



Association of Mexican American Educators Journal

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 14 Issue 2

2020

AMAΕ Invited Issue

Grounding Emerging Scholarship on Queer/Trans*
Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Pedagogies

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Editors' Message

Though 2020 has been a challenging and unique year due to the worldwide pandemic (COVID-19), our contributors have persevered and put together an amazing issue: "Grounding Emerging Scholarship on Queer/Trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Pedagogies." We are especially thankful to our guest editors, Dr. José Aguilar-Hernández and Dr. Cindy Cruz, who spearheaded these efforts. This is the first issue that the *AMAE Journal* has ever produced with a queer and trans* focus. The articles in this issue enlist "personal reflection, historical recovery, scholarly intervention, praxis (theory and action), and a commitment to ending all forms of oppression." Because of the difficult and precarious times in which we live, this type of scholarship enriches and re-affirms our ongoing efforts to continue to bring to the forefront pedagogies that are often overlooked, such as those that include the emerging gender and sexual identities of the Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x community.

Juntos logramos más,

Patricia Sánchez, Co-Editor

Antonio Camacho, Co-Editor

Grounding Emerging Scholarship on Queer/Trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Pedagogies

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This invited special issue ***Grounding Emerging Scholarship on Queer/Trans*, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Pedagogies*** reflects new thinking that is grounded in queer and trans* of color and U.S. feminist of color theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This collection illustrates how queer and trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x pedagogies are drawing from U.S. feminist of color writing and queer of color critique, highlighting important engagements not only in reclaiming and tracing our pedagogical practices in education but also new theoretical insights into queer and trans* scholarship that has taken creative interdisciplinary approaches to education research. The possibilities of the scholarship featured in the journal allows for fresh perspectives in youth studies and provocative embodied projects with Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x college students and their queer and trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x instructors.

We would like to thank the editors of the *Association of Mexican American Educators Journal*—Patricia Sánchez and Lucila Ek—for asking us to create this invited special issue. It was a joy for us to work with each of the contributors, and we are so appreciative of the chance to do this work that is so important to us as first-generation queer scholars of color.

We dedicate this invited special issue to the memory of Dr. María Lugones, a fierce theorist of resistance and popular educator, a beloved mentor and friend.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.14.2.355>

† Informed by Francisco J. Galarte's (2014) work, we use trans* "as an umbrella term that encompasses (but does not conflate) various gender-nonconforming categories such as transgender, transbutch, andro, genderqueer, female to male (FTM), male to female (MTF), genderfucking, etc. It is being used increasingly as a term of self-identification to draw attention to the diverse gender identities that are traditionally conflated under the term *transgender*" (p. 234). When sources are quoted in this article, we use the author's chosen spelling, including trans, transgender, and/or trans*.

A Writing Praxis

We begin our Introduction to this invited issue with a discussion of writing practices. To thrive in the academy, many of us have had to make a shift in the ways we understand ourselves: We must see ourselves first as writers. Everything else is secondary. This is essential. U.S. woman of color writers understand this well—it is one of their most important practices in a pedagogy of coalition.

Why am I compelled to write?...Because I have no choice. Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive. Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me...I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. To show that I *can* and that I *will* write, never mind their admonitions to the contrary. And I will write about the unmentionables, never mind the outraged gasp of the censor and the audience. Finally I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing. (Gloria Anzaldúa, 1981, pp. 168-169)

In this passage, Anzaldúa describes the urgency to write as a praxis for liberation. Because dominant narratives have left out U.S. woman of color writings, Anzaldúa's essay "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers" untangles her political and pedagogical motivation for writing. Writing for her is terrifying and yet necessary. Writing is the compensation for what the world does not give her. It records the "unmentionables"—the racism of our families, the violence of home, silence and its death wish, the passing down of traumas and behaviors that cannot be life affirming. The foundational *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981) is a call for discussion and action about racism and oppression in the U.S. women's movement. To this date, there has been little or no collective response from hegemonic feminists. There is also the assumption that woman of color writings either have no audience or that *Bridge* is simply confessional or worse, perceived as an index of grievances in both racialized communities and in the feminist movement. Central to *Bridge* is a praxis of a "theory in the flesh," where an integrated analysis

of the multiple, often simultaneous experience of oppression makes visible the conditions of woman of color lives. Exemplifying an intersectional analysis, *Bridge's* notion of a “theory in the flesh” must be seen as a praxis of thinking and writing that potentially reconfigures (or reenvisions) the relations of bodies—human bodies, bodies of knowledge, bodies of land, our relationships to our own bodies, and the social dreaming necessary to move the political project of coalitional change forward. This practice of writing by women of color is neither confessional nor unmediated. For this issue, we invite you to rethink *Bridge* as a primer for writing against the grain of power, as a text that is inherently pedagogical, where we learn to write, re-envision, and revise our experiences as stories of resistance (Cruz, 2019).

Aurora Levins Morales (2019), one of the original contributors, reflects on the significance of *Bridge* on social media:

Thirty-eight years ago, this month. We had spent the day draping stone walls and statues of dead white men in fabrics from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Indigenous cultures. We had a crowd that was overflowing, sitting in the aisles, on each other's laps, standing in the back. *This Bridge Called My Back* had only been out for a few weeks and the first edition had sold out. When we came out onto the dais, we got a standing ovation before we'd said a word. That was a revelatory moment for me. I understood two things: that we were being applauded, not for our individual talents as writers, but because we had, for that moment, and through accidents of timing, connection, [and] serendipity, become the tongue for a vast, angry body of our kin, and that this—being a voice at the service of my people—was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

Bridge writing practices are collaborative sense-making activities, where the writing process is an acknowledgment of other people in our emotional, material, and cognitive worlds. It is writing and thinking in relation with others that not only help us understand U.S. woman of color experiences, but offer a blueprint for coalitional relations. Levins Morales illustrates this wonderfully: We write with others for connection, for truth telling, for remaking and revising our understandings of our worlds. The field of education is late in centering queer and trans* Black, Indigenous, Chicana/o, and Asian American theoretical offerings. This invited issue is a call for education scholars to engage with the writings of lesbian and queer feminists of color whose foundations make possible emerging trans* and queer of color research projects in education and beyond. We ask how and why are certain fields of scholarship erased? It is not

enough to acknowledge the research gap on queer and trans* people of color *inside* our field; we also need to unveil how and why the field of education is systematically maintaining the historical contributions of queer and trans* people of color *outside*. Is the so-called “research gap” really the active refusal of transforming pedagogy, the maintenance or containment of knowledge construction that by design keeps queer and trans* people of color out of the classroom, curriculum, and texts?

This special issue engages with Anzaldúa’s (1981) call to write and to do the work to acknowledge and identify the contributions of Black, Chicana, Indigenous, Asian American, lesbian, and feminists of color in our theories and pedagogies in education. One way to engage these foundational scholars is to employ interdisciplinary approaches to research methods and theories. This requires us to read outside of the field of education. Specifically, we need to engage rigorously with the scholarship and writings by Black, Indigenous, and woman of color thinkers. Further, we need to develop methods and pedagogies of tracing the genealogies that inform our writing as a way to establish strong and legible roots of the scholarship that came before us. Ungrounded writing assumes that we are only filling in a research gap. Grounded writing contributes to the historical praxis of writing as liberation.

Latinx Scholars in Education Need to Do their Homework

If you read and trace the field of U.S. feminism of color, exemplified by texts such as Moraga & Anzaldúa’s (1981) *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, “The Combahee River Collective Statement” (1977/1995), *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* by Barbara Christian (1985), *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), *Women, Race, and Class* by Angela Davis (1983), Alice Walker’s (1983) *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Cherrie Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* (1983) and *The Last Generation* (1993), Asian Women United of California’s (1989) *Making Waves: An Anthology By and About Asian American Women*, Paula Gunn Allen’s (1992) *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1992), and *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Oppression Against Multiple Oppressions* by María Lugones (2003), among so many other writers, then you will find an antiracist, anti-imperialist, anticolonial, and very critical lesbian of color mode of inquiry that has often been overlooked, both as a field (Lee, 2000) and as life-affirming theoretical praxis (Alexander, 2006) in education scholarship. The practice of coalition and the relations necessary to achieve it is key in many of

these texts, and it is important for education scholars to recognize U.S. woman of color feminism emergence from the theoretical work of Black feminist scholar-activists.

