the internal struggle of homophobia that Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) has written about in Borderlands/ *La Frontera*. After speaking with one of her lesbian students who thought homophobia was the fear of going home, Anzaldúa thought, "...how apt. 'Fear of going home. And of not being taken in. We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza,* for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us" (Anzaldúa , 20).

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is," and she refused to discuss it further. Carmen has gradually approached the issue since then. On one occasion, Carmen told me that she had another conversation with her mother. (Her brother Jesus and his girlfriend are expecting a baby very soon, making Carmen a *tia* [aunt] and her mom a first time grandmother.) Carmen asked her mom how she would feel if she learned that her grandchild was gay. Surprisingly, her mother answered that although she would not feel great about it, she would accept and love her grandchild. Happy with her response, Carmen pushed a little further and asked her how she would feel if her daughter was gay or a lesbian. She told her, "Do you really think that I would not love you? I would love you however you are. If I were ugly, would you not love me?"

Carmen felt good about her answer because it was definitely a step in the right direction. She was considering coming out to her mother when the phone began to ring, but since no one else was answering it Carmen went to get it and it turned out to be her mother's *comadre* [friend] so she was unable to complete the coming out process at that time. Still, Carmen felt good about the discussion and was hopeful that her mother would come around to accepting her sexuality. However, she has successfully avoided the issue using the distance between Wilmington and her new home in Oakland as a safety between her and her mother.

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The Coming Out Process

When Carmen came to Raza Womyn, she had heard a rumor that all Raza Womyn were lesbians. She recalls the first time she learned about this stereotype.

> I remember the way that Angelica and I learned that people thought Raza Womyn was a lesbian group. It was because Angelica kept inviting her friend Sylvia, and she was like, 'No girl. Don't you know they're all lesbians?' And she was like, 'They're not.' And at the same time, we didn't know who the people were in Raza Womyn that were lesbians. It was never said...And we were like, 'What?! It's not a lesbian group.' Not that there's an issue with that, but we didn't know it was, and not to say that every one in Raza Womyn is Queer because when I came in there I wasn't Queer.

Carmen laughs as she says this because it was in Raza Womyn that she "came out" as a Queer woman. She jokingly adds, "Raza Womyn made me Queer, damn it!" While she jokes about it, she recognizes that this is an important issue for herself and others in the organization because in the past 4 years approximately eleven women have come out as Queer while or after they were involved in Raza Womyn at UCLA, and many others have questioned their sexuality within Raza Womyn.

When Carmen arrived at Raza Womyn there were two openly Queer women in the space, one was Nena and the other was Erica. Nena had a long time girlfriend, Gina, since her first year at UCLA (as mentioned in the *mujerstoria*). By the time Carmen met Nena, her and Gina had been in a relationship for five years, but Gina was away at school in a doctoral program at the University of Illinois. Erica had been single after getting out

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of a long and tumultuous relationship with a woman. Raza Womyn's annual Chicana/Latina conference was being planned at the time, and the preparations and organization of the conference tended to dominate the meeting time. Hence, the topics of sexuality and same sex relationships may not have been a huge focus at the time, but inevitably Queer issues arose in the space as they often did.

It is not clear when the *cuatas* realized that there were Queer *mujeres* in Raza Womyn. It might have been that they noticed it because one of the focus areas of the conference is sexuality. Every year, the program has a full page of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender/Queer (LGBTQ) resources and for the past six years, the program welcome letter has clearly admonished homophobia in Latina/o communities, or it might have been that Nena began to talk about her relationship with Gina. What ever the case might be, the issue of sexuality was introduced and sustained in Raza Womyn, and it made some very powerful changes in their lives.

Initially, Carmen and Angelica both identified themselves as heterosexual women. Both had had previous relationships with men and neither had seriously considered the possibility that they might be Queer. Carmen was in a five-year relationship with Esteban, and she described him as a wonderful man. She could find no fault in their relationship and said that he was a great partner, but midway through her last year at UCLA things took an unexpected turn. Carmen rarely talked about Esteban, and we found it unusual considering that the other *mujeres* often spoke of their relationships. Later, Carmen confided that she sometimes felt uncomfortable talking about her relationship with Esteban because he was a man. It had become common for the Queer women in the space

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to talk about their relationships, but rarely did the straight-identified[44] women talk about their issues with men. Furthermore, by that time (this was second year that Carmen and Angelica were in Raza Womyn) there were more queer women in Raza Womyn. Coral and Claudia were two new and welcomed additions to the space. Both were in the early stages of "coming out," but within Raza Womyn they were vocal about being Queer and proud of it. This had changed the dynamic of the space in terms of the dialogue about sexuality. More and more "Queer talk" was becoming a central focus of the space.

Several of the "straight" members of Raza Womyn that I interviewed admitted that sometimes the Queer friendly atmosphere of Raza Womyn made them feel uncomfortable, a couple even felt "heterosexually oppressed." They often confessed that there was a possibility that their discomfort was linked to their own homophobia. Both Carmen and Angelica struggled with this issue:

> I remember having this conversation with Angelica that at a point it was almost like it was too Queer friendly for the hetero women, like it was okay to be Queer, but it wasn't okay to be heterosexual. Like I remember many times, especially when Erica started going out with Betty, that people were like, 'Oh that's so cute.' And myself included ... And if it was a women it was like, 'That's way too cute.' And 'Yay!, let's talk about it. Let's celebrate it.' And then if there was a woman that talked about her hetero partner it was sort of dismissed, like 'Yeah.

[44] I use the terms "straight-identified" to signify the complexity of sexual identity, recognizing that many women who identify themselves as straight or heterosexual eventually come to identify themselves as lesbian, bisexual, and/or Queer. This is especially true of several of the members of Raza Womyn.

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Whatever…' and let's go back to the Queer women, how cute that is. I don't really know why that was. I think because there is such a necessity to have Queer safe spaces.

Carmen pushed herself to understand why it was that within Raza Womyn the tendency was to be more excited and supportive of Queer relationships versus straight relationships. She struggled because she wanted to feel safe to talk about Esteban in this space as well, but she also recognized the need to have a Queer friendly space. I asked why she feels that Raza Womyn were more supportive of Queer relationships, and she answered"

Why not? Let's talk about Queer relationships. Why not talk about a lesbian relationship or a lesbian girlfriend or why not talk about that when all we do all day long all our lives is talk about how heterosexuals are doing? We see them on TV. We hear them on the radio. We read about them in classrooms. You know? It's like everything is heterosexual. Why not have this space?

She reconciled her feelings of unease as a heterosexual woman with the understanding that Raza Womyn meetings and events were amongst the very few places that Chicana/Latina lesbian and bisexual women could feel comfortable to discuss and display their sexuality and their relationships. Most importantly, it created a space where straight-identified women could question their sexuality. Carmen says that she began her process of coming out in Raza Womyn because she felt safe to question her heterosexual identity:

I think that being in Raza Womyn really opened up that space. I think that it allowed me to question [my sexuality]. I don't think…I don't know if it would

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have happened as soon or maybe even now or if it would have happened at all, if I hadn't been in that space.

Interestingly, Carmen was not the only one who indicated that being in Raza Womyn, amongst Queer women, pushed her to begin the questioning process. She believes that there may have been a possibility that she might not have questioned her sexuality if it were not for the extremely safe space Raza Womyn created for this to take place. Other women who voiced the same sentiment were Angelica, aurora, and delia. Unlike Nena and Erica who knew they were Queer before coming to college, these women had never seriously considered the possibility that they might be lesbians or bisexuals.

Two years earlier aurora had struggled with the same issue that Carmen and Angelica spoke of—feeling that it was not a good thing to be "straight." aurora and delia were members of Raza Womyn at least two years prior to Carmen and Angelica, and one occasion, aurora confronted the *mujeres*, including Cristina and Nena. They were at a retreat with about five women, and the only two women who were straight-identified were aurora and delia. In a talking circle, the *mujeres* talked about how they were feeling as part of Raza Womyn, and aurora cried as she told them that she was feeling pressured to be Queer. For some time, Cristina and the others had half-jokingly been encouraging both aurora and delia to come out of the closet and embrace their sexuality. aurora and delia still believed that they were heterosexual at that time, although they may have begun to question their sexuality as a result of being around these Queer women. Cristina, Nena, and Cathy, who were all long-time members of Raza Womyn had finally come out as

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Queer, so they encouraged these *mujeres* to also come out, but the "Come on…you're know your Queer, why don't you come out?" comments created tension rather than comfort. The jokes were interpreted as pressure rather than light-hearted fun. aurora admits that at the core of her discomfort was also some of her own internalized homophobia, but she was neither ready nor willing to consider the possibility that she might be Queer.

Two years later, Carmen complained about the same type of jokes from Nena, but secretly she began to wonder if Nena knew something she did not. It was after Nena and Cristina, two of the most outspoken women on the issue of sexuality, graduated that aurora, delia, Angelica, and Carmen began a new dialogue about sexuality. For aurora and delia, it began soon after we attended the Gay Pride parade in West Hollywood. This signaled the first of many gay and lesbian activities that we would attend, as well as the beginning of delia and aurora's coming out process. The parade took place in the spring of 2000, both women would not "come out" until the next spring, along with Carmen.

The following spring La Familia and Bienestar[45] co-organized the first Queer Chicana/Latina film festival and conference at UCLA called *Mujer* a *Mujer*. Just before the conference the *mujeres*, (delia, aurora, Carmen, and Angelica,) talked about sexuality regularly. Between them, they had already had intimate conversations questioning their sexuality. delia and aurora confided in each other and Carmen and Angelica talked to each other, but they had not yet confided in each other as a group. Carmen tried to

[45] Bienestar is a LGBTQ resource center located in Los Angeles.

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remember how it was she began the coming out process, "I don't even know when it started, like I just remember having this conversation with women, with Raza Womyn. And um, it was weird, like just having conversations about sexuality, but my sexuality in particular, and sort of thinking, 'Why am I heterosexual?'" She believes that the questioning started when she accompanied Erica to Club Fire, a Queer women's club. Club Fire was started as a fundraiser for Womyn Image Makers, a Los Angeles grassroots organization created by and for Latina filmmakers. Carmen recalls:

> We were talking about going out, and we were trying to figure out where to go out. And most, or a lot of the women being Queer, of course we thought...there was talk about going to a Queer club or women-friendly safe space, Queer-friendly safe space. I remember when the Queer club thing came up, I was very curious...And I remember when I went that I was really excited, but when I got in there, um, I felt a little bit uncomfortable. And I felt uncomfortable, and I realize now partly it was internalized homophobia, but also I remember just feeling sort of like, 'Whoa, what am I doing here?' And, um, sort of thinking, 'Okay, I'm not Queer, do I have a right to be here?' And uh, and sort of thinking one, that people might assume that I was Queer because I was there. And that wasn't so much an issue, but more like because I was so heterosexual then...sort of like thinking that I was going to be questioned for being there because I was heterosexual, and because I identified as a heterosexual woman.

Carmen indicated that so many of the women were Queer, but only Erica, Claudia, and Coral were out at that point. It was not until afterwards that delia and aurora would come

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out and Angelica would begin to question. By the time the *Mujer* a *Mujer* conference rolled around, all of the women were having secret conversations amongst themselves about being Queer with the exception of Angelica who did not attend the conference because she had a commitment with her family. That morning I drove to campus with Carmen who had been considering not going. We talked in the car, and she told me that she felt like her life was whirling around in her head. She was trying to end a five year relationship with her boyfriend Esteban, she was starting to ask herself why she identified as heterosexual, she had just found out she was going to be an aunt—it was all too much for her too handle. We went to the conference and it felt like for the first time all of the women were on the same page, they were all questioning their sexuality and they needed to talk to each other.

That evening, Carmen and I left early. We went to Samahang Pilipino Culture Night with Erica and her girlfriend at the time, Betty. Erica and Betty had been dating for a few weeks, but the relationship was rocky because according to Erica, she was not willing to have a long distance relationship. delia and aurora went to a Bar-B-Q that all of the conference participants were invited to, and aurora met Belen that night. Belen would later become aurora's first girlfriend. The following week back in the Raza Womyn office, there was a buzz about the conference, the Queer discussions, and the coming out declarations that were surfacing. aurora and Carmen had a conversation, and they decided that we needed to have a "sexuality talk," but not all Raza Womyn could be invited. This gathering was meant only for women who were talking about coming out—that included Carmen, delia, aurora, Angelica, and myself. Erica was invited because she was sensitive

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to the needs of women who were coming out and because it was safe to talk to her. Coral and Claudia were not invited because there was a fear that since they were out and very vocal about it, a conversation about questioning might not be safe around them.

We met at a home that Carmen was house sitting for a friend. We had a sleepover, and although we didn't necessarily talk that much about sexuality, we all knew that that was the reason we had come together. aurora told us that she had started talking to Belen. We shared our theories on sexuality, and agreed that everyone had the potential to be Queer. Carmen later told me:

> I think that everyone has the potential to be Queer, and I think because we have been socialized to be heterosexual that it's easier for some of us to be heterosexual and not to not question our heterosexual privilege...And I really do believe that no one is completely heterosexual or completely homosexual either. I think that sometimes we need spaces that are safe in order to come out...

The only one that was missing that evening was Angelica—again she had a family commitment. Later we learned that that evening was the point that sparks between Erica and Carmen began to ignite. Both were in unhappy relationships and they turned to one another, realizing that what they were looking for was in each other.

Love and Revolution

After the first interview I conducted with Carmen in July while she was doing the Summer Internship Program (SIP), we were invited to have dinner with some of the other

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interns in SIP, or the SIPers, as she referred to them. They had organized a Bar B Q by the pool. And after chatting with them a few minutes, I clearly saw how different they were from the *mujeres* of Raza Womyn, which was something Carmen had already told me about during lunch. She complained and described at length how frustrated she was with the program because the students that participated in it were at such a different level of social and political awareness, especially in terms of sexuality and gender issues. She confided:

> I felt like I had been spoiled by Raza Womyn because there were all these women…There were so many women who were just so amazing. They were very strong women, very determined, intelligent, fierce, and amazing women. I expected that when I went to another activist space that was supposed to be similar. I figured, 'what do you expect from a group of activist? You expect them to be fierce and to be challenging and critical and open and wanting to learn and expand on whatever it is that they already believe in.' So when I got the shock that they were not that way, I was really disappointed in that.

