"It Shaped Who I Am": Reframing Identities for Justice Through Student Activism

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Abstract

On May 6, 1993, students of California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona [CPP]) protested what they believed was a lack of diversity on campus. Over 25 years later, this qualitative study explores the identity development of undergraduate students who led that movement, which resulted in the founding of five cultural centers at CPP in 1995. In doing so, this study adds to the growing literature on activism and Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x identity development. Today, student-led movements shine light on continued inequities in higher education. The reframing identities for justice (RIJ) identity development model serves as a lens to explore how six students' historical narratives offer a unique glimpse into the impact of activism on their identity development. We found participants' identity development was influenced by (a) experiencing meaningful interactions along their developmental journeys, (b) making sense of oppression and privilege, (c) discovering praxis between previous learning and activism at CPP, and (d) building coalitions and kinship. Findings show that students act for social justice before they explore multiple identities. We conclude that activism impacts student identity development and offer recommendations for how to enhance this development to student activists, faculty, and administrators.

Introduction

Student activism, although not always acknowledged, is a pillar in higher education institutions in the United States and globally. Historically, students have a central role in shaping policies, reforming curriculum, improving and increasing campus services, improving enrollment and retention practices, and strengthening community partnerships. The 1960s is considered one of the major socio-political time periods that birthed a vision and plan to hold universities accountable to racially minoritized students that continues today. Chicana/o and Latina/o students, specifically, have a rich history of activism that has improved university structures to better serve them. Direct outcomes of 1960s student activism include the creation of cultural centers and ethnic studies departments on university campuses. A rich body of scholarship focuses on the historical significance of Chicana/o and Latina/o student activism, yet there is a need to also study how student activists' identity formation is impacted in the historical past.

Informed by 1960s student activism, in May of 1993, Chicana/o and Latina/o[1] students at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (CPP), staged a protest to demand increased representation of Chicana/o and Latina/o students, faculty, and administrators. CPP was established in 1938 as an all-male institution that primarily served white students. By the 1990s, CPP had the potential to serve the area's growing Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x[1] population, yet the institution's student, administrative, and faculty bodies did not reflect local demographics. A history of racial inequity permeated the campus; this hostile climate was captured by recommendations following a visit from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) team (1990). One recommendation highlights the team's perspective on CPPs "spirit of diversity":

> Beyond increasing the diversity of "bodies" in the community, is the issue of the climate in which they live. Some genuine and strong concerns about the culture in regard to gender, as well as race and ethnicity, are present. There is a clear danger that tensions will escalate. Cal Poly is not alone, of course, in these problems. It should broaden its approach to diversity to include the life on campus (WASC, 1990, p. 48).

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[1] The authors acknowledge the growing use of Chicanx and Latinx to include gender nonconforming and trans individuals who do not identify with the feminine or masculine renditions of "Chicana" and "Chicano." For historical purposes, this article uses Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x to illustrate contemporary expansive gendered identities. Further, this article uses Chicana, Chicano, Chicana/o, Latina, Latino, and Latina/o specific to the 1990s because Chicanx and Latinx did not exist within the historical records of that time.

The 1993 protest by Chicana/o and Latina/o students, known as the RAZA Council, led to a series of meetings with CPP President Bob H. Suzuki that included an 18-month long negotiation process that included establishing a Raza Center (the César E. Chávez Center for Higher Education [CECCHE] opened its doors in spring of 1995); the hiring of a Chicana/o/x member in the president's cabinet to serve as special assistant to the president and director of affirmative action responsible for growing the Latina/o/x faculty and staff population; and increased outreach and recruitment to expand the Latina/o/x student population on campus. During negotiations, students' advocacy against the "death of diversity" grew to include support for the development of an African American Student Center, Asian and Pacific Islander Student Center, Native American Student Center, Pride Center, and expanded WoMen and ReEntry Center (Aguilar-Hernández et al., in press).

This study explores the identity development of student leaders who were directly involved in a social movement at CPP to address the racism and lack of representation they experienced on campus. We contribute to the growing body of scholarship that links identity development and student activism. We draw on oral history interviews with Chicana/o and Latina/o student leaders of the RAZA Council to consider whether and how students' activism on campus between 1990 and 1995 influenced their identity development. As students continue to fight for equity in U.S. higher education today, we believe in the importance of exploring how to enhance developmental opportunities for student activists as well as their experiences on campus.

In this article, we ask 1) What influence did participation in social activism have on student leaders' racial/ethnic identity? 2) Did student leaders feel differently about their racial/ethnic identity after their involvement in social activism? and 3) What influence, if any, did participation in social activism have on other identities, such as gender identity or sexual orientation? The literature on student activism and identity development highlights the many ways students are impacted developmentally by their positive and negative socio-political and cultural experiences in higher education.

Literature Review

Racism persists in U.S. higher education (Morgan & Davis, 2019) and students continue to interrupt this racism with social movements (Darder, 2011; Linder et al., 2019; Morgan & Davis, 2019; Stewart & Quaye, 2019). Identity development models reflect the impact of discrimination and are increasingly addressing multiple identities and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Hernandez, 2013; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Educational experiences and discrimination impact Latinx students' identities, often because of the jarring nature of the structural inequalities they experience during college (Patton et al., 2016; Torres, 2003; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres et al., 2011; Torres & Hernandez, 2007).