For example, the 1977 Combahee River Collective (CRC) writes: “We find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women’s continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation,” an acknowledgment of the climate of impunity in Boston during the late 1970s, where it was necessary to develop an analysis of the experience of terrorization of Black women’s lives. In this analysis, the CRC created a theory of the simultaneity of oppression that women of color were experiencing in Boston. The statement was grounded by an anticolonizing and anticapitalist critique that was required to fully understand the racial and sexual violence of Black women. The authors write:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggles against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.” (p. 210)

CRC’s statement is an expansive vision of liberation with Black women at the center of a radical politic. It is a call to value Black women’s lives in an era of police impunity and terrorization. And in their radical politics of the antiracist, anticolonial, and anti-imperialism stance that they take, one that includes an understanding of the heterogeneity and plurality of Black women’s experiences, it becomes so urgent for Latinx scholars to also include an understanding of the heterogeneity and plurality of *Latinidad* always *already* as Afro-Latina/o/x and Indigenous. Black feminist and U.S. woman of color theorizing make this possible not only in expanding the terms but also as a model of a practice of coalition. In this era of #BlackLivesMatter, we need to recognize and acknowledge our theoretical mothers and grandmothers and the history of the terms we use so that we refuse to erase Black feminist and woman of color contributions in our own scholarship.

Chicana/Latina Pedagogies and Experiential Knowledge

The 2006 anthology *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemologies*, edited by Dolores Delgado Bernal, C. Alejandra Elenes, Francisca E. Godinez, and Sofia Villenas (2006), draws from U.S. woman of color scholarship, where Moraga and Anzaldúa’s (1981) *Bridge*, Anzaldúa’s (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and

Chela Sandoval's early work on U.S. third world feminism and *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) form the major theoretical backbone of the text. Centering Chicana/Latina ways of knowing and a critical set of interpretive practices, *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life* (2006) emphasizes the use of testimonio methods and standpoint epistemologies. The contributions of coalitional thinking, reflexive pedagogies, and the critique of categorical logic are central themes in U.S. woman of color theorizing and are important issues in studies of educational problems. Engaging with U.S. feminist of color thought directs the authors to think through multi-layered, intersectional problems that current frameworks fail or are unable to nuance. Yet there is a legibility problem when education scholars omit U.S. woman of color theory in their work or misrecognize the theoretical offerings of this field of studies.

It is in this space of the chapters of *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) where education researchers are offering pedagogies of survivance, *consejos*, *respeto* and the brown body. It is illuminating a writing practice drawn from U.S. feminists of color who, writing against erasure and into subjectivity, take knowledge produced from lived experience and infuse them with a critique of the racialized, gendered, and political worlds in which they move and exist. The pedagogies of experiential knowledge and the politics that come from this interrogation are unsettled in order to make more visible the contributions of U.S. feminists of color, defending experiential knowledge in every chapter of the book. What is important is addressing the problem of U.S. woman of color writing being dismissed as "messy text" and as raw, unmediated experience. These responses often dismiss woman of color writings as "old school." Their writings are too often evaluated under different standards than mainstream theorists and often end up listed toward the end of course syllabi, if at all. The pedagogies of relation that undergird much of the texts of women of color illuminate the cumulative impact of their thinking coalitionally, where the artifacts of a collection of essays such as *Bridge* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981) and *Haciendo Caras* (Anzaldúa, 1990) become the material representations of coalition and the starting point for new thinking in educational studies.

Limitations and Expansions of Queer and Critical Pedagogies

Deriving from Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, critical pedagogy questions inequitable power manifestations in educational settings. Freire (1970) delineates that oppression is mutually constitutive to dehumanization, and he identifies the ways that schools

(pedagogy) reproduce a knowledge hierarchy between teacher and student. The banking method—the one-way transaction of teachers depositing knowledge in a student’s presumed knowledgeless brain—is the strategy that creates a “culture of silence” in classrooms. Freire (1970) asserts that a pedagogy of the oppressed, in turn, (re)humanizes and engages the oppressed in social transformation. Queer pedagogy is one of the offshoots of critical pedagogy, and it unveils how heterosexuality is normalized in curriculum and classrooms (Drazenovich, 2015). Further, queer pedagogy values queer students’ experiences and knowledges as contestation to heteronormativity. However, as Aguilar-Hernández (2020) finds, the challenge of queer pedagogy is its “limitation of...its primary focus on sexuality, leaving Queer of Color perspectives and knowledges on the margins” (p. 5). In other words, queer pedagogy expanded the scope of critical pedagogy while maintaining queer knowledge as white. Building on the contributions of QueerCrit scholarship in the law (Valdes, 2000; Velez Martinez, 2015) and in education (Kumashiro, 2001; Misawa, 2010), Aguilar-Hernández (2020) proposes a “queer critical race pedagogy” that is explicitly and simultaneously anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, and anti-oppressive.

Kevin K. Kumashiro’s (2001) edited anthology, *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality: Queer Students of Color and Anti-Oppressive Education*, is the earliest collection we identified that contains theoretical and pedagogical writings about queer students of color, including Chicana/o, Latina/o, Asian Pacific American, Black, Native American, and mixed-race peoples. As the title suggests, Kumashiro (2001) engages the “troubling intersections” of race and sexuality “that educators must acknowledge and work through...if they are to address queer students of color and challenge both racism and heterosexism in schools (that is, engage in antiracist, antiheterosexist education)” (p. 2). Responding to the need for additional collections of writing on queer students of color, Ed Brockenbrough (2013) and Lance T. McCready (2013) co-edited a special issue, “Queers of Color and Anti-Oppressive Knowledge Production” for *Curriculum Inquiry* where they activate a “Queer of Color” analytical framework to “interrupt hegemonic processes of knowledge production” and to “inform transformative pedagogical work that benefits queers of color specifically and anti-oppressive educational scholarship more broadly” (Brockenbrough, 2013, p. 427). The two collections expand critical pedagogy to interrogate the intersections of race and sexuality.

Trans* pedagogy also expands critical pedagogy and is a “concentrated effort to explore trans* subjectivities, identities, and experiences in educational contexts” (Nicolazzo, Marine, and Galarte, 2015, p. 367). The issue “Trans*formational Pedagogies” in the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* sought “to reinvigorate ongoing conversations about education as a practice of freedom by exploring ways in which educational processes can specifically challenge the oppressive aspects of the binary gender system” (Nicolazzo, Marine, and Galarte, 2015, p. 368). Responding to the paucity of trans* pedagogical frameworks and informed by his teaching experience with elementary school students, Keenan (2017) proposed a “critical trans pedagogy framework” that unscripts gender and resists definition, as “there is no universal definition or experience of transness” (p. 551). LeMaster and Johnson (2019) argue that while school leaders are called to be inclusive of trans* students on campus, “pedagogues are confronted with the limits of their/our embodied knowing about gender” (p. 191). LeMaster and Johnson (2019) propose a “critical trans-affirming pedagogy [that] is a labor that seeks to shift the hegemonic ways in which we communicate, or are expected to communicate [about] gender identities...” (p. 192).

Specific to the theme of this special issue, we highlight three manuscripts that contribute to earlier articulations of queer/trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x pedagogies. Anita Tijerina Revilla’s (2004) essay “Muxerista Pedagogy: Raza Womyn Teaching Social Justice Through Student Activism” positions Raza Womyn, a Chicana/Latina feminist student activist organization, as a site where pedagogy is developed outside of the traditional classroom. Rooted in Chicana feminist and critical race theory in education, muxerista pedagogy “involves dialogue, praxis (theory and action), and dialectical exchange” to discuss multiple forms of oppression and garners “commitment to creating social change” (Tijerina Revilla, 2004, pp. 83-84). Informed by his experiences as an educator in higher education, Eddy F. Alvarez Jr.’s (2014) essay “Jotería Pedagogy, SWAPA, and Sandovalian Approaches to Liberation” defines jotería pedagogy as feminist, intentional, critical, intersectional, and that centers the lived heterogeneous experiences (and erasures, omissions) of jotería bodies. Finally, Francisco J. Galarte’s (2014) essay, “On Trans* Chican@s: Amor, Justicia, y Dignidad” reflects on the status of Jotería Studies by asserting, “Jotería, listen to what your trans* brothers and sisters are saying, and remember those long forgotten” (p. 229). A reconfiguration of Anzaldúa’s (1987) call to “listen to what your jotería is saying” (p. 107), Galarte (2014) urges jotería scholars to

engage trans* Chican@ pedagogies, beyond inclusion and recognition, to “assert the indispensability of trans-analytics to the aim and scope of jotería studies as a critical project” (p. 233). We situate Galarte’s (2014) argument as a directive to interrupt trans* omissions in current and future research projects that aim to build anti-oppressive pedagogies. Notably, the three manuscripts weave the contributions of women of color, Chicana/Latina, and critical pedagogy that enlighten their conceptualizations of queer/trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x pedagogies.