She was consistently challenged by her involvement in SIP. She and delia, another Raza Womyn that participated in SIP, had tried to push their peers to be more critical of their privilege and their hypocrisy. However, this resulted in them being accused of being political intimidators. After dealing with the very painful experience of being rejected for being "too revolutionary," they joked that they were "Chicana Machona [male-like/butch] Terrorists." Eventually, they were chastised for leaving the circle and isolating themselves. Luckily, Erin, an organizer who worked for the labor center, was hired to

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serve as a mediator and counselor during the internship. She was the one person who kept the program together for Carmen. Carmen told me about a meeting she had with Erin, during which Erin was completely challenging Carmen's decision to isolate herself from her peers:

> [Erin said,] 'Every union, every labor organizing effort, every non-profit, every place has problems. CARECEN [Central American Resource Center]...CHIRLA [Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles]...Bus Riders Union, all these places have internal problems. Not everybody is...Just because they're organizers, doesn't mean that they're not going to be racist or homophobic'...She said, 'You need to realize that in order to organize and be effective, you need to include these people. Why are you excluding them? And if you do exclude them, what does that mean? Does it mean that it's just going to be you and handful or other revolutionaries? What kind of work are you going to do if that's the case?'

Carmen considered Erin's challenge and admitted:

> ...it really made me think because I became really good at writing people off and being like, 'Fuck you all. I don't care about you, and I don't want to deal with you because you are a bofahead [not critical]...And then I realized that I'm not getting anything out of that. And I thought, 'Well maybe I do need these people to be here. And I do need to reevaluate how I'm treating people. And maybe that is my challenge...And how are you going to deal with these kind of people when you're are organizing something else and people say something sexist or homophobic? What are you going to do? And I started thinking about that. And she told me,

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'The only reason that I'm being so hard on you about this is because I believe that you are a fabulous organizer. And I believe that you are a revolutionary. And I see you that way, and I see a lot of the things that you're doing were the same things that I did. And it took me some time to reevaluate what I was doing, and I really approached my organizing by appreciating people for where they are at, which doesn't mean that I let people say fucked up shit and that I don't call them on it and I don't work with them on it.

Erin's words resonated with Carmen months later, and they transcended into her participation in Raza Womyn. Although I had seen Carmen every week at Raza Womyn meetings, we did not reschedule to meet until October because of our busy schedules, but the time between the two interviews allowed Carmen to be much more reflective about her experience over the summer.

When we finally did get together, we spent four and half hours talking—mostly about her new obsession with love and revolution, a concept that she surprisingly developed during the SIP program with the help of Erin and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) organizers.

...One of the things that really impacted me was this talk [Erin] had with us about how she approaches her work. She was like, 'My organizing stems from love. I think that we need to have love. I do this because I love people. I love what I do. I love myself and I love the people that I work with, and I love the people that I live with. And all of it stems from love. And I don't think that you can have a revolution without love.' And I thought, 'Wow! That's so amazing.' And after

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that, I kept on hearing all these people mention love and talk about love. And I thought, 'This is so crazy. It's like love *and* revolution. It is possible.' And I like that idea. I like the idea of appreciating people where they are at. I think, 'Somebody did that for me.' And that person was Kikanza and somebody else at the Bus Riders Union or the Strategy Center, and it was people in Raza Womyn who appreciated me for where I was at and who helped me in my development. Somebody did that for me, and so why am I not doing that? So yeah, love and revolution...

At the time of this interview, there was tension in Raza Womyn because delia, one of the core members of the organization who was also Carmen's roommate, was frustrated because she felt that many of the members of Raza Womyn lacked a revolutionary stance or vision. She felt that they were not motivated enough to organize and to be active, and she felt an urgency to help rebuild the commitment to justice but was unsure of how to accomplish this. She was feeling a huge void, and her pain was evident. At times, she would come into the Raza Womyn space and not even share or embrace us, and this was very unlike her. It became an issue even for Carmen who understood her frustrations but was also on the receiving end of them. It was not until we began to dialogue about this issue of love and revolution that things began to change.

They discussed the fact that not all Raza Womyn have the same revolutionary vision as others within the group, and they acknowledged that not all Raza Womyn have the same politics. Most importantly, they concluded that if long-time members of the organization did not share their personal visions of social justice and teach those visions

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to the new members, they could not expect them to automatically engage in action merely because they entered a space in which other women were doing so. There must be a continual act of education, in which the work of creating a consciousness of resistance does not end once some of the existing members feel that they have become conscious or revolutionary; rather, the act of teaching and learning (r)evolves as they engage in (r)evolution. Carmen asserted:

> I've been feeling this thing about love and revolution. I really feel that these two things really have to come together in order for there to be a revolution, there must be love. And that love can be for…first of all, it must be for yourself because you can't love anyone else until you love yourself. And then you extend that to love the painful parts about your culture, not to excuse them, but to love the parts about you that includes your culture, your family, that includes the fucked up people in your life, and loving the people who are around you and accepting people for where they're at. And I don't think you can accept other people unless you love. As an extension of that, then you are able to revolutionize. And I think if you love, then you're more open to revolutionize what you already think and revolutionizing other people's minds. And if you love and you can demonstrate that you love, then how can people be closed to you or to allowing their lives and thinking to be revolutionized?

The women realized that even in a space that is already believed to be critically conscious such as Raza Womyn, conscientización must be shared and taught in order to

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foster a safe space wherein *mujeres* can begin their own process of conscientización and construct their own personal commitment to act and organize against subordination.

"Revolution" for these women is equated with social change. It is the destruction of oppressive isms and phobias, but as Carmen points out, "Before we begin to engage in the larger vision of social justice and defining what are vision is...we need to begin with a place of loving ourselves and being able to revolutionize ourselves and being open to that in order to fully engage in the movement or social change." From her experience in SIP and Raza Womyn, she learned that activists must love their *compañeras/os* [comrades] in the struggle despite their level of consciousness/awareness or action and accept them for who they are and what they have the ability to become. Essentially, these Raza Womyn learned that activism and conscientización does not automatically take place once you enter a space with other activists. In order to become and remain an activist, one has to be engaged in a process of self-education; then the desire to act and educate others is cultivated.

In January, Carmen accepted a job with the SEIU in San Jose. She decided to take this job soon after working with the SEIU in Los Angeles. As part of the SIP program, the student interns were expected to work with a union organizing around labor issues, so Carmen and delia worked with the Justice for Janitors campaign. At the end of the program, she was invited to work with the SEIU campaign in San Jose. After falling in love with Erica and attempting to have a long distance relationship from Los Angeles to Oakland, she had already considered moving to the Bay area. Thus, it was a wonderful surprise for her to be offered the job in San Jose, and she faced the dilemma of trying to

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choose between her set career path, of spending a year preparing for graduate school and going to work in San Jose, as a full-time labor union organizer. I thought that perhaps the new relationship and some difficulties with negotiating her Queer identity with her mother were major reasons for her decision, but in the end, she felt that the biggest decision factor was the call to action. She said:



Figure 13. Erica and Carmen living in Oakland. (2002)

> I was going crazy trying to weigh my options. 'Okay, do I organize? This is so thrilling right now, so exciting, and I can do graduate school at another time. Or do I go to graduate school, and then sort of plug myself back into activism. How do I do this?' I was going crazy, but all this time I knew what I wanted to do, I was thinking, 'I want to organize.'

Carmen chose to follow her heart and moved to Oakland, to live with Erica and to become a union organizer for the SEIU in San Jose. She believes that love and activism are very closely related to one another. In a poem she wrote to Erica, she talks about love and activism, and how both are similar in the sense that they require work.

> Just like we were saying about the safe space. It requires work. Just because you're in love or you're married doesn't mean that love is what holds you. It takes work to be in a relationship. Love takes work. Activism takes work. It's like saying that just because you say it's a safe space, now it's a safe space forever. It's not. And just because you say I love, doesn't mean that you love forever. And just

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because you say that you are an activist, doesn't mean that you stay an activist forever.

Carmen's *testimonio* is an example of the very difficult road of learning and teaching that takes place in the private spaces that student activists occupy, and it illustrates the learning-process that takes place when people are really committed to putting forward a vision of social justice or to engaging in "love and revolution."

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Chicana Identity Politics: a conversation of sorts

for erica, a leftist lover, by carmen)

on love and activism,
loving activism,
actively loving,
because love is work,
and work requires love,
un labor de amor.

the ringing of the bell
in the depths of me
signaled concientización
activismo hooks
me in

saboreando the possibilities
of revolutionizing
the mind and body
after tasting,
no se puede retroceder

es algo que se sabe,
en la profundidad
not a lesson to be learned from a book,
after all love and activism are
not learned from
reading but rather from
working in the field

conversations with you have
made clarifications,
transparente como freshly drawn
bath tub water,
glass doors that open out to
possibilities

looking through the crystals
of shared knowledge
entre conversaciones
that see eye to eye

intimate thoughts
y tanto contemplar,
reinforces my Leftist desire
for activism and
conversations

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CHAPTER 6

SOY REVOLUCIONARIA (I AM A REVOLUTIONARY)



Figure 14. This is delia in her third year at UCLA. (2001)

For the first four years of this study, delia was consistently at the center of focus. She best exemplifies and embodies what Raza Womyn represented to me during those years—a revolutionary, loving, critical, and fierce womynhood. delia is a 24 year old woman who graduated from UCLA in 2002 after five years in college. When I first met her she was 19 years of age and in her second year of undergraduate school. Some of the data in this chapter date back to my first extended encounters and discussions with her. She was the first woman in the organization to open up to me and welcome me into the Raza Womyn space. I primarily felt that I could approach her because every time we met, she embraced me with a warm smile and a friendly word of love. In recent times, her loving demeanor has hardened a bit. She no longer embraces everyone she encounters. In earlier years, her love was extended to everyone she came across—whether it was on the bus that she rode across town, on campus, or in the intimate space of Raza Womyn. In the

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past couple of years, I have witnessed a marked shift in delia's approach to people and to life—much of it having to do with trust and disillusionment.

It is with great effort that I write about delia. She has changed dramatically in the few years that I have known her. I attempt to show internal and external revolutions that have taken place in this woman's life in the past five years. I begin with a description of the 19 year delia that I met in 1999 and I end with the 24 year old woman I know today, 2004.

My initial encounter with delia

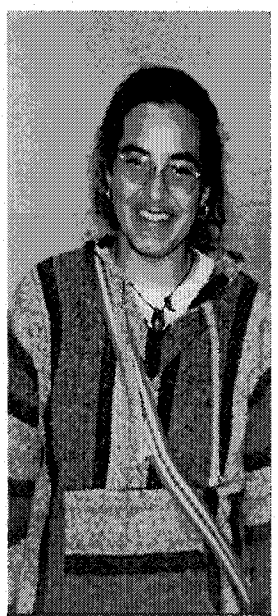


Figure 15. This is a picture of delia at the mujer a mujer film festival at UCLA. (2001)

In 1999, delia was a 5'8', cinnamon-skinned, 19 year-old student who identified herself as both a *Mexicana* and Chicana. She asserted that she was *Mexicana* by birth and Chicana by political identification. She had long, brown wavy hair that reaches down half of her back when it was loose or tied in a braid, but usually her long brown hair was braided and rolled into a bun. It started tight and neat at the beginning of the day, and by midday it ended up loose with several strands of thin hair surrounding her face, which she proudly referred to as her "*greñas*" (messy hair). She dressed then, as she does now, with worn jeans or pants, t-shirts with political messages printed on them and thrift-store sweaters. She consciously purchased her clothing at thrift stores and garage sales, in an

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effort to avoid malls and stores, which she views as capitalist traps. What does not change in her wardrobe are her old-faithful brown *huaraches* (Mexican sandals)—the real kind, which have souls made of tires.

Every time I saw her, she had at least three bags filled with her belongings. One bag was a baby blue Mexican satchel filled with at least 20 books. The books ranged in subject from politics, to Chicana/o studies, to feminism and labor movements. She always had a journal, in case she had a wonderful idea for working with her youth or for organizing with Raza Womyn. Another bag was her tapestry multi-colored satchel that she used as a purse, and the third was a forest green backpack jam-packed with more books. On the backpack, there were at least ten buttons with different political statements on them: one had a woman symbol with a fist in the center of it, another read, 'No Grapes,' and a third declared, 'No violence against women!'

The first time I asked delia to tell me about herself and to identify who she was, she replied, "My name is delia—Chicana, revolutionary, feminist. I was born in Guadalajara, Mexico and came to the U.S. when I was 8 years old. I grew up in San Diego, by Chicano Park." That was in June 1999, and when I interviewed her again in November of the same year, she answered, "I am a Chicana feminist. I identify as a *mujer* (woman), as a *Mexicana*, as an *hija* (daughter), as a student, a *revolucionaria* (revolutionary), a *mujerista* (Chicana/Mexicana feminist), *activista* (activist), *organizadora* (organizer), [and] conscious..." Her strong political stance was evident in every part of her identity. She consistently identified herself as a revolutionary dedicated to change through activism and organizing communities. Her developing and

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transforming feminist identities were revealed in her descriptions of herself as a feminist, Chicana feminist, and a *mujerista*. She explained why she chose to identify as a *mujerista* as opposed to a feminist: "I think that feminism has always been more of a European, White, Anglo term, but I think that *mujerista* really defines the part of me that is a *revolucionaria*, the part of me that loves and fights for justice through my strength of being a *mujer*..." Her use of the Spanish word for woman—"*mujer*"—refers to more than just her identity as a woman. A "*mujer*" is a Chicana, *Mexicana*, or Latina; thus a *mujerista* is a feminist that recognizes the importance of culture, ethnicity, and racialized experience.

delia's *Testimonio*

delia is originally from Guadalajara, Mexico. She is the youngest daughter of her parents and has two older brothers. Her family crossed the U.S.-Mexican border in Tijuana when she was eight years old. She has a vivid memory of the long, cold night they spent in the woods ducking at the sight of every headlight that whizzed by them as they walked many miles towards San Diego. Her father warned them that they should shut their eyes whenever cars passed so that the passersby would not be able to see their eyeballs and locate them amongst the brush, in case they were the *migra* [INS]. She remembers the fear she felt upon awakening and learning that a snake had crawled onto her long hair while she slept, but her parents' quick thinking saved her from being harmed. After making it safely through the night, they were able to hitch a ride to San

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Diego. Her family thought that they were going to a better place in the United States, but the job offered to her father turned out to be a false promise. They found themselves homeless and penniless, and they were forced to move from place to place, living first in an orange orchard, in a garage, in various small apartments, in the family van, and until finally they were able to secure a home in Logan Heights, a predominantly Chicano/a-populated neighborhood.

delia spent her early years in Mexico, and her experience with race there was very limited. She recalls her first memory of race in the following way, "When I was in Mexico, I was five years old. I got off the bus with my mom and I saw a black man. I had never seen a black person before. That was my first exposure to a person of a different race." But her limited exposure to the reality of race would expand once she entered the United States. It was in American schools that delia began to recognize that she too was a racialized being. As a Mexicana, she is neither White nor Black, and while some may argue that Mexican is not a race, delia's negative experiences would prove to be the result of racism and nativism.[46]

As early as elementary school, delia experienced the viciousness of race/ethnic backlash in California against Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants. She recalls entering grade school speaking only Spanish, and being ridiculed by her classmates, both brown and White. She sadly admits that both her teachers and her classmates made her

[46] See Ian Haney Lopez (1995) and Juan Perea (1997) for the social construction of race and its effects on Chicanos/as.