Historically, Latinx students have responded to socio-political issues and discrimination with social activism (Acuña, 2011; Cronin et al., 2010; Gildersleeve & Sifuentez, 2017; Hernandez, 2012, 2013; Tropp et al., 2012), which often leads to positive institutional and individual outcomes (Acuña, 2011; Pulido, 2006). Yet, student activists also experience backlash, exhaustion, and racial battle fatigue (Gorski, 2018; Hernandez, 2012, 2013; Stewart & Quaye, 2019). The question remains: how does engagement in social movements impact the identity development of the student activists?

Latina/o/x individuals and groups are impacted by racism in the U.S. and higher education (Acuña, 2011; Morgan and Davis, 2019). Researchers acknowledge the social construction of Latinx race and ethnicity, increasing impact of racism, and importance of intersectionality (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). Contextual factors, including experiences in higher education, influence how Latinx individuals see themselves and how their identities develop over time (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). In addition to educational experiences, Ferdman and Gallegos' (2001) found that Latinx identities developed through familial reference groups, physical appearance, and peer interactions.

Contextual factors, including educational experiences during the college years, also impact identity development, with cultural dissonance due to structural inequality and oppression playing an essential role for Latinx students (Keeton, 2002; Torres, 2003; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Like Ferdman and Gallegos (2001), Torres (2003) highlights the impact of discrimination and the variety of lenses through which Latinx college students view

themselves. Torres (2003) explains how students adapt and manage the cognitive dissonance and discrimination they experience in college in her Bicultural Orientation Model, which explores acculturation and ethnic identity orientation levels.

Historically, some students respond to racism and other socio-political issues with resistance, including protests (Acuña, 2011; Darder, 2011; Pulido, 2006). Darder (2011) describes the complexity involved in engaging in social movements:

> …when students respond with resistance, they may choose to separate from the dominant culture and segregate themselves within their own primary cultural community, or they may struggle to negotiate…in an effort to actualize some degree of social change (p. 202).

Students who respond to discrimination with personal and collective empowerment show a greater sense of identity consciousness (Darder, 2011).

As a result of the consciousness-raising experienced through activism, student activists have historically initiated socio-political changes in curriculum and student programs and services on college campuses. In direct response to racial inequities in California colleges and universities, Chicana/o empowerment and the resulting student demands in the 1960s led to the creation of ethnic studies departments (Acuña, 2011; Pulido, 2006); an increase of Chicana/o/x administrators, faculty, and staff; and the creation of cultural centers to counter institutional oppression and support positive ethnic and racial identity development (Patton, 2010; Yosso & Benavides López, 2010).

Hernandez (2012) explores how engagement in political activism positively develops the identities of Latinas. Researchers also found that students who engage in activism in response to institutional oppression also learn to employ healthy coping mechanisms, increase their civic engagement, interact meaningfully with faculty and staff, and learn to navigate systems of change and the change process (Hope et al., 2016; Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Kuh et al., 2005). Moreover, following demonstrations, students experience lower powerlessness and isolation levels, promoting agency (Stake & Hoffman, 2001). Student activism in higher education involves protests and also includes other forms of civic engagement and community service, all of which result in short- and long-term positive outcomes, such as deeper cognitive and political

awareness, enhanced interpersonal development, and a more developed ethnic identity (Hernandez, 2012; Hope et al., 2016).

Although researchers have documented student activism's positive outcomes, Linder et al. (2019) described student activism as unpaid labor leading to minoritized activists experiencing exhaustion, fatigue, backlash, and burnout. This burnout is also called battle fatigue and emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion (Gorski, 2018; Stewart & Quaye, 2019). Furthermore, Hernandez (2013) found Mexican American student activists experienced daily challenges and marginalization in college, which were often not addressed by the university. This lack of responsiveness in higher education institutions negatively shaped students' cognitive and emotional development (Hernandez, 2012).

Research on student activism and identity development must deepen, as political unrest at colleges and universities reflects broader issues of oppression in the United States (Morgan & Davis, 2019). Here, we focus on student activist voices to honor their contributions and to explore the multitude of developmental benefits and personal challenges they experienced in their quest for justice and equity on campus.
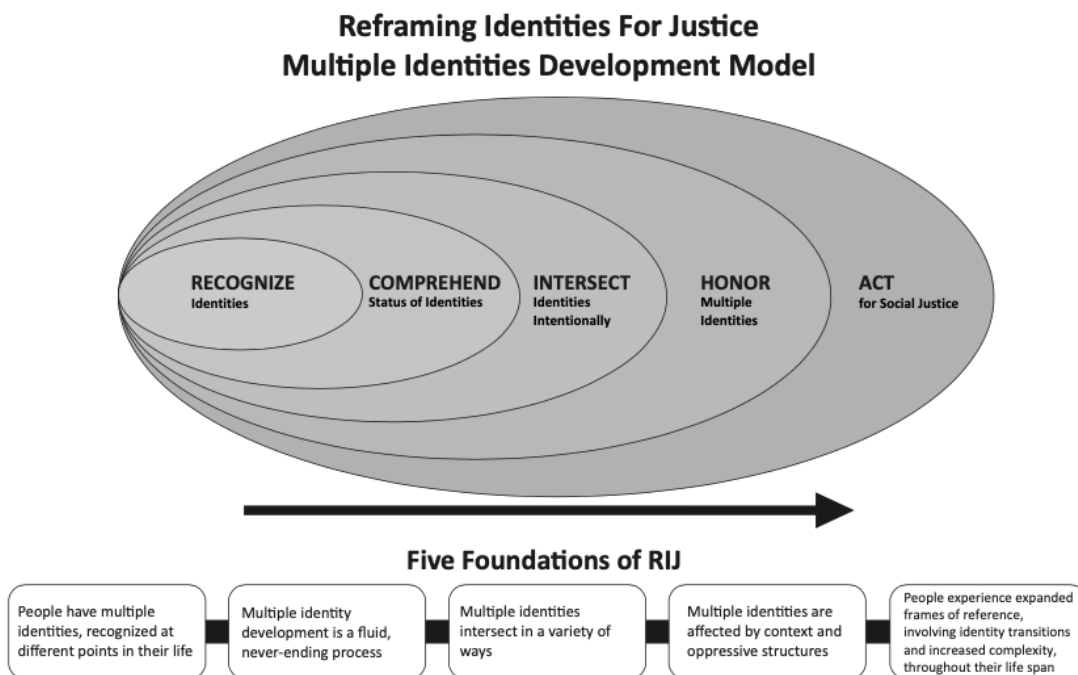
Theoretical Framework