This Special Issue

In the first article, **“Terca, pero no pendeja: Terquedad as Theory and Praxis of Transformative Gestures in Higher Education,”** Omi S. Salas-SantaCruz offers a theory of terquedad to analyze the complex relationships that queer and trans* people of color traverse and negotiate at R I universities. Grounded in Anzaldúan theory, Salas-SantaCruz charts how Quiahuitl, a Xicana queer woman doctoral student, performs terquedad, or stubborn gestures, that refuse gendered expectations and academic violence in the subject’s daily encounters. Terquedad, Salas-SantaCruz profoundly argues, is re-made into a praxis of refusal, where Quiahuitl transforms the spaces around her within higher education.

The second article, **“Cyborg Jotería Pedagogies: Latinx Drag Queens Leveraging Communication Ecologies in the Age of the Digital and Social Displacement”** by José Ramón Lizárraga and Arturo Cortez documents how Latinx drag queens have bridged digital performances with pedagogy. The authors discuss Persia, Reina de Aztlan, and RuPawl, whose digital performances serve as queer gestures that inform cyborg jotería pedagogy. Their amplification signals the necessity of engaging digital platforms within critical pedagogical practices that border-cross and fluctuate gender, race, and sexuality. The third article, **“Imagining the Future of Jotería Studies as a Framework in the Field of Higher Education,”** by Antonio Duran, Roberto Orozco, and Sergio Gonzalez, argues that Jotería Studies can serve as a framework to inform pedagogy, research, and student affairs practices in higher education. The authors provide recommendations for educators, researchers, and student affairs practitioners, arguing for the need for specificity of frameworks that center queer Latinx/a/o students as one way to combat intersecting systems of oppression that higher education replicates.

Drawing from theories of decolonial feminisms, the fourth article by Andrea del Carmen Vázquez, **“Joaquin’s Refusal: An Embodied and Geographic Active Subjectivity,”** is an ethnographic snapshot of the experiences of queer Latinx students at Villa High, a rural school in California, where students literally find themselves in the margins of their school space. Vázquez provocatively suggests that the Latinx students’ refusal to acknowledge the gender-neutral bathroom—at the edge of the school in a room used as storage—is an example of a queer and resistant sociality. In this space, students have learned to recognize each other’s “reclamations to dispossession” by learning to travel to each other’s worlds to understand how the “no” is a radical gesture. In the fifth article, **“Centering the “T”: Envisioning a Trans Jotería Pedagogy,”** Jack Caraves begins with a letter-poem to his family, tracing the relationships between his mother, his transition, and his emerging critical consciousness. It is a powerful narrative that centers the vulnerability of the scholar’s position as a trans* Chicana educator and the productive engagement of the disruption that his change elicits in the students that move him toward a trans* jotería pedagogy. Thinking with Moraga’s theory in the flesh and Anzaldúa’s *conocimiento*, Caraves argues that these practices of vulnerability and disruption must be central in a pedagogy of trans* jotería.

In the sixth article, **“The Power of Testimonio Pedagogy: Teaching Chicana Lesbian Fiction in a Chicana Feminisms Course at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest,”** Tanya Diaz-Kozlowski offers a testimonial pedagogy that bridges the epistemic disobedience the author witnesses her students cultivate in a Chicana Feminisms course. What is illuminating is the careful tracing of Diaz-Kozlowski’s pedagogy to Black women writers such as Toni Morrison, and the linking of Chicana feminist thought to Black women’s literature. Notions of silence, sexual assault, and dysfunctional and often violent households were discussed and interrogated, where students understood intimately that an interrogation of their own experiences was necessary not only for their own emerging political consciousnesses but also for their own healing. Our final offering is Wanda Alarcón’s **“Reading and Remembering Butch-Femme Worlds,”** a meditation on loss, recuperation, and lesbian histories and cultures. In this article, Alarcón leads us through a collective effort of creating and teaching a course that centers butch-femme working class lives, where the limitations of “queer” as a category become illuminated. She argues that “butch-femme is not the same as queer or LGBTQ,” and in the building of a course in LGBTQ Studies,

suggests the problem of the term “queer” needing negotiations and interventions by people of color. The stakes are high for naming butch-femme worlds in terms of race and class and erasure. Alarcón’s contribution of the butch-femme worlds syllabus at the end of her article reflects a similar practice of Black feminist scholarship, where sample syllabi of Black women’s literature, whose work is rarely taught in the university, is often found in U.S. woman of color anthologies as a gesture of accessibility and inclusion.

Cindy’s Reflection

Photographer Laura Aguilar was a friend and teaching colleague whom I recruited to work with college bound high school youth in our summer enrichment programs. We stayed friends and even helped in a Joshua Tree photography session. She shared with us her life story, and we visited her at home, bringing gifts. One of those gifts was a blue wool poncho with the image of the Virgin de Guadalupe emblazoned in the front. It would be easy for Laura to slip on for those afternoons in Joshua Tree when hikers wandered unexpectedly into her photography shoots. I valued our friendship greatly during our time in Los Angeles.

We left Los Angeles in 2006 for New York and then back to Santa Cruz, California. Rarely were my partner and I able to visit Los Angeles as much as we would have liked. But we would not miss the 2017 *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA* art showings, as the Vincent Price Art Gallery at East Los Angeles College featured a solo show of Laura Aguilar’s photography titled “Show and Tell.”

I’d been to the Plush Pony to do HIV education work in the late 80s and early 90s—to hand out safe sex kits and information about testing to the mainly Mexicana working class clientele. This was a butch-femme bar. You could only get beer or wine. There was a small dance floor and a jukebox filled with Mexican ballads of lost loves, cumbias and foot-tapping rancheras. But we only knew Laura’s Plush Pony Series photographs from essays and online galleries, these portraits of butches and their *rucas* and after-work beers with friends, marimachas looking straight into the camera eye, thumbs tucked into their belts. The images are fierce.

The Vincent Price Art Gallery is a beautiful space (see Figure 1). I remember it when it once was held in two portable classrooms and how this opening was also a celebration of the gallery space itself. But for my partner and I, it became a joyful reunion of friends whom we hadn’t seen since we left L.A.: Becky Villaseñor, Sandy Guevara, Judy Ornelas Sisneros, Renee

Figure 1

Image of Entrance to Laura Aguilar's Solo Exhibition, "Show and Tell," at the Vincent Price Gallery



Note. Photo by Judy Ornelas Sisneros, fierce documentarian of Queer L.A.

Martinez, Lynn Ballen, Verónica Reyes, Gino Conti, Robin Poldosky, my ex-high school students, dozens of friends from the Women of ACT-UP/Los Angeles, La Red, Queer Nation, Lesbianas Unidas, Women's International Day events, and of course Laura Aguilar, reminding us of the lesbiana/marimacha/woman of color dyke scenes that were so vibrant in the dance clubs, bars, poetry events, performance art, zine collectives, fashion shows, the butch-femme softball games, coffeehouses (remember Little Frida's?), the National Queer Arts Festival. This remembering is not supposed to be nostalgic for lesbian Los Angeles of the 80s and 90s. But for the few hours that we were at the Vincent Price surrounded by Laura's huge photographs of marimachas, lesbianas, malfloras, the relationships we had thought lost in time were made

anew, connecting with old friends, making new friends, planning new futures, strategizing over cold beers and good food.

In Los Angeles, I did not think of our collection of lesbianas as *jotería*. I thought of us as a dyke nation or sometimes we used the term “jotas” when we were joking, especially after Wanda Alarcón’s *Jota* zines were published and making the rounds at queer and lesbian events in the early 2000s. If I had to think about a coalition of working-class hard-scrabble lesbians who were activists/artists/teachers/troublemakers, I do not think that I would use the term *jotería* to describe the plural worlds of lesbian Los Angeles. To be lesbian in Los Angeles is to be coalitional. Many of us were and still are woven into the fabric of activism in Los Angeles on many fronts—working at Planned Parenthood or as teachers with queer youth, public artists and muralists, with radio programming and poetry readings and the IMRU show or even as archivists at the June Mazer Lesbian Collections. What Laura Aguilar’s work did at the Vincent Price was to make much needed space for these communities of queer, trans*, and lesbian women to connect once again with each other. The space was complex, temporal, and multiplicitous. Little did we know how these connections were going to be necessary for survival just 2 years later in our struggle for coalition on multiple fronts.