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ashamed of her voice and of the sound of a Spanish-speaker's accent—eventually resulting in her silence in school. She confided:

> When I came here to the U.S. everything was different. Since I didn't know English I was put in ESL. Then I was given tests, and I was put in a GATE program. Even though I knew English enough to function, the way the teacher and the other students would treat me was like I was inferior. I wasn't good enough.

The harsh treatment she experienced remains fresh in her mind as she remembers that she was discriminated because of both her accent and her brown skin. Lighter-skinned, Mexican American students made fun of her because of the way she looked and spoke, so she isolated herself. She said, "It came to the point where I wouldn't really talk in class because I was afraid that I would pronounce a word wrong and that they would make fun of me. So, as a Mexicana, I felt worthless." Her self-esteem plummeted and although she scored highly on tests, she did not believe she was an intelligent person because even her teachers made her feel "stupid. It got to the point where [she] started to believe that."

delia's mother and father raised her and her brothers near Chicano Park in San Diego in a historically Chicana/o neighborhood called Logan Heights. As an adolescent, she had difficulty dealing with the fact that her parents worked as janitors. When asked if class or the level of her family's income had ever been a factor for her, she answered:

> My parents are janitors. They clean buildings. They wash toilets, vacuum, and throw away the trash in offices. I would feel ashamed because all the other kids would say my father is a teacher…He does this, or he's the owner of this building.

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I felt like...well, I felt ashamed like, 'What am I gonna say?' It was really hard, but also I always used to see how all the other kids who weren't brown were able to do all the extra curricular activities after school. I couldn't do it because for one, I had to go home.

My mom had to work two jobs. And sometimes I had to have dinner for her ready so she could eat really fast and go to her next job. I am the only mujer, the only daughter. I was expected to be there and clean dishes, the house, everything...So that was an issue as I was growing older. I knew it wasn't fair. I wondered why is it that they have access to those things and I don't?

Although she was initially ashamed of her parent's occupations, the injustices that they experienced as laborers caused her to begin questioning the privilege that she witnessed in the school she attended, which she attended because of her high grades. It was during high school, that she began to question the shame that she felt of her parents. She feels that as she matured, she learned to appreciate the love and sacrifices that her parents made for her and preferred their love to the material wealth that other children had. She says, "I realized that I shouldn't be ashamed of what my parents do because after all, it's a job. They're doing it. It's an

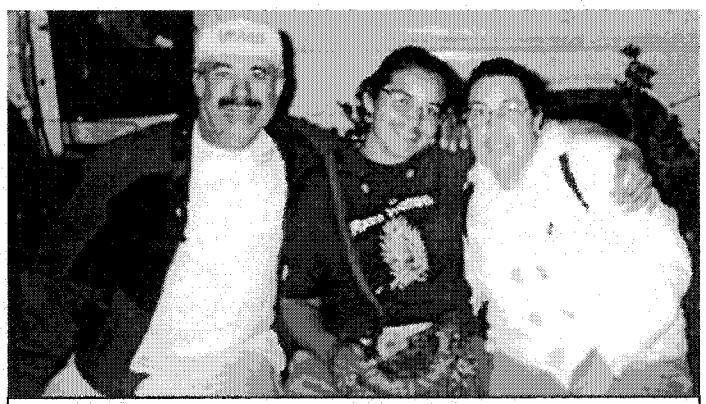


Figure 16. delia sits with her mother and father after a Raza Womyn conference. (2000)

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honest job, and they do it. And then soon (in high school) when they would ask me what they do, I would tell them, proudly, 'They're janitors.'"

delia's exposure to class injustice by way of her parents led her to a fierce criticism of money and capitalism. She asserts that she purposely surrounds herself "by beautiful people, like the *mujeres* in Raza Womyn," because she wants to escape from the capitalist culture of the university. She said to me, "I see how people of color try to fit in and try to pretend like they have money. Some of them do, but some of them are just trying to fit in. It makes me sick. I'm bitter because there *is* a class difference."

The discussions about the dangers of capitalism and negative consumerism led her to a passionate discussion about the youth with whom she works. She says that she is saddened by the fact that her students' goals are led by materialistic visions, and she considers it her responsibility to educate them about these issues. She declares:

> Capitalism blinds people from what they really need to do and from how much they hurt if they only look at profit, at how much they can make... Many times we're taught to see education for how much money we are gonna get out of it. Our youth...Instead of having us teach or recognize the knowledge and the freedom that we can get from education, the freedom of mind, the freedom to express yourself, the freedom to know so much... Instead, we are taught about how much money you can get...
>
> So, I guess I feel like I need to start working on deconstructing that little by little in my students. I know that I'm not going to be always there in the lives of my

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students, but maybe I can create that little seed that will trigger that in the lives of my students, and maybe for them to start thinking that there's more important things than just money.

As delia solidifies her critique of classism and the woes of capitalism, she shares her feelings with her students. She regrets not being taught about the many injustices that her people have encountered in the United States, and she believes that it is up to her to provide this information to the youth with whom she works. She feels that this knowledge will help put an end to the inequalities that she and others faced. I have witnessed the impact of delia's work with her students. Her goal to plant the "seed" for the desire for social justice in her students was evident at the time, but even more powerfully present as I saw her students years later, continuing on the activism to which delia introduced them. Not all of them changed—some of them, delia reported to me, ended up leaving school, starting families, or working. One, who was very close with delia and extremely motivated to go to college was having a difficult time with the law, but even in jail, he wrote to delia and told her what an inspiration she was to him.

During this time, delia was a second year student at UCLA. She was a sociology major, planning to one day get a masters and doctoral degree. Career-wise, she hoped to pursue higher education degrees to become and continue as an activist, teacher, principal, and social worker. She also dreamt of creating a community center that would serve as a space for youth. When I asked what her goals were, she smiled and told me, "There's so many things that I want to do…I want to do everything!" delia's short and long-term goals included continuing to work with youth.

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She consciously chose to work with students in continuation and alternative schools because she believed that they are most in need of academic and emotional support. She laments that her students have been forgotten because of the negative conceptions that they have been tagged with in their schooling experience. She noted that most of them were placed into low-level academic tracks, and were not expected to graduate, much less go to college. She was determined to show them that she cared about them and that she understood them. She believed in their potential to succeed and recognized their talents and capacities in life. She lauded their abilities to write, express themselves, sing, and play sports, but as she told me about them, she sadly shook her head and noted, "no one cares." She said:

> I see so much anger and frustration in my youth. I feel like I have to be there in order to listen to them, in order for them to understand that, 'Look you're not alone. Don't feel like there's no one here that doesn't understand you and don't feel that no one sees that you can make it. Because I believe in you.' I've seen that it has an impact on some of my students. And just for them to be constantly seeing me... Because it's hard, because society has fucked up on them, and they don't trust a lot of people. It's hard for them to start trusting.

From my observations, I was able to observe that delia's verbalized commitment to her youth did indeed transfer into action. To the level of exhaustion of sleep deprivation, she juggled her life as a student and teacher and mentor in South Central Los Angeles. She taught/tutored at two alternative schools, John Hope and Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.).

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At John Hope High School, I watched her clean dirty picnic tables in the campus courtyard because these table were the only spaces that were available for her students' use. She was not given class time or classroom space, but she did not let that hinder her activities and discussions with the students. She recruited her junior and senior students as they passed by the tables, and she asked them to sit down for a few minutes to fill out applications to take the SAT test. Some of the students turned her away saying, "Nah, I don't want to fill one out. SATs are a bunch of bull and a waste of time." delia never despaired, nor did she force the students to join her. Several of the female students and a couple male students either sat down to fill out applications or told her that they would take one and bring it back to her. She confided in me that the administration at John Hope expects her to be only a tutor for the students, but she dreamt of her students pursuing a higher education. She chose to share college preparatory materials with the students and help them collect information about college possibilities. Some teachers complained when their students stopped to talk to her about the SATs. I watched as Mr. Blackburn, a White male, yelled at a Black female student and told her to hurry up and come to class. She replied, "I'm doing something. Can't you see I'm talking to her about this stuff?" He responded, "No, I can't." She told him, "I'll be there in a minute." Ignoring him, she asked delia questions about the SAT and college.

While delia was helping students fill out SAT forms, she was also assisting other students with class assignments. Then she was called away by a teacher to help students in the classroom, and students barraged her with greetings and questions. One student even asked her to help him find work. When she told him where to go and who to talk to,

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he asked her to go with him. She put her hand on his shoulder and said, "I can't go for you. You have to go and show them that you want the job. I can't go for you or hold your hand." He agreed and said, "Yeah, I know. I'm 18 now. I'm an adult." She said, "Yeah, you have to be responsible and show that you want to work." On at least two occasions, I heard students asking delia for assistance with finding a job, and she advised them.

delia told me that she also shared information with her students about community projects and activities that she believed to be both educational and consciousness raising, such as an anti-police brutality march, Raza Womyn activities, and *Dia de los Muertos* celebrations. Sometimes she took students with her to the university or to special events outside of school. This created conflict for delia because the administration of John Hope felt that she was "getting too close" with the students, and they disagreed with the off-campus activities to which she took the students because they were "too political."

When I visited Y.O.U. High School with delia, I was pleased to see the welcome that she received from the students. When she walked in the classroom, a young Black female exclaimed, "delia! Thank God you're here today!" Another student, a Latino male, pleaded with delia for help because the substitute teacher, Ms. Macias, had given his mother a bad report about him, which he swore to delia, was a lie. delia talked to him privately and tried to calm him down, she recommended talking to his mother, but he rejected that advice, insisting that his mother trusted the teacher more than she trusted him. According to delia, Ms. Macias had many problems with the students at Y.O.U. When I observed the classroom, she was often disciplining the students or chastising them. delia later told me that Ms. Macias quit three weeks after being hired because,

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according to delia, "She couldn't deal with the students. She thought they acted like 'animals'."

delia's ability to engage the students at Y.O.U. amazed me because I was able to contrast it with the teacher that was instructing the class before her. For instance, I observed on a when the teacher that was in the classroom before her was conducting an English lesson on how to use "I am" and "We are" in a sentence. He walked around the class reprimanding the students because they were talking instead of working on their assignments. He approached some students at a table and asked them if they had completed the assignment. Annoyed, they answered, "We already did it!" Distrustful, he asked, "Where is it? Let me see it." One of the female students angrily replied, "We're already done!" They then proceeded to ignore him and talked to each other. Exasperated, the teacher walked towards another table. Once the period ended, the teacher went to another classroom, and delia began to address the students. A student named Maria stood up to move the television set out of delia's way, providing her a space to write on the dry erase board. delia wrote the directions for an assignment on the board entitled, "Self portrait through writing." She wrote:

-Describe yourself

-How do you look (physical appearance)?

-How do you feel and what do you think about yourself?

-How do you think people see you?

The students worked quietly on the assignment for at least ten minutes. It was the longest amount of time that the students had been quiet all morning. Although there were

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a few new students that were not originally in the class, most of the students remained in the class from the previous period, and even they were engaged in the assignment. The assignment that they were working on before was a simple exercise of writing sentences using 'am' and 'are.' This assignment was apparently much more challenging, but the same students worked on it without needing much assistance. Once the students completed the assignment, they volunteered to share the very personal things that they wrote about themselves. One of the student asked, "Are we gonna read our self-portraits?" delia said, "Oh yeah. You want to read yours first?" The young woman said yes and read her portrait aloud. She described herself as a happy person and happy to be in school. Two other students read their descriptions of themselves. A female student said, "People may think I am a bad ass, but I'm not." A male student stood up and read, "Some people think I ain't shit, but they don't know me." He continued, "Sometimes I see myself as a boy wonder because I constantly have to fight so much negativity all around me." He sat down after reading his self-portrait.

Just then, Ms. Macias, who was still in the room but had been forgotten by the students, chimed in, "That was really good," and the female student started to laugh. Ms. Macias asked, "Why are you laughing? Don't you think it's good?" The student told her, "Nah, yeah I think it's good. I'm laughing cause you said it was good." Thereafter, none of the other students wanted to read their self-portrait. It was apparent that the students had very negative feelings of distrust and disconnection with Ms. Macias, and I wondered why their relationship with delia was so different. My guess was that delia identified with her students very differently than the other teachers. This was evident in her oral and

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physical communication with them, and consequently, the students behaved differently with her.

delia continued to talk to the students about college, graduation, and the need to work together and dialogue. She asked students to volunteer to tutor the middle school students at Bethune Middle School at least once a week. She encouraged them to participate by saying, "It's important to start learning to educate our young people." The level of respect that she offered her students was evidently appreciated because many of the students volunteered enthusiastically. She talked at length to them about the need to use education as a way to liberate them from conformity, and she never talked down to them. All of them signed up to tutor at least once a week, and some volunteered to go more than once a week. delia often told me that she felt that her students were treated like small children with little or no respect for their intelligence. Consequently, she adamantly rejected (and still does) calling her students "kids." Instead, she referred to them as youth, young men and women, or *jovenes* [youth]. While she no longer works with these same youth, she continues in her efforts to gain access to higher education for youth and to demand respect for them, but now she is much more critical of institutions of educations. I will discuss this tension below.

In delia's work as an educator, she had several obstacles. Her most immediate struggles at work were lack of resources and time, as well as lack of support from the administration, especially at John Hope. She told me:

> The administration...You know, like I have projects that I want to do or simply just talk to them about different issues. The issue comes...Well, you're imposing

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your political ideology… So you can't say this or you can't do that. Also, I'm very limited with funding, so if I want to do a project here and there, or if I want to take them to places, 'no you can't do that.' Obstacle…with like time. If it were up to me, I would have them day and night.

delia has been discouraged from inviting students to protests and rallies for justice. For example, she was told that an anti-police brutality march is not educational and that it would discourage the police from offering help if the school ever needed their help. She once shared her frustrations about the situation at John Hope with me. The following is part of a conversation the two of us had about it:

D: It's crazy shit cause like any kind of little shit, there just trying to get me you know?

A: Why? What happened now?

D: Because, what was it, like two weeks ago. The students were complaining that the tables were so dirty to eat on. So I suggested to them, 'Hey what's up if we stay after school and clean up, you know? Like just wash them and sweep a little…to make our campus more welcoming so we want be here. I mean it's ours, so we gotta take care of it.' They were like 'Yeah, yeah.' At first, they were like, 'What? Us? Stay after school? Heell nah.' So I was like, 'But check it out. We'll be eating. We'll be kicking it with some music or whatever.' And then I suggested to them that we could clean up the garden in the back you know, like where we were. I was like how about planting some flowers or whatever. Well I was 'How about just hooking it up with something? Something to make it look nice?' Some

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of the young girls were like 'How about planting some flowers and stuff like that, you know? I was like 'That's a good idea. We can do it.' But then today the project director, she came up to me, she was telling me…She came up to me again. It's like every time she comes up to me, she has complaints from Dr. Darren. First of all, why can't you just say it to my face?