In this study, we use the reframing identities for justice (RIJ) model of identity development to analyze the identities of students who negotiated the establishment of the César E. Chávez Center for Higher Education (CECCHE) in their pursuit of equity, representation, and social justice on campus (Keeton, 2002). The RIJ model emerged from qualitative interviews with 30 experienced intergroup relations leaders who volunteered at the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ), a social justice organization. The RIJ model includes five foundations: 1) each person has multiple identities, recognized at different points in her or his life; 2) multiple identity development is a fluid, never-ending process; 3) multiple identities intersect in a variety of ways and, in a few specific instances, some identities do not intersect with others; 4) multiple identities are affected by context and oppressive structures; and 5) people experience expanded frames of reference that involve several identity transitions, which occur at new levels of complexity, depending on the context, throughout their life span (Keeton, 2002).

We argue the RIJ frame lends itself to this study's purpose of understanding how Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x student identities developed. The model can be used as a framework to describe the development that took place during and following the students' social justice advocacy in the 1990s. It is critical to recognize that the five stages of the RIJ model do not necessarily occur in a specific order, because of the complexity of identity development. The RIJ model also has five expanding frames and developmental processes and describes: 1) how supportive and challenging critical incidents influence when individuals first begin to recognize their identities and the differences between them; 2) how individuals come to comprehend the dominant and non-dominant status of identities; 3) how individuals intentionally begin to intersect other identities into their consciousness and the role context plays; 4) how individuals begin to honor multiple identities in themselves and others and are willing to resist negative dominant culture values to redefine their own identities; and 5) how individuals take action for social justice and fight institutional oppression (Keeton, 2002). A visualization of the RIJ model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Reframing Identities for Justice Multiple Identities Development Model

Reframing Identities For Justice Multiple Identities Development Model

RECOGNIZE Identities · COMPREHEND Status of Identities · INTERSECT Identities Intentionally · HONOR Multiple Identities · ACT for Social Justice

Five Foundations of RIJ

People have multiple identities, recognized at different points in their life

Multiple identity development is a fluid, never-ending process

Multiple identities intersect in a variety of ways

Multiple identities are affected by context and oppressive structures

People experience expanded frames of reference, involving identity transitions and increased complexity, throughout their life span

The Reframing Identities for Justice model helps us analyze our identity development findings because it offers a framework to explore the developing identities of students that fought against oppression in higher education. We explore ways in which students made meaning of their identities, how they were challenged to explore their multiple identities and those of their peers, and how they reframed their identities in the process of advocating for justice.

Methodology

Oral history has flourished in the field of Chicana/o/x education, led by educational historians invested in documenting how communities experienced and resisted racial and gendered inequities in the historical past (Delgado Bernal, 1998; García, 2018). Oral history is an essential method to capture the past experiences of minoritized communities, whose voices are not usually captured in traditional archives. Oral history allows educational researchers to fill in archival gaps as a way of documenting how minoritized communities challenge power within institutions, including schools (Trouillot, 1995).

As is the case with oral history projects on issues pertinent to communities of color, we positioned the activism and memories of students involved in the formation of the CECCHE "as sites of knowledge production" (Barnett & Noriega, 2013, p. 2). Using oral history as our method, we gathered participants' memories of leadership *and* the impact of their involvement on their identities. The data were analyzed to capture the participants' experiences during their time as student leaders. Thus, oral history allowed us to capture the impact and significance of student activism on the identity formation of past student leaders (~25 years later). As is common with oral history, we acknowledge that time may have shifted and shaped their recollections and how they make sense of, and make meaning out of, this time in their life. We found that the student leaders articulated being aware of the impact of their activism on their identities before, during, and after the 1990-1995 efforts. Further, we argue that future studies on identity formation of student activists should consider oral history as a research method.

Participants

To identify participants for this study, we reviewed historical documents to find the key individuals involved, recruited leaders through alumni networks and social media, and contacted

them via email to request their participation. After contacting key leaders, we utilized the snowball sampling technique (Mertens, 2020) and requested additional names and contact information for students who directly participated in the efforts leading to the establishment of the CECCHE. All participants were undergraduate student leaders involved in the foundational work of the CECCHE at some point between 1990 and 1995. All six participants self-identified as Chicana/o, Colombian, or Mexican American; four participants identified as men and two as women. All but one participant agreed to use their real names for this study.