José’s Reflection

As a scholar-activist and educator, I appreciate the ways in which “*jotería*” has been reclaimed in scholarly projects, the arts, and community-based organizing. I grew up hearing that word as an insult and threat. Cherrie Moraga’s (in Moraga, 1993) essay, “Queer Aztlan: The Re-formation of Chicano Tribe,” redefined the term as an empowering communal identifier that refused to separate queer from Chicana/o identities. Aside from Moraga’s work, Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and Richard T. Rodríguez’s (2002) article, “Serial Kinship: Representing La Familia in Early Chicano Publications,” disrupted my preconceived assumption that queer Chicanas/os were absent in the historical past. Further, my membership and leadership roles in La Jotería de UCLA, the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Joto Caucus, and the early years of the Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship (AJAAS) placed me at the center of intellectual and grassroots conversations that were mapping “Jotería Studies” while debating its limitations and possibilities, specifically in relationship to its genealogical relationship to the U.S. southwest Chicana/o communities.

During my master's program in Latin American Studies, I focused on locating additional scholarship on queer Latinas/os, especially of Central American and Caribbean nationalities. In March of 2006, I attended a talk at UCLA where Horacio Roque Ramírez, queer Salvadoran scholar, spoke about his oral history and archival research that charted the histories of queer Latinas/os in the San Francisco bay area. One of the reminders that Horacio offered me that day is that queer Latina/o history needed to be recovered. In various academic and informal conversations, Horacio shared with me that he identified as a CentroMaricón, an identity that merged his Central American, Salvadoran, immigrant, and gay identities. Today, I understand his assertion of CentroMaricón as exemplary of the need to document the myriad of identities claimed by queer and trans* Latinas/os/xs. Although not the sole focus of his body of scholarship, several queer and trans* Latina/o identities (including Mexican, Central American, Caribbean, and South American) are captured in his publications. That is, queer and trans* Latinas/os/xs are heterogeneous, of multiple nationalities, geographies, genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and experiences.

In fall of 2017, I visited "Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.", one of 70+ exhibitions that formed part of *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA*, a "collaborative effort from arts institutions across Southern California" that explored "Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles" (Pacific Standard Time, 2017). Axis Mundo "...mark[ed] the first historical presentation of groundbreaking art, music, and performance from a network of queer Chicana/o artists in Southern California" (Museum of Contemporary Art, 2017). I was moved, and at moments overwhelmed, as I walked through the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Pacific Design Center. I was particularly struck when I saw a photo of seven Chicanas/os, wearing light yellow t-shirts with the word "maricón" or "malflora" across their chests (see Figure 2). "Malflora" is a variation of Spanish-language Latina/o/x terms used to identify lesbians. The t-shirts were designed by queer Chicano Joey Terrill, and the photo, by Teddy Sandoval, was taken during the 1976 Los Angeles Christopher Street West Pride Parade:

The *malflora* and *maricón* T-shirts take Terrill's assertion of pride and visibility one step further, affirming Chicanidad within a queer culture that was at times resistant to racial difference...[they] place Chicana/os as active participants in the emerging generation of gay and lesbian activists of the 1970s. (Frantz, 2017, p. 67)

I smiled, felt empowered, and was reminded of Horacio Roque Ramírez's assertion. Finding "maricón" and "malflora" was evidence of the multiplicity of identities of queer and trans* Chicanas/os and Latinas/os. As a scholar interested in anti-oppressive pedagogy, the exhibition displayed the urgency of scholarship and curriculum to illustrate the plurality of language that is reflective of historical and geographic locations.

Figure 2

Image of Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A. Catalog Cover



Conclusion

The authors in this issue use multiple terms, concepts, and theories to discuss queer and trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x pedagogies. We celebrate the range of terms as a necessary and ongoing exploration of the heterogeneity of the queer and trans* communities of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x descent. Simultaneously, we acknowledge the need for future special issues, anthologies, and manuscripts that expand on additional representations, specifically of Central American, Caribbean, South American, Black, Afro-Latina/o/x, Indigenous, undocumented, and emerging positionalities. Future manuscripts need to build pedagogies that reflect omitted and emerging gender and sexual identities, as the writings before us have.

The project of synthesizing queer and trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x pedagogies is multi-dimensional. It includes personal reflection, historical recovery, scholarly intervention, praxis (theory and action), and a commitment to ending all forms of oppression. This being the first special issue on this topic leads us to ask: Considering the heterogeneity within Latina/o/x communities, what are the concepts, terms, and keywords that aren't yet named in scholarly works? Where are the Indigenous and Black queer and trans* knowledges and contributions to Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x pedagogies? How does pedagogy change when centering queer and trans* Central American, Caribbean, and South American contexts? Beyond different languages and terms, how are the pedagogies different? What does it mean to teach and learn about social locations/subjectivities not yet covered? What does it mean to be, for example, a first-generation queer Central American learning from Horacio Roque Ramírez's scholarship? What kind of work is necessary to think about a plural Chicanidad and Latinidad that centers Afro-Latinx and Indigenous knowledges? And what kinds of practices do U.S. feminists of color offer for queer and trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x education research? We only imagine that those projects are underway, being theorized and developed in classrooms, digital platforms, and communities across the Americas. We anticipate that future projects will answer these questions and pose new ones.

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Terca, pero no pendeja:

Terquedad as Theory and Praxis of Transformative Gestures in Higher Education

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Abstract

In this article, the author explores the concept of terquedad or waywardness as a blueprint towards gender/queer justice in education. Using María Lugones's (2003) theorizing resistance against multiple oppressions, the author presents Gloria Anzaldúa's writings in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981/2015) as a project of storying the plurality of terquedad. In doing so, the author calls for a theory and praxis of terquedad as a framework to understand the embodied resistances queer and trans-Latinx/e students deploy as textual inconveniences to push back and resist the "institutional grammars" of U.S. universities (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Crawford & Ostrom, 1995). Through a plática methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016), the author introduces Quiahuitl, a doctoral student engaging with a praxis of terquedad when confronted with institutional and sexual violence as she moves within and against the geographies and power structures of the university.

Keywords: queer gesture, embodied refusals, gender/queer educational justice, decolonial agency and resistance, resistance research in higher education

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.14.2.357>

I look through my photos.

I am three, five, seven years old.

La terquedad is with me.

“Cierra las piernas, asi como las otras niñas”

“Una sonrisita”

“Ahora aca, solo los niños del salon”

“Sientate bien. Sonrie”

“1-2-3 Cheese”

Que terca eres.

Figure 1

“Las niñas cierran las piernas.”



Note. Three children are sitting on the floor wearing ballet attire. The author is sitting on the left side of the frame staring at the photographer sitting with their legs open. The other two children to their right have their legs closed and are both giving a scornful side-eye to the author for not sitting properly for the photo.

Figure 2

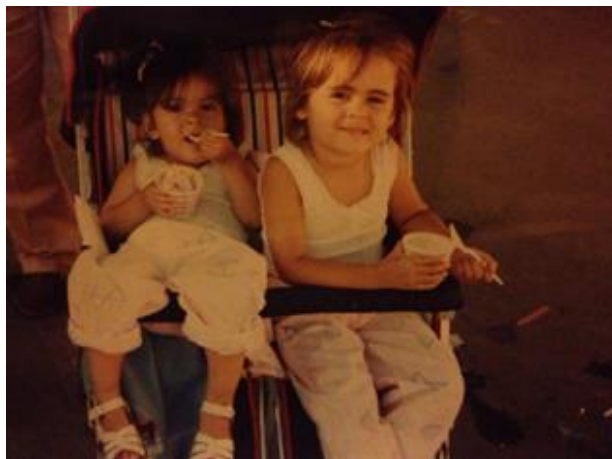
“Sonrían.”



Note. Two children are sitting outside in the patio of an apartment complex. The author is sitting on the first step of a staircase leaning on the wall and their legs extended towards the step. They have a stoic expression, making direct eye contact to the lens as they are captured grabbing a snack from a plastic bag. The second child is turned to the camera and smiling for the photo as he holds a PlayDoh roller.

Figure 3

“Siéntate bien.”



Note. There are two children sitting on a double stroller. The author is on the left side of the stroller with their legs over the guardrail and leaning back, refusing to sit properly. They are holding a spoon to their mouth and eating ice cream. The child on the right is seated properly on the stroller with her feet under the guardrail and using a waist belt. This child is holding an ice cream, has her spoon to the side of her cup, and is smiling for the photo.

Figure 4

“Ahora aca, solo los niños.”



Note. The image is a photography cutoff. There are six visible children and three others who were cut off from the frame. The author is on the far left with an affiliative smile that triggers an upward pull of their lip and dimpling of their cheeks. They placed themselves with the boys.