A: Yeah.

D: She said, you know, she doesn't want me to be organizing the students to be doing anything.

A: Why?!

D: I'm like ugghh! She tells me, 'She feels that you are a threat, and that you're taking too much attachment to the students instead of behaving like a guest at her school. She's feeling that you're taking her decisions…'

A: Taking her school away?

D: Exactly. I'm acting like that's my school. I'm like, nah. First of all, that school is the student's school. I'm not there for her. I don't even want to see her face. That's why I don't even go in the office.

On one occasion, delia shared with me that the office aide at John Hope told her that Dr. Darren, the school principal was jealous of delia's relationship with the students. It was very difficult for delia to work in this situation where all of her actions were being scrutinized and questioned. While she found it to be a great challenge because she had no support from her coworkers, her commitment to the students did not falter.

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Another huge obstacle for delia is the contradiction that she struggles with internally concerning her beliefs about higher education. She says:

> They're so much shit that goes on. Hell nooo. Enough with this. And sometimes I think, Why am I going to school? It's crazy how like I hate going to the institution of UC. I hate being there. You know? I'm like, I just have to go there in order to get that diploma, but if it were for me, I know that I could do so much reading. And sometimes I just feel like I'm just wasting my time there. I have to take classes that I'm like, this is just wasting my time. I don't have to do this. I need to be doing other stuff, working outside in my community. I could be reading my own shit, you know? Educating my own self. Reading. I'm not saying that I'm not gonna read and do research, and I know that those skills I can get through the university and whatever…
>
> But a lot of the stuff that I go through, it's not helping me. All they want to do is brainwash me, institutionalize me, and put more ideas of theirs in me. And I get so frustrated, like, do I have to go? It's crazy how like over there I'm hating to go to the university and over here I'm telling my students go to college, educate yourself. You know?

When I asked delia how she reconciled this contradiction for herself, she replied:

> I think of it like, we have to. In order for them to do something with their lives, in order for them to start doing something, start taking…educating ourselves and putting ourselves in higher positions where we can do more and start taking

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control. I don't want to say control, but start taking charge. Start changing the way things are because if we're always...well letting others do that for us, the society, the system is always gonna stay the same. I don't want the students to conform...

I ask my students not to conform to satisfy or to think that only going into higher education is going to give you a better life...I think that it's important to get into all the institutions and start changing the way things are done...Economic justice, social, all of that shit, start changing it. We gotta just take the initiative and do that shit. Educate ourselves and do it. By any means necessary. If it means that we gotta get violent, you know, we gotta do that shit because if we're always gonna be positive and try to say well this and that, hoping that everything will come along, nothing's gonna happen! No! We gotta do something.

Raza Womyn experience

As a student, delia was fortunate to find a group of women who offered her support and space for development. I initially believed that delia's consciousness and sophisticated critique of injustice was rooted in her involvement with this organization, but when I asked her how she came to her definition of social justice, she answered, "I think I came to that definition...A lot has to do with my involvement with Raza Womyn, but I think that it has to do with my experience and involvement with my community,

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especially youth." When I asked her who taught her about the injustices that exist, she laughed and said:

> Who taught me? I guess I just started seeing it and talking to people. It would just come up. And I would be like, what does that mean? Like okay, go look for this, ask people. Some of the Raza Womyn taught me some stuff...Just my own research, my own interests about it... Some classes. Chicana/o studies classes usually...basically. Some of my feminism classes, education classes... I took Chicanos end Education and it opened my eyes to many things that I had questions about. So, it cleared some of those questions. And just in terms of talking to people, talking to older people in the community... It started making me realize that there's something more to this. Why are we living the way we are?

delia's exposure to books and discussions about justice and inequality began at the university, but the books only added to her understanding of her lived experiences. Her participation in Raza Womyn gave her a space where she could engage in dialogues about these issues, and it provided her with a group of allies, other women who had very similar experiences. It was within this group, that delia was continuously discussing her obstacles as a teacher and a student, and together they came up with ideas and ways to deal with these issues in their daily lives.

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Soy Revolucionaria

I wondered what it was that delia envisioned as a revolution. I asked her what it means to be revolutionary, and she answered:



Figure 17. delia at a protest at the NACCS conference in Arizona. (2001)

> It means fighting for what I believe. Even if it means to die for it. Like not putting up with anything that I know is wrong, that I know is hurting me and that I see hurting human beings, not just, yeah my people of color, but in terms of everyone. A *revolucionaria* fights the injustices that exist. It means that we fight for our mental freedom…To be able to do anything that we want to because we are free….

Being a *revolucionaria* means we need to express ourselves. I am a *revolucionaria* in terms of being a mujer, being who I am. It just means so many things. I guess ultimately it means not being afraid of doing what you believe you have to do. And for sure understanding what you need to do. [She continued and declared,] Yes, I will die for this, for one of my students…just for them to survive and be able to be free with their minds. I will die. And I am not afraid of it, well maybe I am, but I am willing. I'm not afraid of change because change has to occur. If not things are always gonna be the same.

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delia's vision of social justice and the means by which to achieve it has gone through many revolutions as well.

Her last year at UCLA, she took a class on non-violent movements, but she still supports the armed struggle of the indigenous people in Chiapas. She never ceases in her hunger for knowledge and in her immense faith in victory.

My observations of delia offered me wonderful insights, and they helped me better understand the issues that this particular Chicana student activist faces in her work. I learned that many things informed delia's commitment to social justice, including her childhood, adolescence, personal, professional, and academic experiences. When delia was silenced as a young Mexican immigrant child in her elementary classrooms because of her language and skin color, she became determined to regain her voice and cultural pride. Because she, herself, had experienced the feeling of isolation and attack from peers and teachers, she was better able to understand and work with students in continuation and alternative schools. Growing up in a working class Mexicana/o environment taught her to appreciate love, respect, and family and to despise material wealth. As the only daughter of a traditional Mexican father, she was expected to act according to patriarchal female expectations, and she challenged that and has pushed herself to reject all societal-imposed gender and sexuality roles.

Raza Womyn did not teach delia about social injustice, she experienced and recognized the injustices in her daily life. Raza Womyn provided the space to engage in dialogue, to develop her critique of the injustices, and to organize to eliminate those injustices, and it offered her a reason to remain in the university. Consequently, she has

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been able to solidify her beliefs and maintain her identity as a *revolucionaria*. Her commitment and sentiments are inspirational to me and many who know her. She has an immense faith in victory over all injustices, and she actively participates in the struggle against injustice. Education is integrally connected to her struggle. She fights oppressive education by seeking alternative sources of knowledge from her family, community members, activists, organizers, youth, elders, and Raza Womyn.

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CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In college, many students engage in a process of self-discovery and social consciousness. Some undergo this process as a result of learning about their racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized identities and history/herstory, especially in ethnic, women's, labor, and/or lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) studies courses. A great majority of other students learn about this through their participation in student organizations as student activists (Rhoads, 1994, 1998; Muñoz, 1989; Garcia 1997; Solórzano & Villalpando 1998a; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal 2001). My research shows that student activists engage in meaningful acts of pedagogy. Their collective actions and conversations lead to a raised critical consciousness as they dialogue during meetings, at protests, vigils, conferences, and community events. This process of consciousness-raising often begins in forced spaces of marginalization, but they lead to incredibly powerful spaces of personal and social change.

Marginalization

Black feminist scholar, bell hooks, articulates the strength of existing in the margins in an essay entitled, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness." She holds that the margins are places where oppressive boundaries can be transgressed, and she considers the options of people of color in academia:

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> Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of the colonizing mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture, towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? This choice is crucial. (hooks, 1990)

hooks recognizes that she has the ability to attempt entry into the center, that is, the dominant culture's center, but she chooses not to be in the center. As a Black woman in academia who has struggled with oppression but has also gained privilege, she finds herself in a difficult dilemma of having to choose and cross sides. hooks goes on to discuss the margins as part of the whole and as a space for resistance in which the marginal individual understands both the center and the margin. The majority of women, people of color, poor people, and Queer people are not able to choose whether to exist in the margins or not; rather, they are most often forced into the margins. Nonetheless, some have learned to transform the margins into a space of nourishment and transformation. This has been the case for the participants in my study. Although they have gained privilege as university students, they are marginalized based on their race, class, gender, and/or sexuality. They have access to many opportunities that other Chicanas/Latinas are denied; still, they suffer many forms of discrimination based on their immigrant, working-class backgrounds and/or their gender. The members of Raza Womyn are very conscious of their existence in marginal space, or as a marginalized group. While they admonish the marginalization of their communities, they welcome the opportunity to transform their

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marginalized spaces on campus into spaces of intimacy, sharing, and rebuilding. They recognize racial/ethnic organizations as places where students can connect with one another and feel comfortable. When I asked Carmen what the purpose of racial and ethnic organizations was, she answered:

> The purpose of them is to make sure that people feel like they're connected to some sort of community, especially at campuses where people are predominantly White. So people of color can come together within their racial/ethnic groups and be able to talk about issues that affect them because of them being part of that racial or ethnic group.

She went on to explain that Raza Womyn serves that purpose for her and others, but beyond that it serves as a space for them to discuss various aspects of their identity and allows them to organize for social change outside of the university—in their communities—and to have the support to do so.

In an article entitled, "Critical Race Theory, Marginality and the Experience of Students of Color in Higher Education," Daniel Solórzano and Octavio Villalpando (1998) also address issues of marginality, resistance, and safe space within the university. Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) conducted thirty focus groups with students at UCLA and found that students were alienated and marginalized by racist practices in the classroom, but they found sources of resistance in ethnic campus organizations and in the academic field of Chicano/a Studies. Many of the members of Raza Womyn had similar experiences; however, as noted earlier, even in some ethnic organizations, they did not find a safe space because of the sexism and homophobia that they encountered. Likewise,

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some women came across hostile and uninviting spaces in predominantly White feminists organizations. Thus, it was in Raza Womyn that they found their niche or "safe space." One Raza Womyn member indicated:

> …I can come into this space and be open with other women and talk to women and have a venting session or a crying session. I feel really privileged to be in this space because I do have that support system… But see, it's a privilege to be a Raza Womyn in the context of where we are situated. We are situated in a White university. We're situated in a racist society in a racist structure, so it's a privilege within that.

Many of the women recounted stories of joining male and female Chicano/a student organizations and experiencing sexism and/or homophobia. Even when they joined the Latino/a Queer organization on campus, they found that the male-female dynamic was not as comfortable as a women's space. Also, these women were often in the process of "coming out," and they were uncomfortable with being pushed too quickly into particular Queer politics or sexual identities. In particular, bisexual women were met with harsh resistance from gay and lesbian students who wanted them too choose one or the other.

Just as bell hooks indicated, Solórzano and Villalpando also found that the margins were a site of resistance and a place of transformation. Solórzano and Villalpando's research (1998) found that the margins were a place where students learned how to survive in college—they gained critical navigation skills that served as survival skills:

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> One result of the ascribed marginal status is that some of the Students of Color have developed... 'critical resistance navigation skills' to succeed in higher education. Many of these skills do not stem from students' conformist or adaptive strategies, but emerge from their resistance to domination and oppression in a system that devalues their ethno- and socio-cultural experiences. (p. 216)

Often the feeling of connecting with other women from similar cultural backgrounds alone was enough to help the members of Raza Womyn feel that they had a place at the university; more importantly, the process of growth and consciousness-raising that took place within Raza Womyn was a source of strength. Many participants of Raza Womyn felt that the most positive part of their college experience was what they learned from Raza Womyn and others who pushed them to become critical thinkers. One woman said:

> The positive aspects [of college] have been the classes, and the professors, the students, and Raza Womyn who have opened up my way of thinking about things and who have challenged the things that I've thought about, who have made me think about the things that I held to be true, who have made me question the things that I held sacred and true. I think that's been the best thing about the university...I now see things critically because of them.

In essence, Raza Womyn had the power to educate the women who participated in the organization in the same way that the courses they took educated them. Often, they noted that they learned more from being in Raza Womyn than they did in their courses. The time that I spent observing Raza Womyn and interviewing members of the

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organization allowed me to document the pedagogical process that takes place in the organization. I also witnessed the development of many of these women's processes of conscientización. I have identified this as Raza Womyn/*Muxerista* pedagogy and conscientización.

Raza Womyn/*Muxerista* Pedagogy and Conscientización

Muxerista pedagogy involves dialogue, praxis, and dialectical exchange between the participants. At the center of this pedagogical experience are Chicana/Latina realities. Issues include, to name a few, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, spirituality, health, politics, immigration, intimacy, love, social justice, and revolution. The common factor that brings the diverse participants together is that they have a commitment to creating social change through Chicana/Latina resistance to subordination, and this goal is coupled with warmth, love, and fun. There is a tenderness and caring culture that makes this space different from most other activist spaces because it is founded on the premise that *mujeres* need safe spaces and that they need to constantly recreate them. As one member of Raza Womyn explained:

> There's a really safe space to go, where you can go and be who you are. What that's doing is it's giving you the energy and the language and the courage and the strength to go out and use that in other parts of your own activism, or in the collective activism of the group…

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> And I think that a lot of the organizations that we've all once been a part of, and had to leave for one reason or another, who talk a lot of revolution talk, are exactly the people who are hurting us and are doing the things that are pushing us down and silencing us. They are not giving us the space to be who we are. So that I feel personally that I can't be part of a movement if I can't even be myself, and if I can't say what I need to say and if I'm constantly being silenced.

Muxerista pedagogy takes place naturally, especially in meetings where the women sit in a circle and share information about the outside world (society, politics, and history) as well as their inside world (family, friends, school, and work). The learning and educational process evolves and manifests itself in a variety of ways.

There are several women who act as mentors in the organization because they have information to share, but usually they are the women who have been in Raza Womyn the longest. They have been involved in the *Muxerista* space longer and can therefore speak about particular issues and teach the newer Raza Womyn about them. However, each woman contributes a specific source of knowledge that is unique and valued by the other women. They have pedagogies of the home and community that they bring as resources to the other *mujeres* of the organization (Delgado Bernal, 2001).