Student Leader Profiles

Ernesto Rodriguez, a self-identified Chicano/Mexicano originally from Mexico, was named by all participants as one of the key leaders of the student movement at CPP. He took this role seriously and worked to teach his peers the history of Chicana/o social justice during meetings and informal gatherings. He was a computer science major and was actively involved in MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana and Chicano de Aztlan), MASA (Mexican American Student Association), and the RAZA Council.

Manuel Saucedo was identified as another key leader. A self-identified Chicano originally from Mexico, he majored in electrical engineering and held numerous student leadership roles including the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, Society of Hispanics in Science and Engineering, MEChA, the RAZA Council, and the Minority Engineering Program.

Norma Leon was a communications major with a minor in psychology while at CPP and self-identified as Chicana and is originally from Mexico. Along with Corina Crespo, she was one of only two women involved in the early organizing of the student movement. Norma's campus leadership included MASA, MEChA, Associated Students Incorporated (ASI), the Multicultural Council (MCC), and the RAZA Council.

Stevan Correa identified as a Chicano/Latino and majored in Engineering and Pre-med. Stevan came to the U.S. as a teenager from Mexico. His involvements included MEChA, the RAZA Council, the Chicano/Latino Pre-Medical Student Association, and he served as a tutor for Disabled Student Services.

Jean Paul Allain, originally from Colombia, was a mechanical engineering major with a minor in physics. As a non-Mexican student, he provided a voice of inclusivity to the group. His

CPP activism included leadership with the Society of Hispanic Scientists, the RAZA Council, and the Minority Engineering Program.

Esther (pseudonym) joined the efforts later, identified as a woman, and was a psychology major while at CPP. A self-identified Chicana/Mexican American, she came from an immigrant, farmworker family. While at CPP she held active leadership roles with MASA, MEChA, and the Xicano Latino Heritage Month committee.

All six student leaders were first-generation college students and either immigrants or children of immigrants. During their oral history interviews, they discussed being first-generation college students and connected their identities as immigrants (or children of immigrants) to their passion for social justice and activism. While five participants self-identified racially/ethnically as Chicana, Chicano or Mexican, and one identified as Colombian, as students they all shared a strong sense of commitment to the diverse Chicana/o and Latina/o communities which impacted their collaborative work. And, because all of them held various leadership positions within the Chicana/o Latina/o and campus communities, as a group, they had clarity on the strong impact their leadership and activism could have on the university.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Trustworthiness

For this study, we utilized oral history to collect data because it allowed us to activate and capture the memory of six former RAZA Council student leaders who participated in the establishment of the CECCHE at CPP between 1990 and 1995. As part of our protocol, we first obtained informed consent and administered demographic surveys in which participants self-identified their race/ethnicity, gender, citizenship or immigration status, where they grew up or considered home, the years they were at CPP, and the student leadership positions they held. Oral history interview questions asked about their pre-CPP exposure to student activism and social inequity. Then, they were asked about their memories of the 1990-1995 social movement at CPP. Specifically, we asked them to provide concrete details of how the protest and negotiation process developed and also to reflect on the strengths and challenges of their efforts. Last, we asked participants about their identity formation: (a) What influence, if any, did your participation in the formation of the CECCHE have on your racial/ethnic identity? (b) Did you feel similarly about your racial/ethnic identity before your involvement in the formation of

the CECCHE? and (c) What influence, if any, did your participation in the formation of the CECCHE have on your gender and/or sexuality identities?

We collected first-person oral histories using one-on-one interviews with the six participants. Our oral history questions used an interview protocol that allowed us to ask follow-up questions. Interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted face to face or via telephone. For this article, we extracted for analysis the students' responses that spoke to their identity formation. We analyzed the resulting data using Creswell's (2014) six steps of qualitative analysis: (a) organize and prepare data for transcription, (b) review and code data, (c) use codes to create categories, (d) report findings through themes, (e) develop a qualitative narrative with findings, and (f) interpret and create meaning with findings. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Our analysis strategy included both emergent and confirmatory analysis.

Creswell (2014) defined emergent analysis as high-level abstract coding in which researchers create a final list of core categories. Following the emergent analysis method, we began by reviewing transcripts and open coding. We simultaneously reviewed, coded, and outlined the transcripts. Emergent analysis continued using a constant comparison method of focused and axial coding. We then conducted confirmatory analysis to report how our themes aligned with the RIJ model.

We used multiple strategies to ensure trustworthiness of the data and findings, including member checking (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure accuracy of interviews, participants received a copy of their transcripts and provided feedback for revisions. To further ensure credibility of findings, we shared initial results with researchers and student affairs educators at one national and one regional conference.

Because the project focused on the past (1990-1995), it was historical in nature and drew on the experiences of living participants at the time of data collection. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, "Case studies can be historical, as in the history of an organization or program" (p. 40). We found six oral histories sufficient for a historical case study; however, we acknowledge the sample is small for discussing identity formation and therefore not generalizable (Creswell, 2014). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed, "In qualitative

research, a single case, or a small, nonrandom, purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of many" (p. 254). We found that the purposeful sample of student leaders offered specific details about the campus climate at CPP in the 1990s, their personal experiences in that environment, and the situation that led to their social movement. The student leaders also reflected on their identity formations.

Findings

Emergent analysis of students' oral histories yielded four themes describing how activism influenced participants' identity development: 1) experiencing meaningful interactions with people they met along their developmental journey; 2) making sense of oppression and privilege they experienced prior to and while at CPP; 3) connecting the past to the present by discovering praxis between previous learning and activism at CPP; and 4) building coalitions and kinship. Next, we highlight the power of student activism and its influence on participants' identity development.