My childhood photos where I refuse to make my body do what is being asked or the cutoffs that reframe me as being part of “los niños” captures mi terquedad,¹ a term I use in its pluralist sense as a source of survival and resistance but which has been used historically to describe willful defiance, stubbornness, misconduct, and insubordination to authority. In reflecting on the uses of photography, Roland Barthes (1979/2010) wrote that photos are not just images, but they can also be snippets of a just image where we can decode a new consciousness. I share with you my photos as a blueprint towards understanding gender/queer justice through the notion of stubborn gestures or the political dispositions that explicitly understand and contest oppression through embodied refusals. In this instance, I consider the photos of my childhood as capturing the ephemeral function of terquedad, a series of active subjective strategies caught in the process of what María Lugones (2003) describes as the oppressing ⇌ resisting relationship, where oppression and resistance are ongoing and incomplete (p. 17). Terquedad, in this case, is a resistance subjectivity at the level of gestures

¹ I use the verb terquedad to denote a praxis of stubbornness/waywardness among Latinx/Latine people. The goal of this essay is to uncover a pluralist understanding of stubbornness in each of its forms: as identity (terca/rebelde), as praxis of, as disciplinary gesture, as resistance sociality, as gesture of refusal, and as the embodiment of multiplicity and “mestiza consciousness” (Anzaldúa, 1987). I use terquedad, rebellious gestures, and stubbornness interchangeably.

when confronted with the cultural violence of gender dualism and other forms of a dichotomous self.

I begin with these images with the pedagogical intention of *looking for terquedad* in what Cindy Cruz (2013) describes as “the smallest resistances that come from the body” and are produced within infra-political hangouts that serve as spaces to conspire and breathe (p. 556). Considering the ways bodily movements are always already assigned cultural meaning, I note how through the recognition of the smallest of queer gestures² such as practicing *jotería*³ in the academy, and even perhaps recognizing waywardness in my childhood photos, is a means to call on the past to resist the present. A resistance sociality among Latinx/Latine peoples’ bodies and gestures as means to muddle with, desire, and even find pleasures when confronted with oppressive institutional and racial grammars⁴ (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Crawford & Ostrom, 1995) that structure corporeal and aesthetic practices in higher education. Terquedad in the academy is thus a form of resistance sociality by listening and uplifting the “I-We” of “what your *jotería* is saying” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 85).

In the first part of this paper, I read through Gloria Anzaldúa’s book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and her essays “La Prieta” and “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers” in the edited volume *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981/2015) to listen to her moments of terquedad as a multivalent resistant subjectivity. I use Lugones’s (2003) theorizing resistance against multiple oppressions to discuss Anzaldúa’s terquedad as a tactical embodied strategy when confronted with the meaning-making and disciplinary grammars of the dominant culture. In doing so, I highlight Anzaldúa’s epistemic

² I follow Muñoz’s (2009) and Rodríguez’s (2014) concept of queer gestures as a repertoire of cultural modes of knowing enacted through bodily movements, feelings, mannerisms, and linguistic behaviors that act/communicate through the interpretation of performance. Queer gestures consist of both cultural memory and a history.

³ I use the term *jotería* as a queer political body consisting of non-normative genders, sexualities, gestures, and as a “decolonizing social movement that seeks to move away from normative colonizing relations of power and toward horizontal, personal/collective, transgenerational, and transdisciplinary forms of thinking, being, and acting that make dialogue, respect, love, spirituality, and healing central to both vision and praxis” (Bañales, 2014, p. 8).

⁴ According to Crawford and Ostrom (1995), the central pieces of an institution are strategies, norms, and rules, which can be distinguished by their grammatical texture. According to Ostrom (2005) these grammars include “the prescriptions that humans use to organize all forms of repetitive and structured interactions” (p. 3). Similarly, Bonilla-Silva (2012) describes the racial grammars that shape and frame institutions. The notion of grammar moves beyond linguistic connotations to encompass vision, emotion, and sense of aesthetics.

shift about the notion of stubbornness: one that shifts from an imposed identity to a resistant subjectivity as the basis to navigate within, across, and in-between worlds of meaning, survival, and resistance (Lugones, 2003; Ortega, 2016). In other words, I treat Anzaldúa's embodiment of terquedad as the embodiment of her mestiza consciousness or the limen, "the place where one becomes most fully aware of one's multiplicity" (Lugones, 2003, p. 59).

In the second part of this article, I unpack the political possibilities of terquedad in spaces of higher education. Through a plática methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) I turn to a case study of Quiahuitl,⁶ a doctoral student engaged in a praxis of terquedad as an embodied refusal of the grammars of the university. Specifically, I offer the praxis of terquedad in the academy as a framework to unpack the multiple ways queer and trans Black, Indigenous, and Students of Color hold on to their complexity, where their body or specific aspects of one's body becomes a textual inconvenience to push back or disrupt the grammatical textures of institutions of higher education.

Towards a Theory of Terquedad: Trespassing "Worlds" of Stubbornness

Anzaldúa (1987, 1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) has made a crucial theoretical contribution to studies on the relationship among multiple subjectivities, survival, and resistance, a relationship central to personal and institutional transformation when confronted with the ongoing material, emotional, spiritual, and cultural violence of imperialism. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and her writings in the co-edited collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981/2015), Anzaldúa demonstrates a unique concern with the plurality of consciousness that emerges in the borderlands as the basis to contest the meaning, location, and source of knowledge production. However, instead of expanding the theory of consciousness in Cartesian terms, Anzaldúa makes the body a central concern to Brown epistemologies, both as the source of knowledge and a battleground over asserting decolonial agency (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cruz, 2001; Villenas, 2010). I offer her texts as a way of listening to her body. That is, I look for Anzaldúa's moments of terquedad to uncover its pluralist use as she navigates between, across, and within

⁵ I follow María Lugones's (2003) use of the word "worlds" to denote the spatio-temporal dynamics that construct social space.

⁶ Quiahuitl is pronounced *Key-a-wit*.

an imposed colonial/modern identity, a resistance and survival praxis, and as the embodiment of liminality.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa (1987) describes “movements of rebellion” as a resistant sociality that emerges through the constant *guerra de independencia*, a clash between the demands of the dominant culture, *la cultura que traiciona*, and the stubborn “Will” of a mestiza consciousness (p. 16). She writes, “La mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (p. 78). This inner war, I argue, is a war toward asserting multiple definitions, uses, and understandings of *terquedad*.

Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1981/2015a) childhood memories are stories of her *terquedad* where the institution of the family, church, and school try to assert their Will. Anzaldúa (1987) described when *terquedad* became an identity, an ideological system of oppression capable of hailing her (Althusser, 1970) under the signs of rebellion for demanding her name be pronounced correctly and her uses of the Spanish language: “hocicona, repelona, chismosa, having a big mouth, questioning” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 54). In other words, *terquedad* became “la seña” (Anzaldúa, 1981/2015a, p. 199) that her growth was going sideways.⁷ She recalls,

At a very early age, I had a strong sense of who I was and what I was about and what was fair. I had a stubborn will. It tried to constantly mobilize my soul under my own regime, to live life on my own terms no matter how unsuitable to others they were.

Terca. Even as a child, I would not obey (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 16.).

Anzaldúa as a *terca* is an attempt of the dominant culture to bring her under its Will, “to get rid of our accents” (1987, p. 54), a disciplinary subjectivity with the goal of re-orienting her growth by recruiting others to show her *las reglas* and guide her towards the grammars of the dominant culture. That is, to get rid of different ways of using *terquedad*. It is at this moment, the interplay between being made a Subject of *terquedad* and *terquedad* as resistance that allows her to see beyond the ideologies of the dominant culture. She continues,

⁷ Stockton (2009) coins the term growing sideways to describe ways of growing that defy heteronormative and linear trajectories toward marriage and reproduction. Her work demonstrates that in many literary renditions of the child, there exists an assumption that children should grow up and toward heterosexuality. In the essay “La Prieta,” (1981/2015a) Gloria Anzaldúa links rebellion to authority and objection to submission as a reflection of “an image” of being strange, abnormal, and queer (p. 199).

There is a rebel in me—the Shadow-Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts. (1987, p. 16)

In this statement, Anzaldúa (1987) navigates the externalization and multivalence of *terquedad* as she moves across the logic of oppression and resistance. She distinguishes between the ideologies of “my Will,” as the conscious Will of the dominant culture, and the “sovereign Will within” (p. 66) as a praxis of active subjectivity when she announces that “wild tongues can’t be tamed” (p. 54). Here, *la terquedad*, the rebel that bolts, is a survival and resistance praxis against the cultural tyranny of patriarchy and the Anglo culture that try to capture her under the one meaning of *terquedad*.