As students, Raza Womyn experience alienation and discrimination at a predominantly white university. They also believe that there is a lack of courses and curriculum that teach them about being Chicanas/Latinas at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Thus, they have a commitment to learning their *mujerstoria*, and to sharing it with students, faculty, family, and their community. They are involved in a

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constant state of pedagogical practice, or *Muxerista* pedagogy. Based on my research of Raza Womyn over the past five years, I have learned that *Muxerista* pedagogy:

1. is founded on Chicana/Latina feminist theory, activism, and pedagogy,
2. involves natural dialogue, questioning, and dialectical exchange between equal participants,
3. is based on Chicana/Latina realities or lived experiences,
4. is committed to creating social change through Chicana/Latina resistance to *all* forms of subordination,
5. takes place in a safe space nurtured by warmth, playfulness, love, and fun.
6. necessitates the connection to community (female *and* male), culture, and language,
7. rejects patriarchal forms of power and leadership,
8. encourages intimacy and loving relationships between women,
9. rejects homophobia and heteronormativity and works to create safe spaces for both Queer and heterosexual women,
10. involves the production of knowledge that leads to new, redefined, reclaimed, and/or reconstructed concepts,
11. creates mentoring and novice relationships and respects the different levels of consciousness of the participants,
12. recognizes diversity amongst Chicanas/Latinas, especially distinct his/her-stories and multiple identities, and

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13. is critical of social justice movements that maintain patriarchal, racist, homophobic, and imperialist structures.

Overall, the most important element of *Muxerista* pedagogy as it takes place amongst Raza Womyn is love—love for each other, family, community, justice and learning. It is this love that draws women into the organization, that ensures their commitment to activism, and that leads them to want to share it with others.

Amongst Raza Womyn there are specific pedagogical strategies that are utilized for the purpose of raising consciousness and creating safe space while also encouraging activism. Raza Womyn/*Muxerista* pedagogy and theory draws on home and community knowledge, but it extends into an area that not all Chicanas/Latinas/os venture into, into activism and organizing for the purpose of raising consciousness. Hence Raza Womyn pedagogy is rooted in Chicana/Latina feminist/*Muxerista* ideology in opposition to mainstream, traditional notions of knowledge as well as to Chicano/Latino nationalistic notions that subsume the experiences of *mujeres* in the home, community, university, workplace, and the *Movimiento*.

Because Raza Womyn, the organization, is rooted in a political struggle, there are different elements of knowledge and consciousness that very few others have considered. They include class, capitalism, globalization, race, ethnicity, immigration, generational status, gender, gender-bending, sexuality, and spirituality. As Chicana/Latina student activists, they engage in an open and honest teaching and learning dialectic process that focuses on the antisubordination and empowerment of Chicanas and Latinas that other people do not.

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I documented Raza Womyn pedagogies that took place in *mujer* spaces off and on campus—in the community as well as at the university. I observed and participated in profound acts of Raza Womyn pedagogy in which the *mujeres* educated each other and themselves about race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and so much more through the act of love. Distinctly a part of the free flow of education is love, hope, fun, safeness, and intimacy. Raza Womyn pedagogy often resulted in *mujeres* developing heightened levels of conscientización, or what they also refer to as revolutionary consciousness, or "re-constructing revolution."

"Re-Constructing Revolution"



Figure 18. 4th Annual Chicana/Latina Conference Program Cover. (1998)

"Revolution...revolution...revolution... Revolution to me means change, speaking out, recognizing the injustices that exist. It's also about recognizing bitterness and being aware that there's bitterness, and I have to let that out. I have to use my bitterness and my anger to change the injustices that exist.

Speaking out, that's part of revolution...making the change, demanding, recognizing that there's something wrong here... we see that there's something

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wrong so we will become active and do something about it. And educating ourselves and becoming informed about what's really going on. (-delia)

According to delia, revolution entails not only recognizing the injustices that occur in our society and amongst our communities, but also actively engaging in a struggle to ensure that change will come about. She acknowledges the pain and struggle involved, or the bitterness as she puts it, but she pushes herself to turn her bitterness into a commitment for social change. She indicates that revolution entails "speaking out." This is in direct response to the feeling of silencing that she and many of the *mujeres* reported occurred in their homes, schools, and even in the movement. She explains the concept of "re-constructing revolution" in the following manner:

> Also how do we expect our community to be free of oppression when many times our own communities are oppressing us? To me that's what revolution is about, changing the mind, the ideas that have been imposed on us. Many times, we forget about the mutual respect, the equality that must exist between each other, we forget that.
>
> To me revolution looks at the big issues, but you cannot forget about the individual members of the movement who are behind that revolution, that are in that struggle too. Many times the *mujeres* are forgotten and we are oppressed. Re-constructing revolution means we won't put up with that anymore. We will educate ourselves and educate as many people as we can.

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She is specifically speaking to the issue of being marginalized in male and female spaces in Chicana/o organizations or movements. She admonishes the idea of putting forward a vision of justice or "revolution" that lacks the full inclusion of women's issues, and she uses self-education and a general process of educating society as a strategy to further the vision of "re-constructing revolution."

Morelia, another Raza Womyn, also noted that working with men in activist organizations has taught her something about working with people who consider themselves conscious or revolutionary. She says, "...it's taught me a lot about how to deal with men in the struggle...how just because we're conscious, or just because we call ourselves revolutionary doesn't mean that we're conscious, and just because we call ourselves conscious doesn't mean that we're gender conscious."

Other Raza Womyn agreed with this and indicated that many men and women of color perceive themselves to be people who are engaged in creating social change—calling this process "revolution"—but oftentimes reinforcing sexist and homophobic beliefs. Hence, "re-constructing revolution" entails working toward the elimination of all forms of oppression and not only racial/ethnic oppression. Not surprisingly, *mujeres* in the Chican*o* Movement have been dealing with this very issue since the 1960s.

In 1971, Anna Nieto-Gomez wrote a poem entitled, "*Empieza Le Revolución Verdadera* [The Real Revolution Begins]." Nieto-Gomez indicated that the real revolution begins to occur when humanity and freedom between men and women exists. She wrote:

Empieza La Revolución Verdadera (1971)

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[The Real Revolution Begins]

The struggle is long
The struggle is much
Our men are few
Rigid boundaries of roles do not move
They make us separate
They make us fewer

Busily we race with the 'man'
But time is too valuable to talk among ourselves,
about ourselves
Understanding is assumed
Misunderstanding arises
Communication stops
And now we compete among ourselves,
against ourselves
Thou shall not do
Thou dare not do

The struggle is longer
The struggle demands more
But seek the knowledge of all women
And seek the knowledge of all men
Now bring them together
Make them a union
Then we shall see the strength of la raza
Then we shall see the success of el movimiento

First,
Humanity and freedom between men and women
Only then
Empieza la revolución verdadera

(Anna Nieto Gomez, 73)

Nieto Gomez's poem illustrates the frustration with both men and women in the Chican*o* Movement. Men were asking women to wait until the revolution took place to begin discussing issues related to women's liberation. Sadly, change has occurred very slowly in male and female occupied spaces, even (or especially) in Chicana/Latina and

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Chicano/Latino student organizations, Chicana/Latina/o Studies programs, and the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies. Although progress is being made, students and young scholars often feel that their struggle for social justice has just begun and that they are alone in the *Movimiento*. Because the history and herstory of most of these organizations/programs is scarce, young student activists find they are struggling over the very same issues that early Chicana and Chicano activists did. Furthermore, while some organizations have begun to incorporate women's issues and are making gender equity moves, the issue of homophobia and creating Queer friendly spaces within the *Movimiento* lags far behind the issue of gender.

Even when there are token efforts to purport the acceptance of Queer people, there are oblivious incidents of homophobia, exclusion, and disinterest. Raza Womyn continue to struggle with the concerns voiced by Chicana feminists that date back to the 60s and 70s. As they seek to expand on a *Muxerista* vision of social justice and revolution, they push others to recognize the ways in which they resist the discrimination that persists today. This is expressed in a poem written by Raza Womyn member, Anayvette:

"I've been told I pass...."

I've been told I pass as Just being a hard core Latina Feminist
"You, Queer??? Chale..." I can't even begin to tell you how many times I've had a long hair Chicano tell me, That these LGBT issues just get in the way of the *movimiento*.
They say, "There's bigger things we should be addressing other than who you sleep with, Besides that shit, you know that lifestyle was adopted from the whites, specifically the Greeks and the Romans back in the day."
"You see sister, it's all about going back to our indigenous roots,
this shit didn't exist back then."

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Me llamas tu hermana sin saber que I like panocha too [You call me sister without knowing that I like pussy too]....
How dare you call me your "Sister" when we both know, if you knew what I really was, Those words "Sister" wouldn't have escaped from your mouth.

Police brutality, Domestic violence, Discrimination, Sexual exploitation all exist within the Queer community tambien [too].

"But we should focus on our community's race and class struggles because for so many it is an issue of life and death."

Life or death...life or death...For so many sexuality IS a matter of Life or death. Internalized homophobia, internalized hate, reciprocate the hate, reciprocate the hate. Meanwhile the numbers of Raza Queer Youth Suicides and Hate Crimes Rise.

I'm charged Once under the account of gender—Mujer.
I'm charged Twice under the account of Race—as a Centro-Americana.
I'm charged Three Times under the account of loving Womyn and Men.

Guilty and arrested on Three accounts of Marginalization.

So next time you think about stepping up to me as your "Sister", Make sure you embrace me at all angles: Centro-Americana, *Mujer* Y JOTA. (2003)

Implications of this Research

The implication of this work for the field of education is that education is intricately connected with the lived experiences of students outside of the classroom. If educators want to meet the needs of their students and want them to succeed, they must fully understand the complexities of their lives as learners and as human beings. Particularly for Chicana/Latina student activists who are concerned with social injustice and antisubordination efforts such as eliminating racism, classism, sexism, and

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homophobia, educators must be sure that they are not also guilty of the perpetuation of that injustice.

It is through involvement in on and off-campus student organizations that many marginalized students create meaning of their education. In their efforts to accomplish their goals or visions of social justice, the students develop intimate connections between their education and their lives. It is important to note that not all student activism is progressive or justice-oriented; nevertheless, historically student movements are remembered and documented for their positive effects and achievements.

Student activism has historically been a tool of resistance and transformation for students in higher education who voice discontent with a particular aspect of society, governmental regulations, or their educational institutions. Students have protested things such as war, sexism, patriarchy, heterosexism, homophobia, racism, capitalism, exclusion, xenophobia, and other aspects of subordination. Women have especially focused their activist goals on the liberation, education, and self-empowerment of women. Reproductive rights and sexual liberation have also been key factors of the women's struggle. Even the right to gain entry and inclusion into institutions of higher education has come as a result of activism and struggle.

This research shows that students who come from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds and go to the university can engage in a process of resistance to oppressive practices and environments within those institutions, while continuing their education. While a higher education has proven to be a form of liberation for many of these students, it has simultaneously been oppressive to some. As these students learn how to negotiate

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both privilege and oppression in the college setting, they develop tools for understanding their conditions. These tools are *political and social consciousness*, which are often internalized and acted upon in the form of student activism.

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APPENDIX A

4TH ANNUAL CHICANA/LATINA CONFERENCE PROGRAM (1999)

Raza Women de ucla

presents the

Fourth Annual
Chicana/Latina Conference



"El Fuego de Nuestro Espiritu Continua la Llama de Revolucion Colectiva"

(The Fire of of Our Spirit Continues the Flame of Collective Revolution)

Saturday, March 6, 1999
Moore 100
8:00am-5:00pm

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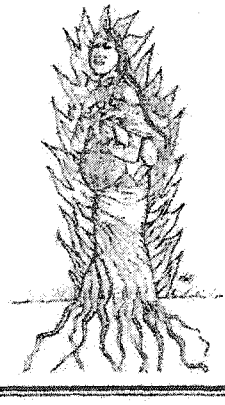
Fourth Annual Chicana/Latina Conference

table of contents

March 6, 1999

Page/Pagina #

bienvenidas 3
welcome.....4
poemas 5
agenda 6
keynote - Cherrie Moraga 7
Workshops/Talleres .....8 - 10
closing - Monica Palacios.....11
performers - Wozani, Quetzal.....12
Proposito de Raza Women 13
Raza Women Purpose.....14
Body pages.....15-16
Struggles/Luchas 17-18
resources.....19-20
Muchos Thank You's.....23- 24



She stands strong. Her roots are firmly embeeded in the earth, as a symbol of the connection we have to our past...Ancestry, Familia, and All. She holds on tightly to Herstory, Her Voice, and Her Life. She gives birth to a movement full of positive conciousness...Ollin. The flames behind her keep her warm, as she looks onward to a liberated futuro.

- MaricelaRomo Ponce

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bienvenidas

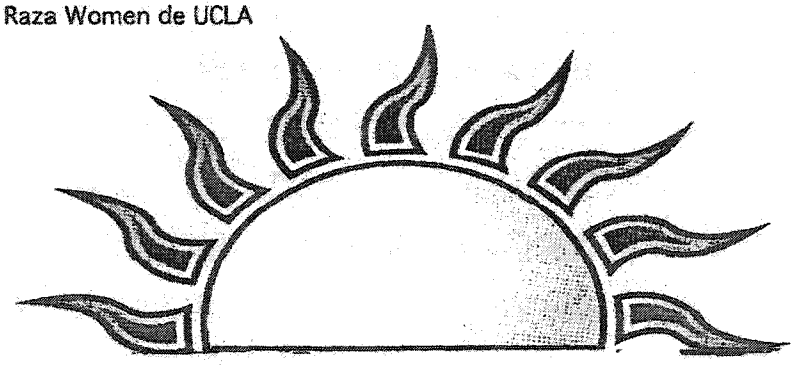
De parte de ***Raza Women de UCLA*** les queremos dar la bievenida a la celebración de nuestra Cuarta Conferencia Chicana/Latina honorando el Dia Internacional de Mujeres. Este dia tiene gran significancia para nosotras. Nos recuerda de las luchas y condiciones que toda mujer tercermundista tenemos en comun. Constantemente somos mal representadas y peor aun, a consecuencia nos volteamos una contra la otra. Es por eso que sentimos la importancia que desarollemos un dialogo fuerte con nosotras mismas y con otras mujeres para desafiar en colectiva esos obstaculos que continuan marginalizando nuestras experiencias. Sentimos que es de suma importancia crear una conferencia que enfoque en consientizacion, dialogo, solidaridad y sin falta que proporcione un espacio donde toda mujer se siente segura de ser y expresarse.

El tema de este ano es, ***"El Fuego de Nuestro Espiritu Continua la Llama de Revolucion Colectiva."*** Este representa nuestra pasion interna, nuestra abilidad para motivarnos a nosotras mismas y crear cambio. Es el fuego que arde dentro de nosotras para destruir y luchar contra el sexismo, racismo, homofobia y clasismo, que han tratado de desmantelar nuestras comunidades.

El tema tambien trata de encorporar el modo en que nosotras mismas nos miramos para ver la reflecion the las mujeres que continuan en y por la revolucion. Nuestras hermanas, madres, abuelas, las senoras al lado de nuestras casas, las mujeres en la parada del camion, en fin, toda mujer alrededor del mundo llevamos la tradicion y el fuego de lucha por justicia, politica, y social. Esperamos que nuestras oradoras y talleres ayuden a deshacer las falsas ideas sobre nosotras mismas y otros mujeres, para asi organizar contra las suposiciones y continuar la llama de revolucion colectiva.