Influenced by Experiencing Meaningful Interactions: "I Have a Home Here"

Students said they were challenged to reflect more deeply upon their identities because they engaged in activism. They could reflect upon and describe how individuals they met along their developmental journeys influenced their identity development. Some of the influence happened in home communities, campus organizations and departments, and through one-on-one interactions.

Home Communities

Esther was affected by her immigrant community before arriving at CPP, having grown up in a rural agricultural region of southern California. Esther shared how "the majority of us are Chicano and the majority of us here are bilingual…how come we're not in government, how come we're not in city council, how come none of the teachers are Latino?" She continued, "I don't think it's all of our fault. I think we're all trying it's just that there's blocks." She experienced some of these barriers at CPP, too, as she was one of a "small, small group" of Chicanos in her major." She said "there was this sense like students like me or people like me were having a hard time at Cal Poly [Pomona] and a lot of us were not gonna make it." Her

immigrant experience and interactions with immigrants in her community and the campus's Mexican American Student Association (MASA) helped her develop a sense of justice and critically understand her positionality at CPP. She recalled that MASA offered tutoring and a bilingual conference for the local community. As Esther stated:

> MASA allowed me to say, "Okay, I'm different; I went away [to college]. I'm more immigrant. I learned English here. I didn't grow up in [Los Angeles], but there are people like me here, and I have a home here."

> Esther connected the lack of opportunities available to Latinos in the border town where she grew up with institutional barriers in her community and at CPP. Many students spoke to the value of co-curricular and curricular engagement on their identity development and activism.

Campus Organizations and Departments

Campus organizations and academic departments were also influential for students during their time at CPP. In particular, el Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán (MEChA) and MASA were valuable organizations for nearly all participants, who also noted the impact professors and the Ethnic and Women's Studies (EWS) department had on their development. Norma recalled the importance of meeting people along their journey: "During that time, I wouldn't consider myself as liberal or radical as some of the other students. . . . I relied on others who had more passion, and I provided the work that needed to get done." Norma's reflection illustrated how people enter social justice efforts with different social justice experiences and knowledge levels. Jean Paul also emphasized this point:

> My two and half, three years that I was involved at the MASA house, with CECCHE, with Ernesto and Manuel and MEChA were one of the . . . best moments in my life that I mostly value because it really shaped me. It shaped who I am [and] . . . how I think about myself.

> Manuel and Ernesto were two CPP undergraduates who initiated the protest planning group and held long-term leadership roles throughout the process. During the initial planning process and negotiations with administration, Manuel's and Ernesto's leadership was critical to the foundation of the student movement and students' identity development; for example,

Ernesto pushed his peers to critically consider social, political, and historical Chicana/o/x issues. Similarly, participants identified another student who was part of the initial protest planning group, Corina Crespo, as influential in giving women a voice and challenging a history of silencing women's voices in student movements.

One-on-One Interactions

Ernesto shared how his identity developed because of collaborating with individual members of the African American Student Center, Asian and Pacific Islander Student Center, and the Pride Center. His awareness and understanding of working with people who were different changed him. He stated:

> I interacted with them on a personal basis, and that changed my perspective of African Americans and Asian Americans. . . . The more we got to know them we were like, "We are going through the same struggles. . . . We're just a little different because of our cultural differences." That changed my whole perspective.

> He went on to describe how interaction with members of the LGBT community also aided his development and challenged previous biases, "I hadn't given myself the opportunity to really get to know them. Once the Pride Center came about, I was given that opportunity…[to start] breaking down those biases for me. That is how my identity is changing, too."

> Participants' personal growth was influenced throughout their developmental journeys, before they arrived at CPP, upon their arrival on campus, and during the negotiation process with administrators. Participants also learned to connect memories of discrimination with moments of personal growth.

Influenced by Experiences of Oppression and Privilege: "It Totally Changed My World"

Participants shared that their activism helped them make sense of the discrimination they experienced in the past and at CPP. They connected discrimination with institutional oppression and racism, learning some aspects of their identities were privileged, and they made a commitment to engaging in activism as college students and as professionals. Ernesto discussed how prior experiences with discrimination drove him to engage in social change. Ernesto identified as a Mexican immigrant and shared a negative experience in his

predominantly-White junior high school that fueled his activism. He recalled, "I would run from class to get food, because I was hungry. She [cafeteria worker] would make me wait to the end of the line, she would say "You dirty Mexican, you need to wait until the last"… [The experience] shaped who I am." He recalled getting involved with MEChA, first at his high school when learning about oppression, and then later when entering the university and witnessing the same issues. Ernesto's involvement with MEChA provided him the lens to understand systemic oppression in society and at the university. Esther reflected on how experiencing discrimination and engaging in activism led her to pursue a career with a social justice focus after college:

> I eventually recognized that my identity and background were going to color some of the privileges and challenges I had in my journey. I feel like being conscious earlier really set me up to take advantage of a lot of opportunities, and that happened to include my area of work now.

Ernesto's and Esther's experiences of discrimination informed their commitment to social justice through organizing and choice of career.

Norma described how learning about discrimination led her to become part of the CECCHE implementation team. EWS faculty and other activists enhanced her learning about past discrimination. Norma said, "The participation in this particular movement . . . validated what I had been developing in the initial years [at CPP]." Norma took EWS classes with faculty who "challenged a lot of the gender stuff." Taking these courses allowed her to process and make sense of her gender identity. She credited her student activism and involvement with MEChA with influencing her perspective about racial identity and oppression: "[It] totally changed my world."