Unlike hegemonic notions of ideology, which establish ideology as the “like-the-unconscious,” as a process of misrecognition by the subject (Leonardo, 2010, p. 200), Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) writing describes how she travels across and within the ideologies of the borderlands, in which *terquedad* does not fully exhaust her subjectivity if we consider her uses of stubbornness through a lens of resistance and transformation (Lugones, 2003).

Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) heightened awareness of seeing herself as being thoroughly, but not exhaustively “socially constructed in terms of power” (Lugones, 2003, p. 9), is reflected in her writings of *La Coatlicue*. According to Anzaldúa (1987), *La Coatlicue* depicts the contradictory: *el otro yo* (p. 47), another self that exists in the shadow of the representation of her *as being* stubborn but that informs her experiences *of stubbornness*. On the one hand, her writing functions as a mirror of her identity, as the representation of the colonial imposition, *terca* (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 97). On the other hand, her writing ruptures “false mirrors” and announces she is not fully captive of the representation of herself. Her writing becomes a “seeing through” into her inner faces, *las caras por dentro* (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvii). In other words, Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) *terquedad* is not merely a reaction to oppression, but an act of resistant meaning-making on behalf of the active subject (Lugones, 2003, pp. 13, 97). Given the propensity of the dominant culture to externalize stubbornness onto particular body parts, such as her stubborn/wild tongue, Anzaldúa (1987,

1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) shifts her *terquedad* to the act of writing as a performance of her Will.

In “Speaking in Tongues,” Anzaldúa (1981/2015b) evokes the trespassing of the dangers in writing. She writes,

the hand is an extension of our will, it holds the pen, the brush, the lump of clay. It is both a symbol and a vehicle of communication. Without the hand the voice is helpless. When hand and tongue work together, they unite art and politics and attack the dominant ideology...Creative acts are forms of political activism employing definite aesthetic strategies for resisting dominant cultural norms and are not merely aesthetic exercises.” (p. xxiv)

Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1990, 1981/2015, 1981/2015b) aesthetic writing strategies function as a path toward transformation. Her writings exist as moments of *terquedad*, as a border tongue in which she develops the language of survival and resistance through “the path of red and black ink” (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 65, 69). For her, the spirit with no manners, *terquedad*, puts her in a state of psychic unrest, using sensory deprivation to imagine and desire otherwise. A form of writing that has an identity: stubborn, multiple, and contradictory, capable of changing her mind and body, belief system, and consciousness, the kind of performance work that manifests the same needs as a person, *a la que baña y viste* (p. 67). Anzaldúa’s writing is a modality of deliberate stubbornness as a praxis to resist the status quo. The art of *terquedad* is therefore an active subjectivity that is culturally and socially mediated with the intention of “making [new] meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be” (p. 73). The act of *terquedad* is an embodied creative process of becoming a subject of our own discourses through a process of disidentification (Alarcón, 1990), or in this case, a disidentification with one discursive theme of *terquedad* that serves as a “remaking” through her body and leads to “a path /state to something else” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 73). In other words, *terquedad* is a praxis of embodied refusals capable of transforming herself, the symbolic, and the material world.

Moreover, Anzaldúa (1987) conceives of her stubbornness as a political body embedded with the cultural memory of *los atravesados*, a political body that is malleable, preserving, and waiting. She writes,

Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us. We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue,

we've kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant *norteamericano culture*...Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the mestizas and mestizos, will remain (p. 64).

Here, *terquedad* has social and cultural memory and is corporeally situated in charge of social, cultural, and spiritual survival. It is a form of survival and resistance through a series of political gestures, feelings, spirit, and images that have a history of resistance, from Aztec rites of mourning as defiance, La Llorona's lament as means to protest, and Anzaldúa's (1987) choice to be queer as a conscious decision of being two in one body, a "half and half" with feet in both worlds (pp. 19-21).

Listening to *terquedad* is then an anticipatory "illumination of the not-yet-conscious" to understand and critique the present (Muñoz, 2009, p. 28, 84). It is a listening of Anzaldúa's childhood memories of stubbornness/waywardness as a blueprint towards a new consciousness (1981/2015a). An attention to how Anzaldúa's *terquedad* is always at work, always in performance. Patient, quiet, proud, and even wild. Flawed but "infused with spirit" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 67). *Terquedad* has an aesthetic. It is messy, defiant, unbound, clumsy, porous, complex, and conflicted. It contrasts with what Anzaldúa (1987) describes as the sign of Western virtuosity and rationality (p. 67–68). It is what drives Anzaldúa to dig deeper into her wounds, which forces her to grow up quickly, rough, unyielding (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1981/2015a). It is imbued with transformative power as it drives the endless cycle of "making it worse, making it better" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 73), a going "through the dangers" in hopes of not repeating the performance (Anzaldúa, 1981/2015b, p. 163). Finally, *terquedad* serves as a survival mechanism that allows political actions to be unnoticed, unrecognized, non-threatening—yet it poses a constant threat as they are constantly misrecognized through the grammars of the oppressor as ignorance or self-sabotage. While *la terquedad* in Anzaldúa takes the form of writing, *terquedad* takes forms in many ways as one chooses the gestures of refusal and the creative acts in accordance to the worlds we may inhabit.

Platicando con Quiahuitl

Quiahuitl is a Xicana queer woman who traces her roots to Indigenous pueblos of the Nahuatzen mountains of Michoacán. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate that engages in *terquedad* as a resistant praxis to navigate the demands of professionalism in her doctoral

program. I employed a plática methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) to unpack her *terquedad*. According to Fierros & Delgado Bernal (2016), "pláticas move from method to methodology when they are embedded within the rich, analytical theory of Chicana feminism, engage contributors as knowledge creators essential to the meaning-making process, draw on life experiences, and provide a potential space for healing" (p. 115).

For the last six years Quiahuitl and I engaged in multiple *cara a cara* and synchronous conferencing pláticas about our doctoral program. These pláticas served both as a strategy to collect data and to theorize resistance practices at the level of gestures. In this context, pláticas served as a form of "organizational gossip" (Hafen, 2004), a process of information and knowledge sharing that attempts to manage and engage with organizational regulation and resistance. These pláticas are thus in themselves infrapolitical resistance hangouts and rich sites of knowledge and information production (Cruz, 2013).

In this particular study, I used dated and time-stamped transcripts and images of thirty-five one-on-one pláticas in the span of five years between July 1st, 2015 and April 15th, 2020. Through a process of revisiting and discussing the themes and transcripts of our previous pláticas, Quiahuitl was able to theorize her lived experiences to co-construct knowledge pretraining to the pedagogies of professionalism as graduate students of color in predominantly white universities, procedural and institutional knowledge regarding degree milestones, petitions, appeals, and navigating faculty hazing and violence. The theme of *terquedad* as stubborn gestures of refusal emerged inductively as we discussed institutional demands and regulations.

The research agenda remained open and evolving as Quiahuitl read, approved, and provided feedback on all the drafts to this paper. As co-participant in the production of knowledge, Quiahuitl shared two personal journal entries that she produced after reading the second draft of this paper and that I cite extensively as theorizing how and why she embodies *terquedad*. Moreover, in these journal entries, Quiahuitl added photographic evidence that we decided not to include to protect her anonymity. Instead, I describe Quiahuitl's aesthetic choices to unpack how gestures are a resistance practice that offer concrete avenues of producing meaning in the academy. Finally, following plática methodology as a potential space for healing, our pláticas turned to ceremony, both spiritual and material, where Quiahuitl and I

supported, uplifted, recognized, and remembered each other's complexity as the basis for coalition building.

Terca, pero no pendeja: Embodying the Limen as a Praxis of Institutional Transformation

When I asked Quiahuitl about her journey, "how did you get here?," she began to describe herself and her journey in academic terms. She is a first-generation college student and a McNair Scholar who graduated with honors distinction and cum laude from her undergraduate program. At the graduate level, she was admitted to top tier research universities and considered to be at the top of the applicant pool, which made her a recipient of some of the most prestigious multi-year and dissertation fellowships. When Quiahuitl stopped sharing her academic achievements, she found it compelling to say, "that is all to say, *que soy terca pero no pendeja*."

While the term *pendeja* has many colloquial definitions in the Spanish language, Quiahuitl was making an epistemological distinction about her *terquedad* as being different from willful ignorance or being "a dumbass" who lacks an understanding of the rules of the academy. Quiahuitl wanted to discuss her academic dismissal as having less to do with "academic deficiencies" and more to do with faculty incapacity to understand her *terquedad*.