En solidaridad,

Raza Women de UCLA



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welcome

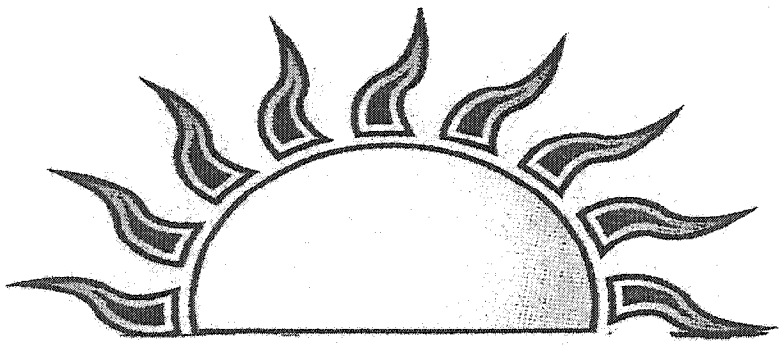
On behalf of ***Raza Women de UCLA***, we would like to welcome you in celebrating our Fourth Annual Chicana/Latina conference honoring International Women's Day. This day holds significant meaning to us. It reminds us of the struggles and connections mujeres of color have in common. Often times we are misrepresented and placed in positions where we oppose each other instead of creating solidarity between us. That is why we feel it is important that we develop a strong dialogue with ourselves and other mujeres, and collectively challenge those obstacles that continue to marginalize our experiences. We feel it is necessary to create a conference which aims to raise consciousness, create dialogue, build solidarity, and provide a safe space for all mujeres in attendance.

This years theme is, ***"El Fuego de Nuestro Espiritu Continua la Llama de Revolucion Colectiva" (The Fire in Our Spirit Continues the Flame of Collective Revolution).*** It represents our internal passion, the ability to motivate ourselves and create change. It is the fire that burns within us to destroy the many "isms," such as sexism, racism, homophobia, and classism, that attempt to dismantle our communities.

The theme also tries to embody the way we look into the face of ourselves to see the reflections of those that continue to carry on the revolution. Our sisters, mothers, great grandmothers, the neighbor across the street, the women at the bus stop and the women half way across the world, all carry on the tradition of struggle of economic, political, and social justice. We hope our speakers and workshops facilitate the deconstruction of assumptions about ourselves and others, in order to organize against them and continue the flame of collective revolution.

In solidarity,

Raza Women de UCLA



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MUJER

Mujer, si te han credido las ideas,
de Ti van a decir cosas muy feas.
Que no eres buena, que si tal cosa.
Que cuando callas eres mas hermosa.

Mujer, espiga abierta entre panales.
Cadena de eslabones ancestrales.
Ovario fuerte de lo que vales.
La vida empieza donde todos son iguales.

Nina, adolescente y Mujer,
manana es tarde y el tiempo apremia

Mujer, si te han crecido las ideas,
de Ti van a decir cosas muy feas.
Cuando no quieras ser incubadora diran:
no sirven estas mujeres de ahora.

Mujer, semilla, fruto, flor y camino,
pensar es altamente femenino.
Hay en tu pecho dos manantiales
fusiles blancos y no anuncios comerciales.

Nina, adolescente y Mujer,
manana es tarde y el tiempo apremia.

- Gloria Martin





EXIJO LIBERTAD!

Quiero romper las cadenas
que he cargado por
generaciones
como si fuera una condena

quiero ser quien yo decida
si me pongo un pantalon
o mejor una falda

si me fumo un cigarillo
o mejor un toque de marihuana

si dejo de ser virgen ahora
o mejor manana

quiero decidir yo
si prefiero ser una doctora
o mejor una ama de casa

- Anahuac

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agenda

time	event	location
8:00a - 8:50a	Registration/Registracion	Moore 100
8:50a - 9:00a	Welcome/Bienvenidas	Moore 100
9:00a - 9:30a	Opening Performance: Wozani	Moore 100
9:30a - 9:40a	Introduction of the Keynote Speaker/ Primera Oradora-	Moore 100
9:40a - 10:05a	**Cherrie Moraga**	Moore 100
10:05a - 10:10a	Announcements/Anuncios	Moore 100
10:10a - 10:20a	Break to Workshops/ Pausa a Talleres	Kerckhoff Hall Ackerman Union Boelter & Math Sci
10:20a - 11:25a	Workshops I/Talleres I	" "
11:30a - 11:40a	Break	
11:40a - 12:45p	Workshops II/Talleres II	" "
12:45p - 2:10p	Lunch/Comida Feria de Informacion/DJ	Court of Sciences
2:10p - 2:25p	Break for Dialogue	
2:25p - 3:20p	**Dialogo**	Court of Sciences
3:25p - 3:35p	Break to Closing Session	Moore 100
3:40p - 3:55p	Spoken Word: Dee'Lo	Moore 100
3:55p - 4:00p	Introduction of the Performer Closing Speaker/La Oradora Final -	Moore 100
4:00p - 4:30p	**Monica Palacios**	Moore 100
4:35p - 5:00p	**Quetzal**	Moore 100
5:00p - 5:10p		

6

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keynote

Cherrie Moraga

Cherrie Moraga is a playwright, poet, and essayist whose plays and publications have received national recognition. She has also published as an essayist and poet. She is the co-editor of *This Bridge Called My Back; Writings by Radical Women of Color*, which won the Before Columbus American Book Award in 1986. She is the author of *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Paso Por Sus Labios* (1983) and *The Last Generation* (1993), published by South End Press in Boston. She has edited numerous publications including *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas and Third Woman: the Sexuality of Latinas.*

Presently, Moraga serves in an ongoing appointment as the Artist-in-Residence in the Department of Drama and the Department of Spanish & Portuguese at Stanford University. In addition to working independently with student-playwrights at Stanford, Moraga teaches Latino Theater and Literature, Intensive Playwrighting and other Creative Writing courses. Her most recent book, a memoir on motherhood entitled *Waiting in the Wings*, was published by Firebrand Books on Ithaca, NY in the Fall 1997.

I am the welder.
I understand the capacity of heat
to change the shape of things.
I am suited to work
within the realm of sparks
out of control.

I am the welder.
I am taking the power
into my own hands.

From The Welder by Cherrie Moraga
This Bridge Called My Back:
Writings by Radical Women of Color,
Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983.

Cherrie Moraga es una escritora de obras, poeta, y ensayista. Sus escrituras y publicaciones han recivido reconocimiento nacional. Un gran numero de sus ensayos y poesia han sido publicados. Es la co-editora de *Este Puente Llamado Mi Espalda; Escrituras por Mujeres Radicales de Color*. Ha sido ganadora del premio Libro Americano Antes De Colon en 1986. Cherrie es la autora de *Amor En Tiempo De Guerra: lo que nunca paso por sus labios* (1983) y *La Ultima Generacion* (1993), publicado por South End Press en Boston. Ella ha editado numerosas publicaciones, incluyendo *Cuentos: Historias por Latinas y Mujeres Tercermundistas: La Sexualidad de Latinas.*

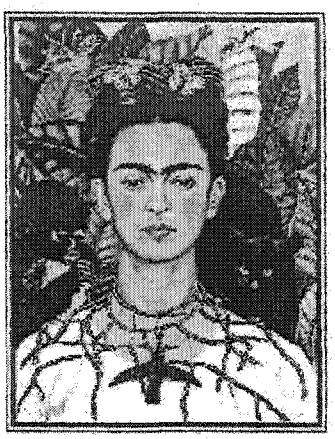
Actualmente, Moraga mantiene una posicion indefinida como la Artista-en-Residencia en el departamento de Drama y el departamento de Espanol y Portugues en la Universidad de Stanford.
Mas que trabajar independientemente con estudiantes-escritores de obras en Stanford, Moraga tambien da cursos en teatro y literatura Latina/o, y clases intensivas en escritura creativa. Su libro mas reciente es una memoria en ser madre, titulado *Esperando en Las Alas*, fue publicado por libros Firebrand en Ithaca, NY en el otono de 1997.

7

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workshops/talleres

1) Get Out, Act Out, Speak Out: A Personal Herstory of Familia and Revolution/
Sal, Actua, Expresate: Una Historia Personal de Familia y Revolucion
Cindy Cruz, UCLA graduate student School of Education
kerckhoff 131
The workshop will combine family history, personal narrative, and feminist politics that talk about a woman's reasons to pursue her education.



2) Identifying Domestic Violence in a Relationship/
Identificando Violencia en Una Relacion
Celerina Vera, Project Peacemaker
boelter 5514
This workshop is to identify abusive characteristics; explain how violence affects children and family; and how battery affects during pregnancy. It will also discuss the different options and resources available.

3) Redefining Gender Roles of Mujeres in Charreria/
Redefiniendo el Lugar de la Mujer en Charreria
Susana Contreras, UCLA undergraduate student
ackerman 2410

4) A.Our Minds, our Bodies & our Girlfriends/
Nuestras Mentes, Nuestros Cuerpos, y Nuestras Novias
Stacy Macias
boelter 5422
This workshop will explore the constructs behind how our bodies as Mujeres are perceived within our culture and society, as well as discuss the further difficulties of coming out.

4) B. Chicana Dykenamics: Explaining and Talking Openly about Chicana/Latina Sexuality
Stacy Macias
boelter 5422
This workshop will discuss the after process of being out, finding your familia and support groups.

5) Health and AIDS/ *La Salud y el SIDA*
TBA
ms 55148
This workshop will emphasize the importance of educating our Raza on HIV/AIDS prevention and the effects that AIDS and other chronic health diseases have on our community.

6) I Want to Go to College/*Quiero Ir al Colegio*
Vivian Salazar, UCLA Academic Advancement Program
moore 100
Don't let Proposition 209 discourage you! Learn about helpful hints and strategies for applying to college.

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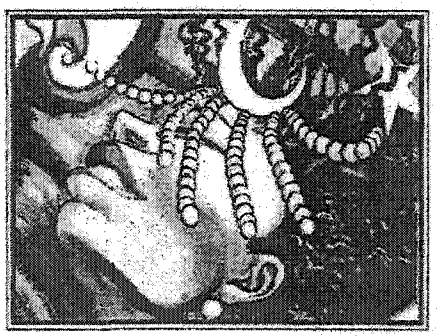
workshops/talleres

7) Teenage Pregnancy/ *Embarazo Juvenil*
Sera Mendoza, Proyecto Pastoral
moore 1003
This workshop will focus on sensitive issues dealing with teenage pregnancy. Due to the sensitive issues at hand, this workshop will be open to **women only.**

8) Let's Talk About Sex/ *Vamos Hablar Sobre el Sexo?*
Maria Castillo
ms 5225
This workshop will discuss the various issues regarding sexuality and knowing your own body. In order for our young mujeres to have a safe space to discuss these areas. This workshop emphasizes issues for **mujeres ages 17 and under.**

9) Bilingual Education/ *Educacion Bilingue*
ms 7608
This workshop will address the recent propositions aiming to dismantle bilingual education and directly affecting the Chicana/Latina community. This workshop will also develop strategies to mobilize against this dangerous proposition.

10) Creatividad: nurturing the writers within us
Claudia Rodriguez, UCLA undergraduate student
boelter 5440
The emphasis of this workshop is to practice your writing skills and explore different writing methods in order to express your voice through writing.



11) Body Image
Briseyda Zarate, UCLA Alumni
ackerman 3517
This workshop will discuss the misconceptions of our bodies as perceived by the media.

12) La Virgen y La Puta: Deconstruyendo el Estereotipo
Maria Murillo, School of Film and Television-UCLA
ms 7608
This workshop will examine the stereotypical depictions of women in film - from the image of the virgen/ saint, mother and whore. It will examine the work of Mujeres from the UCLA Film School as they empower themselves by creating new roles for and about women and women's issues.

13) Just Kick It -- An Introduction to Self-Defense
Los Angeles Commission on Assualts Against Women

Come and learn basic techniques of how to defend yourself and how to be more trucha (alert) of your surroundings.

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workshops/talleres

14) How our Indigenous Grandmothers Welcomed the Sun/
Como Nuestras abuelas Indigenas Bienvinieron el Sol
Irene Vasquez, UCLA graduate student, Chicana(o) Studies Coalition
ms 5117
This workshop will discuss how indigena women went about their lives as leaders, mothers, grandmothers, etc. It will focus on indigenous communities that were not patriarchal. How women worked, lived and shared their lives with others. Also how they resisted oppression and fought for their families and communities.

15) Children's Workshop/Taller Para Niñas(os)
Aurora Cerda, UCLA undergraduate
ackerman viewpoint lounge 1
The workshop will serve as an empowering, learning experience for young girls and boys under the age of ten. There will be activities dealing with cultural history, reading, and other fun stuff.

16) Show Me the Money!!!
Dorene Martinez, UCLA undergraduate, UCLA Office of Admissions
ackerman viewpoint lounge 2
Getting into higher education is half the battle. Learn about the costs of a college education and how to avoid paying for them. Schoalrships, grants, money, money, money...

17) Mujeres In the Maquilas
Marta Segura, Labor Occupational Safety and Health, Board of Directors on the Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers
kerckhoff 152
A discussion of the exploitation of women in the maquilas from being exposed to hazardous chemicals, sexual harassment and being murdered for working. We will also discuss the activism in this area and organizations like Red de la Mujer and Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras.



18) Teatro Izcalli Sin Verguenza
Izcalli: Christina Nunez, Michelle Telles, Claudia Cuevas, Alicia Chavez-Arteaga
ackerman 2412
Izcalli is a Chicana(o) Saturday school program in San Diego that focuses onartistic, historical, political and cultural teachings to empower our youth. Teatro Izcalli Sin Verguenza has performed throught California. They will also discuss their personal experiences as women within the Teatro and school component.

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closing speaker

Monica Palacios is a writer/performer, playwrite and teacher. She travels the country with her bold one woman show: Greetings From A Queer Senorita, Latin Lezbo Comic and My Body And Other Parts.
She is a playwright in residence at the Los Angeles Mark Taper Forum's Latino Theatre Initiative, developing her play Clock which received a standing ovation at the 1998 A.S.K. Fall Reading Series.
Monica is published in Living Chicana Theory; A Funny Time To Be Gay; Latina: Women's Voices From The Borderlands; Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About and she has a monthly column in the Lesbian News. Monica has taught writing and performing classes and given lectures at Universities such as UCLA; UC Berkeley; Stanford; U of Texas at San Antonio and U of Massachusetts. She is currently teaching play writing at Los Angeles high schools.

She would like to thank the UCLA Raza Women for including her in this year's conference and she applauds their strength.