Peers, faculty, and campus organizations helped participants develop an understanding of institutional racism and sexism. Participants also described how activism helped grow their awareness of intersections of their identities. They offered examples of how they connected their multiple identities and individual experiences of discrimination with larger societal problems of oppression and how they responded accordingly.

Influenced by Discovering Praxis: "That's When I Became a Chicano"

Participants offered examples of how their previous learning in community organizations and the classroom intersected with and influenced their work as activists at CPP. Student activists translated ideas and concepts they learned from peers, faculty, and campus organizations into practical application in response to the institutional oppression they experienced. These experiences highlighted participants' identity statuses, and they noted discrepancies between the low levels of Latina/o enrollment and representation at CPP compared to elsewhere. Stevan said, "[I would] look at all my *gente* [people] . . . [with] so few of us here in this college environment, where there's so many of us in this community. That's when I became Chicano." For Stevan, becoming a Chicano was directly connected with the social movement at CPP. Stevan's recognition that racism created institutional barriers that kept Chicana/os and Latina/os out of higher education, was key to his cognitive development and subsequent activism. He understood that CPP was located in the City of Pomona, a predominately Chicana/o Latina/o community, yet students, faculty, staff, and administrators did not reflect that demographic. Esther also recalled CPP's lack of diversity: "It really felt like we were a minority." Ernesto agreed:

> We were not being represented. . . . [We had] second-class citizen representation of faculty and staff. . . . We just didn't see anybody who looked like us. . . . [We were] always being treated as second class.

Ernesto highlighted how his previous learning drove him to engage in social change, and he recalled first getting involved with MEChA at his high school. He connected historical and institutional racism with painful discriminatory experiences from his youth. Ernesto also joined MEChA at CPP and recalled witnessing the same institutional issues. This praxis influenced his work by leading him to take a leadership role as an activist and challenge campus leaders.

While Ernesto's involvement with MEChA provided him with the lens to understand systemic oppression in society and at the university, Esther was challenged by "active and conscious" students in MASA to learn more about her identities. Esther's desire to explore more of her identities grew: "I just took every EWS [Ethnic and Women's Studies] class I could. . . . The contact led to my changes in perspective." Esther shared how she wished "there was more evenness in genders in terms of involvement [in the RAZA Council]." Simultaneously, she

recalled Corina Crespo and other women leaders directly challenging men to value women's voices in group discussions and include women as part of the negotiation and implementation teams.

Norma shared an example of discovering the praxis between learning and action. As one of the only two women on the RAZA Council, Norma recalled, "As a woman, I needed to speak up. . . . I would say, 'Okay, we need to make sure that all of us are speaking.' The men would agree with me and say, 'Yeah, it's important.'" Norma's sharing this point showed that her learning in the classroom influenced her work as an activist. She learned it was essential to intentionally intersect one's multiple identities in social justice work. The intentionality to speak up as a Chicana and a woman is especially significant because she recognized her initial resistance to challenge the male-dominant dynamic of the RAZA Council.

Participants developed by connecting what they learned about historical systems of oppression with personal experiences of discrimination. This learning helped them make meaning of their experiences as activists, advocating for changes on campus. Another change that occurred was that the students adjusted their views regarding gender roles and sexual orientation. For example, CPP Latina/o/x organizations had different political frameworks, purposes, resources, and programming foci. Participants intentionally reached across the political and philosophical divides among campus organizations to build coalitions.

Influenced by Building Coalitions and Kinship: "We're Obviously Very Diverse"

Participants described building coalitions and deepening feelings of trust, kinship, and relationships with people who held multiple identities during their activism, which helped them interrupt individual discrimination and resist institutional oppression. Jean Paul acknowledged coalition building among diverse Latina/o activists as making the CPP movement unique and as contributing to his identity development: "Just because we are all Hispanics, Latinos, Chicanos, we're obviously very diverse. I mean, we have very different points of views about how we see ourselves." He remembered activists from other campuses noticing their coalitions and the diverse Latina/o/x groups coming together to mobilize.

Stevan found kinship in college after returning to the United States from Mexico. He knew the language and customs but felt "completely lost" and "tried to find a way to anchor"

himself to be "part of something." He recalled, "The initial motivation wasn't social justice. . . . The initial motivation was 'Ay, ay, ay, I'm scared. This is a foreign environment.'" He gravitated toward Latina/o/x organizations in the sciences and MEChA to find peers with whom he could identify. He then began to notice structural problems at the university, which led to his activism. Stevan found a seamless intersection between his time living in México and as a student at CPP. He described resisting negative dominant cultural definitions and labels around his identity due to his activism with MEChA and the affiliation developed by the Chicana/o movement:

> Through my exposure to MEChA [at CPP], that's really when I started making my identity, piecing it together from the fact that I was Mexicano. Yes, I've got these other aspects to my heritage and my history and who I am today, and I'm Chicano.

Participants discussed the importance of building trust, relationships, and support as part of their social justice work engagement. Norma had a nuanced view of kinship. There were times she left meetings feeling annoyed, but she returned because trust existed, illustrating her commitment to social justice efforts.