Quiahuitl describes her *terquedad* as an embodied way to make space for her complexity and multiplicity in the academy by refusing the grammars of professionalism and the culture of silence that demand a particular kind of subject. She explains,

[The Ethnic Studies Department] had an understanding of what Latinas ought to be and behave in higher education, especially in doctoral programs. I was the only Xicana in my cohort. To be a *doctora*, in the academy, there is an expectation of being a good, quiet, firm, but soft-spoken Chicana. A cookie-cutter.

Quiahuitl explains this cookie-cutter persona as a gendered and racialized expectation that serves to discipline how students in her former department ought to behave and act. This ideal student functions to keep Quiahuitl's multiple identities outside the institution. Quiahuitl describes her aesthetic intentions as a strategic praxis to reclaim the meaning of professionalism. She describes her first day at the doctoral program:

I had these fiery red beaded earrings, and I also had gauges, so I just slipped the earrings in. I had half of my hair shaved with leopard print, and the other half was cut short in a

melenita, and I think my hair was like a burgundy brown/reddish. My eyebrows carefully drawn in and threaded, makeup done up, nails, and toes done.

Quiahuitl's decision to adorn her body, from earrings to her toes, is an awareness that every part of her body functions as a site of meaning-making. Her aesthetic choices constitute a praxis of *terquedad* as an embodied refusal of Eurocentric notions of professionalization by actively challenging the university's docile body: good, quiet, firm, and soft-spoken. She continues to describe her intentionality:

I wanted to always be strategic with the way I dressed. Depending on what mood I was in and, or where I was going, I always thought about what statement I wanted to make aesthetically because for me it was a way of reclaiming space and also (albeit nonverbally) decolonizing the academy.

Quiahuitl has an understanding that her body is capable of challenging the dominant notions of who is and who looks like a doctoral student, a refusal of institutional grammars made through gestures, vernacular, clothing, and aesthetic appearance in which she refuses to let go of her multiplicity through her body. She describes her embodied refusal to abide by this grammar of professionalism in the academy:

I like wearing dark lipstick. I just felt like it made my face pop. I look at dark and bright lipstick like war paint. Something about having a dark color gives me a little extra something, like strength or self-empowerment. As you know, I love falsies. I have big eyes, so putting on false eyelashes helped me accentuate the depth in my eyes. *I had a gangsta-danzante-aliyah-tomboyish-femme kind of stilo, you know?* I could give you tomboy, 'urban,' the sweats and baggy sweater, and I could give you my danzante look. I feel like my aesthetic is also a manifestation of my spirit. *Rebelde con causa.*

Quiahuitl sees herself as a rebel with a cause in which her aesthetic choices not only challenge the grammars of professionalism in higher education but also engage in a politics of decolonizing the academy by reclaiming a space for her multiple selves in the institution. For Quiahuitl, *terquedad* is a tactic to manifest her spirit when confronted with the expectations of becoming *a doctora*. For instance, Quiahuitl discusses a time she blurted out, "that is dope" to refer to a research project she got excited about and to which a faculty member scolded her by saying, "you don't have to use that language in the university to continue to belong to your community." Quiahuitl sees her *terquedad* as rooted in what she identifies as indigenous forms

of resistance and self-care by summoning her various selves that are made to stay at the gates of the academy. Terquedad thus allows her gangsta-self, her spiritual danzante-self, the tomboy-self, and her femme-self to show up collectively and trespass into a space that is not meant for them.

Quiahuitl's terquedad is a deliberate attempt to redraw the field of power of who belongs in the academy. However, some of her peers and faculty only perceive her aesthetic choices as detrimental, as a performance of ignorance and self-sabotage since her embodied refusals are grasped through the logic of oppression. They assume Quiahuitl unconsciously embodies the objective structures (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) that prevent her from enacting acceptable behaviors and comportment of professionalism for doctoral students. This reading, however, assumes what Lugones (2003) describes as the univocity of meaning, where Quiahuitl's terquedad is (mis)recognized as a form of agency from the standpoint of liberalism and its unified, fixed, singular Self (Lugones, 2003, p. 86).

A reading of terquedad as resistance subjectivity, however, allows us to understand her actions in multiple ways such as self-preservation or as both self-preservation and self-sabotage, given that an act of resistance, according to Lugones (2003) can be read and intended to act in both or numerous ways (p. 13). In this double-bind of oppression and resistance, Quiahuitl's stubborn gestures become political performances embedded with endless possibilities for thinking and acting against oppression in worlds of sense that exist alongside academic worlds and can, therefore, undermine it.

In *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, Lugones (2003) describes negotiating and resisting multiple oppressions as a process of trespassing (p. 8). That is, Lugones describes a "spatiality of resistances within and against the spatiality of dominations," (p. 8) in which an action like terquedad can operate under both the logics of oppression \Leftrightarrow resistance. However, the point of an active subjectivity is to trespass the logic of oppression as a process of redrawing the field of power relations (p. 11). Of importance is Lugones's (2003) notion of the "arrogant perceiver" that is unable to recognize either oppression or resistance and thus opens the possibilities for Quiahuitl to enact and experiment with new joys and meaning-making that go unnoticed and are capable of facilitating infrapolitical resistance spaces (Cruz, 2013) into which to practice new ways of being in the academy.

Quiahuitl's enactment of *terquedad* is an enactment of multiple ways of being, which ultimately pose a threat to the academy, the moment various aspects of her body "talk back" (Cruz, 2011). In Quiahuitl's view, *terquedad* mobilizes her body to make claims of belonging in the academy in her terms, "showing up in snapbacks, grillz, and dark lipstick." In other words, the epistemological distinction of being *terca pero no pendeja* announces Quiahuitl's process of moving away from "practical reasoning" to *terquedad* as an action/intention that may not help her escape the oppressive structures of the university but allows her to critique its oppressive structure and can help her arrive to a consciousness leading to liberation in her other worlds of sense (Lugones, 2003, p. 55). Quiahuitl's process of refashioning professionalism functions as a political gesture to refuse neoliberal intellectualism, coloniality, and arbitrary institutional grammars—a significant reclamation against ongoing acts of violence against non-dominant student populations.

La Terca con Dientes: Refusing Academic Violence

Quiahuitl's family migration story, like many other families who migrate with young children, is marked by separation at the U.S./Mexico border. She recalls being six years old when her mother was taken away as they tried to cross the Tijuana–San Diego border. She tells the story:

I remember being in a blue van. At some point, some strangers opened the side of the truck we were in. I was fucking scared. I jumped onto my mom's chest and bit her blouse so we wouldn't get separated. She was taken away.

Quiahuitl describes this moment as a recollection of her *terquedad*. This memory of latching to her mother's blouse, *con los dientes*, is when Quiahuitl's stubborn Will confronted the Will of the State, a willful moment expressed through the clenching of her teeth. She shares this memory of *terquedad* to describe her journey in two doctoral programs and to provide us with a view of the uses of *terquedad* as a resistance subjectivity in academic "worlds."⁸ Quiahuitl explains how this embodied memory, the inner impulse of *terquedad*, makes her latch onto things, leaving marks, even if what she is holding onto is taken away, a taking that is momentary

⁸ I move away from the concept of academic cultures to describe academic "worlds." Academic world in this sense relates to the historical, political, social, institutional, and epistemic relationships that produce the university.

as she finds her way back through her teeth marks. She recalls her experiences dealing with her academic dismissal:

I refuse to let any of these people break my spirit. They can tug and pull, but they can't break me down. It's in my blood. I recognize we come from warrior people. Even my homies who are locked up say it all the time. We come from a legacy of brilliance and fighters. I refused to get stomped down and kicked to the side. There is too much at stake.

Like many first-generation mujeres and queer-of-color scholars, Quiahuitl's academic journey is deeply personal. She describes the moment that she received her acceptance into the university as the moment that also inaugurates the criminal proceedings against her younger brother who was arrested and prosecuted for gang-related violence at the age of thirteen. Quiahuitl shares this situation as one of her motivations to pursue a doctoral degree and focus her work on Mexican and Chicano gangs in Southern California. While this drive to write an otherwise of Chicano gang culture has been described as a stubborn pursuit "difficult to handle for a woman researcher," the university's creation of diversity programs and admissions expects this type of research from Quiahuitl as a legitimate person to theorize on race in the academy and gang culture in general (Bacchetta et al., 2018; Ferguson, 2012; Moallem, 2002). She is an expected multicultural subject until *la terca con dientes* showed up. She recalls her experiences:

When I think about my graduate school experience, I, for whatever reason, have been consistently confronted with struggle. I don't even look for it—when I was at Y University—I actively tried to steer away from politics and drama and focused on my work because I knew/know my work is fucking dope. I know I have a 'unique' positioning, but somehow either whom I was associated with or *something about my presence posed some kind of threat to some people*. Unfortunately, regretfully for me, those people just so happened to be in positions of power, and I got to experience their wrath and exertion of it. I mean, I got pushed out of my doctoral program. I got forced out of an Ethnic Studies Department for voicing a complaint despite being told to be quiet.