Monica Palacios

Monica Palacios es una escritora/artista, escritora de obras, y maestra. Viaja por todo el pais con su valientes presentaciones: Saludos de una Senorita Lesbiana, Latin Lezbo Comica, y Mi Cuerpo y Otras partes. Es escritora de obras en residencia en el Mark Taper Forum Latino Theatre Initiative de Los Angeles desarollando su obra Reloj, lo cual recibio fuertes aplausos en el A.S.K. serie de lecturas en 1998.

El Trabajo de Monica se puede encontrar en las publicaciones Living Chicana Theory; A Funny Time to be Gay, Latina: Women's Voices From The Borderlands; Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About y escribe una columna mensual en la revista Lesbian News. Monica ha dado cursos de escritura y actuacion y ha presentado lecturas en varias Universidades Estado Unidenses.

Actualmente trabaja en Los Angeles con estudiantes de Secundaria dando cursos de Obra. Le gustaria agradecer al grupo de UCLA, Raza Women, por invitarla a ser parte de la conferencia Chicana/Latina de UCLA. Les da aplausos a las Mujeres de Raza Women por todo su esfuerzo.

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Artists/Artistas

Quetzal takes its cue from a long steady tradition of Chicano Music and creates a new sound that is neither here nor there. As pioneers of the new Chicano sound, Quetzal roots its birth in the largest border town—East Los Angeles, the place where it all comes down. It is something that can only be called Chicano Cool. It is the struggle to exist with dignity manifested in verse, song, and dance; Quetzal is the point at which individuals with various methods unite to collectively create movement. The debut recording of Quetzal brings to life the beauty and spirit of the East Los Angeles Chicano experience. Rousing and inspired vocals combined with uplifting melodies demonstrate a musical talent that is unmatched and uncategorizable. It's a new Chicano Groove.

Quetzal toma su inicio de una larga tradicion de musica Chicana y han creado un nuevo estilo de musica queno es ni de aqui ni de alla. Como pioneros de un nuevo estilo de muscia, Quetzal toma sus raices de una de las mas grandes ciudades—el este de Los Angeles, el lugar adonde todo occure. Es algo que solamente se puede llamar Chicano cool. Es la lucha de vivir con dignindad manifestado en verso, canto, y baile; Quetzal es el punto en cual se juntan varios metodos, creando un movimiento, uniendo colectivamente. EL primer disco de Quetzal da vida a la belleza y espiritu de la experiencia Chicanoen el este de Los Angeles. Vocales inspiracionales combinadas con melodias demuestran el talento musical que es incomparable. Es una nueva onda Chicana.

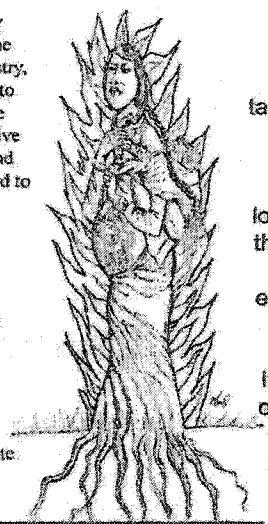


WOZANI
A musical group inspired by jazz, folk, and r &b rhythms. Their thought provoking lyrics leaves us with a sense of liberation and peace of mind. Un groupo musical inspirado por ritmos de jazz, musica



She stands strong. Her roots are firmly embeded in the earth, as a symbol of the connection we have to our past...Ancestry, Familia, and All. She holds on tightly to Herstory, Her Voice, and Her Life. She gives birth to a movement full of positive conciousness...Ollin. The flames behind her keep her warm, as she looks onward to a liberated futuro.

Se para fuerte. Sus raices estan firmamente enteredas en el mundo, como simbolo de la conecion que tenemos con nuestro pasado, ancestria, familia, y todo. Ella firmamente se entierra en su historia, su voz, y su vida. Da a luz a un movimiento lleno de consciencia positiva...Olin. Las llamas atras de ella la mantienen encendida, mientras ve libertad adelante en el futuro.



I think it s important to let you know that I *choose* to express myself. Out of all of the loop and holes that the world throws at me, I manage to either write it down on paper or explode on the wall. If it weren t for this outlet that I have, I think I would be a little more insane, or even worse, a lot more sane...

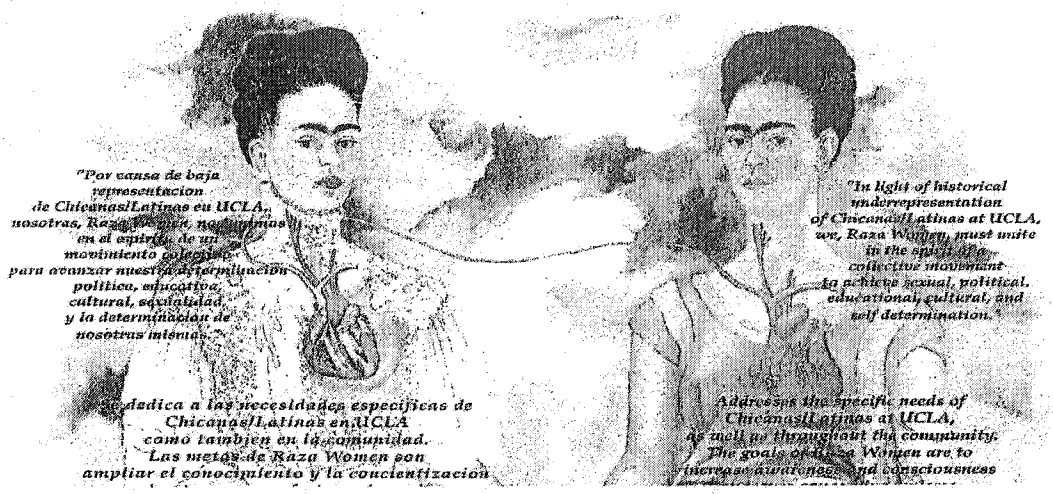
Maricela Romo Ponce

Dee'Lo
A captivating and inspiring political performance poet, based out of Los Angeles and student at UCLA that is sure to leave you stunned. Among the issues she deals with are those of women's empowerment and liberation.
Una captivante inspiradora poeta politica, de Los Angeles e estudiante en UCLA las dejara sin sentido. En su poesia, ella trata con los temas de la liberacion de las mujeres.

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Raza Women...

322 Kerckhoff Hall, 308 Westwood Plaza, Los Angeles, Califaztlan 90024
(310)825-1308 *razawomen@asucla.ucla.edu*



"Por causa de baja representacion de Chicanas/Latinas en UCLA, nosotras, Raza Women, nos unimos en el espiritu de un movimiento colectivo para avanzar nuestra afirmacion politica, educativa, cultural, sexualidad, y la determinacion de nosotras mismas."

"In light of historical underrepresentation of Chicanas/Latinas at UCLA, we, Raza Women, must unite in the spirit of a collective movement to achieve sexual, political, educational, cultural, and self determination."

Se dedica a las necesidades especificas de Chicanas/Latinas en UCLA como tambien en la comunidad. Las metas de Raza Women son ampliar el conocimiento y la concientizacion sobre temas que afectan a la mujer. Complimos estas metas promoviendo y ofreciendo lo siguiente:

Addresses the specific needs of Chicanas/Latinas at UCLA, as well as throughout the community. The goals of Raza Women are to increase awareness and consciousness on issues concerning mujeres. We accomplish these goals by promoting and providing the following:

Raza Women

Talleres sobre la Sexualidad
Carreras Profesionales, Religion,
Educacion, la Violencia, la Familia, escribir resumenes

Concurso de Becas

Trabajar con varias organizaciones Chicanas/Latinas de la universidad y de la comunidad

La Conferencia Anual Chicana/Latina

Eventos Sociales (conciertos, bailes, eventos culturales) y mucho mas...

Workshops on Sexuality,
Professional Careers, Religion,
Education, Violence, Family, and Resume Writing

Annual Scholarship

Work with other Chicana/Latina organizations at the university and the community

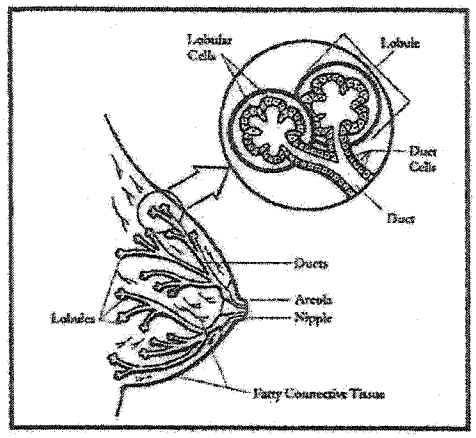
Annual Chicana/Latina Conference

Raza social events(concerts, dances, cultural events) & much more...

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BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION

All mujeres 20 years and older should regularly conduct breast self-examinations. Regularly breast examinations can help you detect breast cancer or other changes on your breasts. If mujeres feel any unusual lump or detect any changes on your breasts, seek medical attention as soon as possible. The majority of mujeres who check themselves regularly have less of a risk of developing breast cancer; eventhough most breast changes are not cancerous do not disregard any changes. For more effective results, self-examine your breasts when they are least tender, usually seven days after the start of your menstrual period.

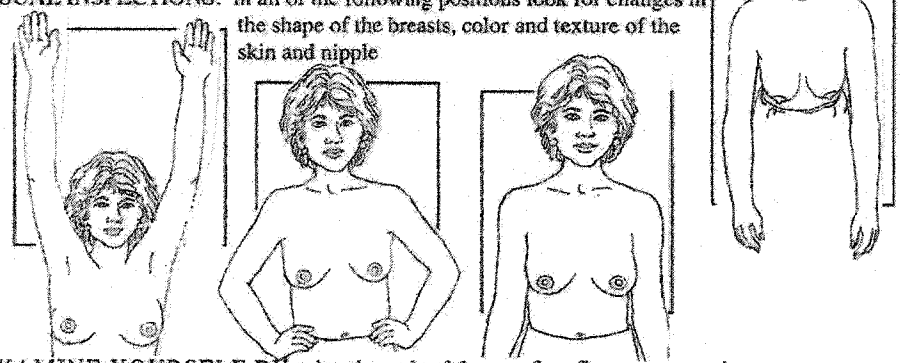


!Pare el Cancer del Ceno!

METHODS

Fight Breast Cancer!

VISUAL INSPECTIONS: in all of the following positions look for changes in the shape of the breasts, color and texture of the skin and nipple



EXAMINE YOURSELF BY using the pads of three or four fingers to examine every inch of your breast tissue. Softly move your fingers in small circles. To help your fingers move more smoothly you can use powder or lotion.

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women, second only to lung cancer. It is the leading cause of cancer death among women aged 40 to 55.

Your body is beautiful. It is your temple. Love, respect, and take care of it. With a regular Simple breast self-examination, you can reduce the risk of your bodies becoming sick and hurting.

Breast cancer is a malignant tumor that has developed from cells of the breast.

15

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MUJERES, LOVE YOUR BODIES!!!!

The Media influences many eating disorders. Let's challenge these pressures and the destructive methods that the media sends to mujeres and children everywhere.

* 1/3 women & 1/4 men are on a diet at any given time
* In 1970 the avg. age a girl started dieting was 14; by 1990 it dropped to age 8
* 1/2 of all 4th grade girls are on a diet
* 50% of women wear a size 14 or larger, but most clothing outlets cater to size 14 or lower
* Women overestimate the size of their hips by 16%, and waists by 25%
* 1/10 high school juniors and seniors diet

Mujeres, we must love our bodies for they reflect who we are inside and out!
Real women have curves and shapes in different sizes.
!Ama tu cuerpo!
Squeeze your hips and say I'm BEAUTIFUL- Soy MUJER!

Common symptoms of eating disorders:

- Thoughts about "feeling fat"
- Fear of gaining weight
- Body image obsession
- Guilt or shame after eating
- Fasting
- Self- induced vomiting
- Eating to relieve stress or depression
- Embarrassment about body weight
- Strict dieting
- Over eating
- Lying about eating habits
- Menstrual irregularities
- Compulsive exercise

Sintomas Comunes de Desordenes de Alimentacion

-pensar de Sentirse sobrepeso
-miedo de subir de peso
-obsesion de como se ve
-culpa o verguenza de haber comido
-traspasarce de comer
-vomito forzado
-comer por nervios o depresion
-verguenza de peso
-dietas estrictas
-comiendo de mas
-mintiendo sobre los habitos de alimentacion
-irregularidades de menstruacion
-ejercisio en exceso

What is Date Rape?

Date rape is forcible sexual activity against a woman's will by someone she knows
a majority of incidents occurs in high school and college women
Mujeres use your instincts
Ponte trucha and be assertive
If you plan to drink, open your own beverage
Let someone else know your plans for the evening or day

Coming Out

Coming Out is an ongoing process in questioning your sexual orientation. It is a movement from self hatred and self-rejection to self- love and self- acceptance. Coming out can be so difficult because many times it is not supported. As a result, we are subjected to blatant forms of prejudice and discrimination that other underrepresented groups face. Living in a society that is very oppressive to gays and lesbians, it is important to that we deconstruct the stereotypes that hurt lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. Remember, we are your children, your mothers, your fathers, tias y tios. If you are thinking of coming out, trust your feelings. Denial of who you are will hurt you more than any outside rejection. Mujeres, together we can help support and love eachother, But it takes all of us to learn about eachother to keep the flame of collective revolution burning.

16

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STRUGGLES/LUCHAS

I am aware that the

violence against women comes in many forms. I am aware that the commodification of women is one of the most dehumanizing and oppressive acts perpetrated against women. I am aware that the international sex industry profits off the bodies of women. I am aware of the global trafficking of women, as they are bought and sold. I am aware that Pilipina women have become the largest export of the Philippines. I am aware that Mail Order Brides number in the tens of thousands, mostly in the United States and in Australia. I am aware that hundreds of thousands of Pilipina women are entertainers or prostitutes and work in the farms and brothels. I am aware that the flesh industy grows every minute with every dollar which is given for the exploitation of women. I am aware of the proliferation of pornography and the trafficking of Pilipina women who are seen as exotic sex toys. ***I AM AWARE.*** *I make a pledge not to solicit the sex industry, not to give one penny to support pornography and the sexual exploitation of women, and to all worldwide. I make a pledge to do my part to end the trafficking of Pilipinas worldwide. I make a pledge to do my part to end the increasing commodification of women.*

Para mas informacion:
GABRIELA Network-LA Cerrito, CA 90703-3032
Email: aenrile@ucla.edu
(888)-852-8096 or 213-307-3696

Welfare Reform = Welfare (De)form

UFW STRAWBERRY CAMPAIGN



Fresera(o)s trabajan un promedio de10 a 22 horas al dia en un medio ambiente lleno de pesticidas, condiciones de bano antihigienicas y agua para beber contaminada. El labor del nino, auque es ilegal, es frequente y mujeres son constantemente acosadas sexualmente.