Stevan recalled hosting unofficial gatherings: "Let's have a *carne asada* and listen to some music!" After meetings or on weekends, the core group of diverse student-leaders-turned-friends would socialize, solidifying their kinship and trust. Stevan articulated they were all different, but social justice called them together: "I remember those *carne asadas* and sitting around just talking and just feeling like, yeah, I'm on the 'super friends' team." (*Carne asada* is the literal translation of "grilled steak" and when used in this context, it described a familial, friendly, and community-oriented social and cultural gathering centered around interpersonal interactions and the grilling of a shared meal. In Latina/o/x communities, it is an honor to be invited to a *carne asada*.)

This strong coalition allowed participants to demonstrate their commitment to actively resisting institutional and societal racism within CPP and beyond. In addition to the creation of the cultural centers, Manuel recalled one of the RAZA Council's demands to President Suzuki was "to create a position for vice president of diversity." He continued, "We met with Dr. Juana Mora at a conference and we asked her to consider the position and apply." The creation of the position would ensure conversations around diversity were happening at the

administrative level. Dr. Mora accepted the position and worked in that capacity for one academic year. Participants' commitment to challenging institutional and societal racism brought them together at CPP and extended to their future efforts.

As the above findings illustrate, participants' activism had significant impacts on their identity development. Although we recognize that time may have shaped their recollections and cognitive meaning making, in their oral history interviews, student activists recognized the influence activism had on them as they reflected on their developmental journeys and made meaning of the discrimination and oppression they experienced before and during their time at CPP. They also experienced identity development in the process of connecting their prior social justice knowledge and learning with their activism at CPP and by building coalitions and kinship with other individuals and across disparate campus organizations.

Discussion

The findings of this study support that Latina/o/x individuals and groups are impacted by racism in the U.S. and higher education (Acuña, 2011; Morgan & Davis, 2019) and that student activism leads to institutional changes (Acuña, 2011; Gildersleeve & Sifuentez, 2017; Morgan & Davis, 2019). Issues of power, oppression, dominance, subordination, and multiple identities deeply impact Latinx people's identity development (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). Contextual factors also influence how Latinx individuals see themselves and how their identities develop over time (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001).

As findings in this study illustrate, the participants' identity formation was impacted by their engagement in student activism. Our findings are consistent with the five expanding frames of the RIJ model, each of which articulates a different aspect of the ways in which participants' identities developed during and following their social justice advocacy in the 1990s. The RIJ's first developmental frame concerns critical incidents that influence individuals' recognition of identities and differences between them (Keeton, 2002). Student activists shared how the people they met along their developmental journeys impacted their identity development long before they arrived on campus. Some students arrived on campus understanding they were part of at least one non-dominant group. However, as students' social interactions expanded through contact with mentors and engagement as activists, they recognized that some of their

identities were privileged. Of particular significance is how participants describe the influence of peers and faculty members on their understanding of their identities and, subsequently, make sense of oppression's historical roots. For these activists, critical incidents included encounters with other people and ideas that reshaped their understanding of their own and others' identities.

Student activists described how their previous activism, peers, and faculty helped them make sense of the discrimination they experienced before and during their CPP activism. They pushed back against institutional racism. This ability to identify racism is a critical developmental task for Latina/o/x students (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Participants acknowledged privileged identities and negotiated with each other to determine their demands, protest plans, and the structure and function of the CECCHE in the context of their multiple identities. This awareness of oppression and privilege is consistent with the RIJ model's second developmental frame of comprehending the dominant and non-dominant status of identities (Keeton, 2002), as well as prior research findings on the influence of contextual factors and interaction with faculty on identity development (González, 2002; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Kuh et al., 2005).

RIJ's third developmental frame involves an awareness of how different identities intersect, as well as attention to the role context plays in this process. Participants described the impact of discovering the praxis between their previous activism and their activism at CPP. Study participants engaged in activism focused on one salient identity, consistent with earlier stages of identity development (Keeton, 2002). Because of their college activism and interactions with peers, faculty, and administrators, the student leaders became aware of their intersecting identities, such as gender, which broadened their activism scope. The activists described how they began to intentionally intersect other identities, which is consistent with RIJ's third developmental frame and supported by prior research (Gildersleeve & Sifuentez, 2017; Hernandez, 2012, 2013; Keeton, 2002).

Student activists describe how building coalitions and kinship increased their political awareness, enhanced interpersonal development, deepened contrasts between identities, promoted agency and ethnic development, and helped participants feel less isolated, supporting previous research (Hernandez, 2012, 2013; Stake & Hoffman, 2001). This work of coalition-building aligns with RIJ's fourth frame, which concerns how individuals begin to honor multiple

identities in themselves and others, as well as how they begin to resist negative dominant cultural values in order to redefine their own identities. We see participants begin to resist negative messages. Participants also offered examples of how their peers challenged them during the coalition-building process; this built strong feelings of kinship and helped them learn to support students of different identities and to reject negative valuations of their own and others' identities. This development is best illustrated in activists' direct opposition to the university administration's plan to create a single multicultural center. Instead, student activists advocated for individual spaces dedicated to various identity groups, reflecting their developing awareness of the need to honor specific identities and their willingness to support other students with stigmatized identities.