Strawberry workers work an average of 10 - 22 hours a day in an unhealthy environment filled with pesticides, unsanitary bathroom conditions and polluted drinking water. Child labor, though illegal, is rampant and women are constantly sexually harassed.

NIKE
Workers Demand

"Our demands are very simple. We just want to remind NIKE that it already has a good Code of Business Conduct. All it needs to do is enforce it."

- ***Pay A Living Wage***
- ***Stop Boot-Camp Style Assembly Line***
- ***Stop Using Child Labor***
- ***Investigate All Reported Acts Of Abuse***
- ***Allow Truly Independent Monitoring of Factories***

NIKE
Las Demandas de los Trabajaros

"Nuestras demandas son muy sencillas. Queremos recordarle a NIKE que ya tienen un Codigo de Conducta para negocios. Solamente le falio ponerlo en accion."

- *Pagar un sueldo suficiente para sobrevivir.*
- *Parar la linea estilo militar para asssemblar.*
- *Parar el uso de ninos en el labor.*
- *Investigar todos los reportes de actos de abuso.*
- *Realmente permitir el control independiente de fabricas.*

17

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STRUGGLES/LUCHAS

WOMEN IN PRISON

DID YOU KNOW..

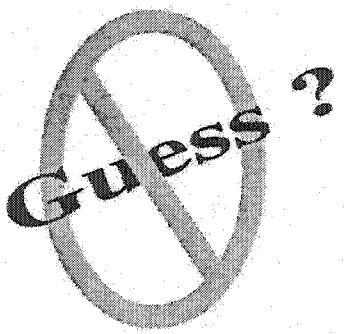


* *Women are the fastest growing prison population.*
* *80% of the women in prison are mothers.*
* *Prisoners must pay $5 to go to the prison health center. (Prison jobs pay 8 cents/hour)*
* *Prisoners suffering from serious illnesses inlcuding cancer are often given nothing stronger then ibuprofen to relieve pain.*
* *Little or no prenatal care is given to pregnant prisoners.*
* *Women prisoners are required to be shackled to the table when giving birth.*
* *Women prisoners who have detected lumps in their breats have been denied mammograms and ater devloped breast cancer.*

---

* *La Presencia de mujeres en la prision es la que ha aumentado mas.*
* *80% de las mujeres en las prisiones son madres.*
* *Prisioneras tienen que pagar $5 para recibir cuidado medico de la clinica (Trabajos en la prision pagan 8 centavos la hora.)*
* *Prisioneras que suffren de enfermedades serias incluyendo el cancer no se le dan medicamento bastante efectivo para calmar el dolor.*
* *Prisioneras embarazadas no reciben bastante cuidado prenatal.*
* *Prisioneras son encadenadas a la mesa en donde daran luz.*
* *Prisioneras que detectan grumos en sus senos han sido negadas las mamagramas y luego ellas desarollan el cancer de los senos .*

Guess? Inc., along with 16 sub-contractors, were cited by California Inspectors for paying garment workers, mostly female immigrants, LESS than poverty level wages and working under horrendous sweatshop conditions. Guess? manufacturing is now fleeing to Latin America to exploit a cheaper labor force.



La compania Guess?, y 16 sub-contractores, fueron citados por inspectores de California por pagar sueldos BAJO el nivel de pobresa a sus trabajadores, siendo mayormente mujeres inmigrantes, y bajo condiciones de trabajo horrendas. Guess ahora se mueve a Latino America para explotar a una fuerza laboral mas barata.

MAQUILADORAS

Mexican government fails to protect women from any discriminatory treatment in maquiladoras along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Human rights Watch Women's Right's Project finds that major U.S. based and other corporations routinely subject prospective female employees to the mandatory urine testing, invasive question about their contraceptive use, menses schedule or sexual habits in order to screen out pregnant women and deny them jobs. This action violates Mexican Federal Law. Support the women workers, contact the Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers (619) 542-0826.



El gobierno Mexicano ha fallado en su proteccion de actos discriminacion hacia la mujer de parte de las maquiladoras que estan situadas por la frontera de los Estados Unidos-Mexico.

La organizacion para derechos humanos, Watch Women's Right's Project, ha encontrado que companias de los Estados Unidos constantemente someten las mujeres que buscan trabajo a un examen de orina, preguntas evasivas sobre su uso de metodos de anticoncepcion, su menstruacion, y sus habitos sexual es para negarles trabajos a las mujeres embarazadas. Esto es una violacion de la ley federal mexicana.

Apoyen las trabajadoras, para mas informacion llamen "Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers" (619) 542-0826.

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LESBIAN GAY BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER RESOURCES

Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center
1625 N. Schrader Avenue, Hollywood, CA
(213) 933-7400

Asian/Pacific Lesbians and Gays
7985 Santa Monica Blvd. Hollywood, CA
(213) 660-2131

Bisexual Network of Southern California
12228 Venice Blvd. Ste. # 473 Mar Vista, CA
(310) 281-9804

United Lesbians of African Heritage
1626 N. Wilcox Ste. # 190 L.A. CA 90028
(213) 960-5051

Bienestar Latino AIDS Project
(213) 660-9680



Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos
P.O. Box 85459 L.A. 90072
(213) 660-9681

Lesbianas Unidas
(818) 282-5827

90.7 K P F K IMRU-
Lesbian and Gay Radio Show
SUNDAYS 6:00pm-7:00pm

Organize for Social Justice!!

Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project.....(213)694-0482
Justice for Janitors Local 399, Local 1877 SEIU....(213) 680-9567
CATS: California to Ammend Three Strikes.....(213) 564-6446
Community Service Organization.....(310) 338-5684
AFL-CIO Organizing Institute..(213) 365-0088
United Farm Workers.....(213) 387-1974
Global Exchange.....(415) 255-7296
U.C.L.A. Labor Center.....(310) 794-0385
U.N.I.T.E.....(213) 380-8930
Free The Mind Project.....(310) 825-5969
Local 11 H.E.R.E.....(213) 481-8530
Metropolitan Alliance..(213) 730-4950
Bus Riders Union.....(213) 387-2800



"It's never too late to get involved!"

19

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LOLITA LEBRON

HEALTH

Holistic Health for Women
8240 Santa Monica Blvd., Ste.201
West Hollywood, CA 90046
213-650-1508

Los Angeles Free Clinic
3324 W Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026

Women Alive
(Women Living with HIV)
1566 S. Burnside Ave.
Los Angeles CA 90019
800-554-4876

Venice Family Clinic
(310) 578-6510

Planned Parenthood Los Angeles
1316 3rd Street Promenade Ste 20
Santa Monica, CA 90401
(213) 226-0800 or (310) 787-2666

Para tu Seguridad

LA Commission on Assaults Against Women
(213) 392-8381

Los Angeles County Domestic Violence Unit
(213) 738-2615

Sexual Assault Victim Services-Santa Ana, CA
(714) 957-2737 (hotline); (714) 834-4317 (office)

South Bay Rape Crisis Center- Hermosa Beach, CA
(310) 545-2111 (hotline/office)

Los Angeles County Domestic Violence Council
(213) 738-3192

The HOTLINE- Whittier, CA (310) 945-3939

1736 Family Crisis Center- Redondo Beach, CA
(310) 379-3620(hotline); (310) 372-4674 (office)

Long Beach Sexual Assaults Crisis Agency
(310) 597-2002 (hotline) (310) 494-5046 (office)

AVANCE-East L.A. Sexual Assaults Program
(800) 585-6231 (hotline);(213) 526-5819 (office)

Rainbow Shelter- San Pedro, CA
(310) 547-9343 (hotline; (310) 548-5450 (office)

Chicana Service Action Center- L.A., CA
(213) 268-7564 (domestic violence hotline)

Project SISTER- Sexual Assaults Services, INC.-
Claremont, CA
(909) 626-4357 (hotline); (909)623-1619 (office)

Project Peacemaker
PO Box 82361
Los Angeles, CA 90082-0361
213-752-3772

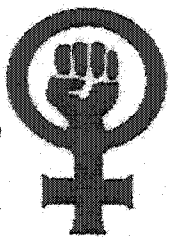
Mariposa Women's Center- City of Orange, CA
(714) 547-6494

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女人的眼睛
WOMEN'S EYES / CON OJOS DE MUJER

Raza Women
... continuing the dialogue of collective organizing

Nikkei Student Union supports and congratulates Raza Women in their continous efforts

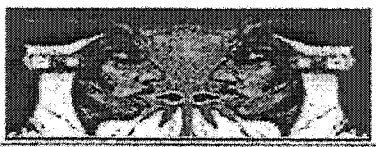


Latin American Student Association



commends Raza Women in their continous efforts to promote the issues affecting Latinas today.

Queer Pilipinos from Samahang congratulate Raza Women on their 4th Annual Chicana/Latina Conference



Pinays of Samahang Pilipino

Support Raza Women and the liberation of all Women of Color

Para mi mama.
Gracias por enseñarme como amar. I love you.
Your Angel.



Mike de la Rocha
USAC General Representative

USAC President

joins Raza Women in their efforts to promote educational & cultural awareness

CHICANA!

21

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El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana y Chicano de Aztlán

MEChA CALMECAC

The Chicana/o and Latina/o Academic Supports Program

Congratulates Raza Women on their Fourth Annual Chicana and Latina Conference...

¡Que Viva La Mujer!

Centro Estudiantil:
Study Hall and Study Group Component



Centro Coátlicue:
Gender and Sexuality Specific Counseling, Programming, and Resources

Tepochcalli Unit:
Student-Friendly, Peer and Academic Counseling Component

Calpulli Unit:
Mentorship Component for Incoming and Continuing Students

Internship Program:
Gain experience assisting the MEChA Calmécac Staff in events and activities

For More information, Please Call the MEChA Calmécac Office @ (310) 206-5547 or stop by the UCLA Student Retention Center located in the Men's Gym Building Room 203

22

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Muchisimas

Raza Women de UCLA would like to say GRACIAS to the following people and organizations

Nuestras madres queridas- Creadoras de la vida y revolucion
Coatilicue "diosa de la tierra"
Maria Castillo from the Chicana/o Studies Library
Martha Guerrero
Gloria Ramirez...Erica's mom
Audio Visual Servises
USAC president: Stacy Hae Lim Lee
USAC General Representative: Mike de la Rocha
Board Of Directors Interactive Fund
all speakers, facilitators,entertainment and artists
Lee at Pulse Copy & Technology
Student Government Accounting:
Debbie, Georgine & Irma
Pat McClaren
Maricela Ponce
Chicana/o Park
Stacy of Events Management

23

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Gracias

For contributing and making the *Fourth Annual Chicana/Latina Conference* una realidad

The transportation crew:
Vanessa, Cat, Mel, Erica, Stacy,
& The Big Blue Bus #12
All the schools who attended
All the mujer organizations throughout the state
All the community organizations
Latinas Guiding Latinas
DJ Loca- Dinah Consuegra
DJ Aurora Guerrero
Raza Women 4CLC committee
MEChA Calmecac
UCLA's Nikkei Student Union
Latin American Student Association
Samahang Pilipino: Pinay Power!
Isidro "Skid" Rodriguez
Info faire representatives
and those who believed in the need for this conference

24

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APPENDIX B

Pilot Study Focus Group Interview Protocol

June 3, 1999

1. State anything about yourself that you feel is important about whom you are.
2. Tell me about the effect that race has had on your life and in school.
3. Has class been a big factor in your life?
4. Has the level of income of your family ever been a factor in your life?
5. What is revolution? What does that mean to you?
6. Why are you a member of Raza Women?
7. Do you feel that you are able to affect men or do the things that you do affect only women?
8. How many members are there in Raza Women?
8. What other organizations are you involved in?

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APPENDIX C

Pilot Study Interview Protocol

November 3, 1999

1. How do you identify yourself? Are there any other ways that you identify yourself?
2. And how does your identity affect how you live your life?
3. Tell me about your work. Tell me what you do and why you do it.
4. What are some of the obstacles that you find in doing your work?
5. Do you believe higher education is important? Why?
6. What do you think social justice means or looks like?
7. How can we achieve justice in education?
8. How do you think you came to that definition of social justice?
9. Who taught you about social justice issues?
10. Talk about the injustices that you believe exist?
11. What is your vision, both short term and long term, for creating change?

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APPENDIX D

Raza Womyn de UCLA Survey/Open-ended Interview Protocol

1. Today's Date:
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Sexuality:
5. Race/ethnicity:
6. Socio-economic class:
7. List your different identities (as many as you like). If you like, you can tell me why or explain the identity:
8. From what year to what year were you/have you been involved with Raza Womyn? In what capacity?

Family Background

9. Did your family emigrate from a different country?

   If so, from where?
10. How many generations has your family been in the U.S.?
11. Where were you born?
12. Where did you grow up?
13. Would you classify your family as poor, working class, middle class, upper class, or wealthy?
14. What kind of work did your parents do when you were growing up?

Mother:

Father:

Other guardian:

15. What do they do now?

Mother:

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Father:

Other guardian:

16. Where do your parents live now?

17. Are you the first to go to college?

18. If not, what number are you?

19. Has anyone else in your family ever gone to college?

    If so, how many people?

20. Up to what grade did your mother attend in school?

    Your father?

    Other guardian?

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

21. What language(s) were you raised speaking at home?

    At school?

22. What language(s) do you primarily speak in now?

23. Rate your language proficiency from 1-10 in:

    English:

    Spanish: Other:

24. What language(s) do your parents speak in primarily?

25. Were you ever in a bilingual or ESL class?

    What grades?

26. What elementary school did you go to?

    Middle school?

    High school?

27. What, if any, student or community activities were you involved in before college?

28. Were you in a college prep academic track in school?

29. How many honors classes did you take?

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AP courses?

COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

30. Did anyone help you apply to college?

    If so, who?

31. What or who made you want to go to college?

32. What college(s) did you apply to (community college, undergrad and grad)?

33. What college(s) were you accepted to (community college, undergrad and grad)?

34. What college(s) have you attended (community college, undergrad and grad)?

35. If still in school, what year are you in school?

36. When did you/will you graduate college (community college, undergrad and grad)?

37. What is/was your major(s)/minor(s)?

38. Do you plan on going to (or are you in) graduate school? If so, in what area and why?

39. What career would you like to pursue?

40. What are you doing currently?

STUDENT ACTIVISM IN COLLEGE

41. What student organizations have you been involved in at UCLA? Why?

42. Have you been involved in any off-campus organizations?

    Which ones? Why?

43. How long have you been/ were you involved with Raza Womyn?

    What years? Why?

44. What is (was) your role or connection with Raza Womyn?

45. Tell me what you think of Raza Womyn. (Positive things as well as critiques.)

39. Name the one member of Raza Womyn who has the biggest impact on you and why?

40. What impact, if any, did Raza Womyn have on you?

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