The RIJ model emphasizes acting for social justice in its fifth frame and conceptualizes this action as a high level integrative and developmental function (Keeton, 2002). The findings of this study build out the RIJ model and illustrate that acting for social justice can begin early in the developmental process. Participants were able to engage in social justice work while simultaneously learning more about the dominant and non-dominant status of identities they had not previously explored. As we evaluate the findings, the student's oral histories reveal that their activism was a direct result of the oppression they experienced in higher education. The meaningful learning that student activists had with peers, faculty, administrators, and staff enhanced their development. Additionally, participants' activism eventually became more complex and nuanced over time as they learned about the multiple identities of their peers. They began to realize that some of their peers were being impacted by oppression in ways they were not, because of their privileged identities, and began to advocate for them as well.

Our findings support and expand the RIJ model, which helps make sense of student activists' identity development. The RIJ model's five foundations also hold as participants experience expanded frames of reference that involve several identity recognitions and transitions that intersect at new complexity levels and depend on the context and oppressive structures throughout their life span (Keeton, 2002). Several implications for practice arise from this study and our recommendations focus on activists, faculty, administrators, and staff in higher education.

Recommendations

This study offers insight into the continued need for equity in U.S. higher education and the developmental opportunities that engaging in activism offers Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x students. We offer recommendations to enhance opportunities for future student activists, faculty, and administrators to focus on identity development. We found participants' development was influenced by diverse experiences and individuals. Based on our findings, we underscore the importance of focusing on social justice issues in higher education and supporting the multiple identities of students.

Recommendations for Student Activists

We recommend that Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x student activists build coalitions across multiple communities to enhance their identity development. Taking the time to identify allies from various ethnic backgrounds and political affiliations contributes to students' identity development by helping activists comprehend the dominant and nondominant status of their identities with people of diverse racial backgrounds. Coalitions provide student activists with the opportunity to learn from each other and build kinship that can enhance their identity development. We also recommend that student activists identify allies that are minoritized by their gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and national origin to form stronger coalitions for emerging student movements. Coalition building beyond immediately identifiable allies can strengthen emerging student movements and sustain those in existence. For student activists, working across multiple communities helps build social networks. We recommend collaborating with faculty that are engaged in social justice efforts. Student activist and faculty relationships can increase visibility of social justice issues through campus educational lectures, research, and programs. Faculty can offer their research and teaching expertise to contextualize current social movements with the past.

Recommendations for Faculty

Faculty and allies are in a unique position to contribute to the identity development of student activists through supportive and challenging dialogue about students' experiences with oppression and privilege. Faculty can collaborate with students on research projects, advise and mentor students, and support campus and community-centered student activism. These high

impact practices are found to promote increased student success (Kuh, 2008). Because students' identities can develop through interactions with faculty and may have extensive community networks, student activists may approach faculty members as they begin to consider engaging in social movements on campus. A way for faculty to connect with Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x students may be to offer examples of their own identity development and activism. Faculty may also share their personal connections and networks with students.

Recommendations for Administrators

Enhancing and improving campus climate is an important goal that administrators should uphold. Some administrators discourage student protests, while others were student activists themselves. Building meaningful relationships with Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x students is essential for strengthening students' identity development. We recommend that administrators seek to hire and retain faculty whose research and teaching informs current issues raised by student activists on their campus. Further, administrators can engage with student activists who challenge institutions and institutional agents through their lived experiences. One way to center student leadership is to schedule listening townhalls with students of color. After listening and understanding from the students' experiences, administrators can design a process that invites students to collaborate in implementing institutional change. When students protest, taking an adversarial approach may squelch opportunities to support student activists' identity development.

Conclusion

Student-led historical movements in higher education challenge persistent institutional oppression and serve as powerful catalysts for change. This study provided evidence that engaging in student activism also offers unique opportunities for student identity development. Analysis of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x participants' historical narratives through the RIJ model highlighted the impact of experiencing meaningful interactions on their developmental journeys and experiences of oppression and privilege, activism, coalition building, and kinship on CPP and the participants as individuals. Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x activists at various developmental levels may take actions toward social justice as they begin to explore a

singular aspect of their identities, and this activism supports them as they move through the five frames of the RIJ model. This study offers evidence that taking action for social justice may occur before Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x student activists begin to intentionally intersect additional identities or honor multiple identities in themselves and others (Keeton, 2002).

The study may also serve to highlight how student activism work during college may continue to impact an individual's life and professional journey, as was experienced by the participants in this study. After completing their undergraduate degrees, five of the six participants completed graduate or medical school. Two individuals earned their Ph.D. and are tenured at their respective universities, one in the STEM fields and one in the social sciences. One of the participants earned an MBA and is an IT professional in higher education and another completed their medical degree and practices medicine. One individual has maintained an active role in progressive electoral politics in a professional capacity. Another participant is a higher education administrator who earned their master's degree and is completing their Ph.D.

After their time at CPP, all the study participants continued some aspect of social justice work in their professional lives, including volunteering, leadership in progressive politics, and advocating for undocumented immigrant student services, and advising or mentoring college students or community members. Another powerful continuation of participants' commitment to social justice is how those that have become parents continue to educate their children about social justice and are actively teaching them to not discriminate against individuals with different life experiences.

Activism has a positive impact on higher education and on Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x students' abilities to move through developmental stages with support from peers, faculty, staff, and administrators. This study suggests a need for future research on the cumulative nature of learning and identity development. It is important to record how individuals, like the activists in this study, make meaning of their identities before, during, and after their involvement in social movements. Pursuing research questions like this would allow for continued understanding of how and when the lived experience of activism become a cognitive event in an individual's life. In addition to harnessing the energy of and embracing the opportunity to learn from student activists, campuses must create systems and avenues to benefit the growth of the university and activists' identity development.

Acknowledgments

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