Quiahuitl understands that her aesthetic choices and her body alone pose a threat. Her terquedad beyond an aesthetic refusal is an unwillingness to be silent and speak up against “her people,” what she describes as Chicano/Latino cisgender men who fail to recognize their power and read her terquedad as a provocation of violence. Quiahuitl describes a refusal to appease

the social body of educational institutions through a culture of silence and respectability, a becoming *terca* for what she describes as "not selling her integrity and dignity" in exchange for belonging.

Quiahuitl explains she became *terca*, a *terca* understood from a logic of oppression, because, according to her peers, she didn't know when to be silent or how to speak up. Quiahuitl was not silent when she experienced the most extreme cases of gender and racial violence and emotional abuse from colleagues and mentors, a speaking-up that made her into "a rebellious, angry student" because she allowed her conscious Will to clench her teeth down tight and leave marks in the tenure portfolio of faculty of color. *Terca* because she spoke against the culture of machismo among Latino faculty men despite being advised the contrary, "given her record with academic issues," *terca* because she won't pack and leave. *Terca* because she appealed. *Terca* because she applied to another doctoral program and continues her academic journey. *Terca* because she asserts her body as a confident Xicana scholar despite the experiences of violence to claim her identity, her body, and her voice(s). Intentionally *terca*, politically *terca*, she continues,

colleagues and mentors describe me as a loudmouth, 'always fighting some kind of war, and *there is something wrong with me and in me.*' My colleague asked me, 'does everything have to be a war?' I felt that my colleague wasn't empathetic to my struggle(s) traversing the treachery that is inherent in my journey in grad school as a working-class woman of color, you know? I felt like a sense of judgment on his behalf because here he is reading what I recognize as acts of defiance.

Quiahuitl recounts being disparaged by colleagues and faculty because they perceive of her gestures as turning everything into warfare. She explained she knew she was at war but in one she did not start, albeit in one she is willingly fighting back. Moreover, being hailed as the subject of *terquedad* also becomes the justification given to Quiahuitl to make sense of her precarious conditions within the university when she describes her colleagues asserting "there is something wrong with me and in me." Her experiences are her fault for being mad, always fighting. It is her *terquedad* that places her in a constant war.

Terquedad, as described by her mentors and colleagues, is perceived as a full-frontal attack in Gramscian terms.⁹ Quiahuitl, however, conceives of this war as a travesia, a crossing the treacherous terrains that sustain the university. Quiahuitl is indeed in a war, an inner war between the Will of the institution and her Will to remain multiple and complex. She invokes her terquedad:

I don't give a fuck if you are a professor. Why are we so afraid? We tell survivors of sexual assault and rape to name their rapists, why aren't we as graduate students name dropping professors who cause us psychological, spiritual, and emotional harms and distress? Imagine what that would do? How it would force these motherfuckers to be accountable and to humble themselves down.

In other words, Quiahuitl understands her terquedad as a process that makes her peers and faculty uncomfortable. It is a becoming that makes others uncomfortable when Quiahuitl remains multiple: spiritually in tune, demonstrating a strong work ethic, and being outspoken. A queer body that destabilizes the distinction between object and subject of knowledge. One that requires Quiahuitl to "act professional" and not act as if she was part of a gang if she wants to be more than an object of knowledge.¹⁰ Quiahuitl understands her terquedad as a performance that produces a social space of resistance and survival among those who join her in reading her terquedad through a different frame of intelligibility. It is a stubbornness that creates a geographic area to be both object and subject of knowledge production. Quiahuitl states,

I have reached a point where I am like fuck that. Enough is enough. So what if I am always fighting? The reality is that I am! People like you and I are continually having to fight for our dignity. I know it's not good for my health, and trust me, I work very diligently to balance all the poison I confront in these white treacherous academic

⁹ Gramsci (1971) describes a war of maneuver as a confrontational and direct attack at the State while his war of position indicates a struggle over hegemony within the institutions of civil society. In this manner, Quiahuitl is more accurately engaging in a "war of position" or the hegemony over the meaning of professionalism. However, her terquedad is not understood as a counter-hegemony given her actions are read, judged, and understood from a logic of oppression.

¹⁰ Quiahuitl describes how gestures, body image, comportment, speech, and accent determine how faculty treat or label students as belonging to the academy. She states this pattern is similar to how the State determines membership to gangs, where the body and its adornment indicates belonging. In this manner, Quiahuitl tells me the State and its institutions of higher education reserve the right to be unmarked as "the real thugs" despite having a documented history of engaging in criminal and violent activities.

spaces consistently thrown my way through yin yoga, running, the gym, reiki, danza Azteca. At this point, I do not give a fuck about how other people see me maneuver my way through grad school. I've had to create my blueprint.

Quiahuitl is conscious that her *terquedad* is creating a blueprint towards new geographies of meaning and a resistance sociality where we mutually recognize each other as *tercas*. "People like you and I" places me in this relationship of resistance subjectivity where I return to my photos as a blueprint into my worlds of *terquedad*, a traveling that allows me to understand and write Quiahuitl *terquedad* as an act of survival and transformation. A returning to *mi terquedad* is to collectively conspire, thrive, survive, and resist the damages caused by the university. A shifting into our worlds of *terquedad* to prevent the academic venom from spreading. A return to gestures of embodied refusal to find new paths of *conocimientos* and imagine new political fantasies that Quiahuitl describes as embodied "mermaid energies" with "gauged ears like the Aztecs," in which, "the bigger the gauge, the bigger the vision." Where we, *terca* scholars, envision, enact, and transform ourselves and institutions of education through the pedagogy of *terquedad*.

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Cyborg Jotería Pedagogies: Latinx Drag Queens Leveraging Communication Ecologies in the Age of the Digital and Social Displacement

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Abstract

Researchers and practitioners have much to learn from drag queens, specifically Latinx queens, as they leverage everyday queerness and brownness in ways that contribute to pedagogy locally and globally, individually and collectively. Drawing on previous work examining the digital queer gestures of drag queen educators (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019), this article explores how non-dominant people that exist and fluctuate in the in-between of boundaries of gender, race, sexuality, the physical, and the virtual provide pedagogical overtures for imagining and organizing for new possible futures that are equitable and just. Further animated by Donna Haraway's (2006) influential feminist post-humanist work, we interrogate how Latinx drag queens as cyborgs use digital technologies to enhance their craft and engage in powerful pedagogical moves. This essay draws from robust analyses of the digital presence of and interviews with two Latinx drag queens in the San Francisco Bay Area, as well as the online presence of a Xicanx doggie drag queen named RuPawl. Our participants actively drew on their liminality to provoke and mobilize communities around socio-political issues. In this regard, we see them engaging in transformative public *cyborg jotería pedagogies* that are made visible and historicized in the digital and physical world.

Keywords: queer pedagogy, digital pedagogy, social justice

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.14.2.358>

Introduction

As we write this introduction, COVID-19¹ has ravaged the social, cultural, spatial, and economic landscape, particularly impacting the gathering places of non-dominant people around the world disproportionately. San Francisco's Stud Bar, a queer² space that has had its own history of closure threats, shuttered its doors after fifty-four years. During a Twitch-streamed digital drag funeral held for the Stud Bar on May 31, 2020, the self-identified Trans Latina performer Remy regaled the digital stage with a rendition of Juan Gabriel's³ "Noa Noa": a jubilant anthem to another defunct queer space in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. This layered performance, characterized by Remy serving as both lead singer and two back-up singers through video editing (see Figure 1), punctuated both the grief for the death of yet another queer space and the celebration of the joy these spaces brought our queer communities.

Figure 1

Screenshot from a Digital Drag Funeral for Stud Bar Featuring Performer Remy



¹ In late 2019, COVID-19 emerged as a severe respiratory infectious disease. It resulted in a global pandemic in 2020 that has endured until the writing of this piece, in June of 2020.

² We use queer to denote a space that is inclusive and central to anti-normative genders and sexualities (Warner, 1993).

³ Juan Gabriel was the stage name of the late Alberto Aguilera Valadez, a famed Mexican composer, singer, and queer icon.

Through her playful, gritty performance, Remy leads with hope and possibility as she harkens a not-yet-here (Muñoz, 2009): a future that is perhaps beyond the horizon, so as to say that the closure of *The Stud* is not the end. In this small vignette, mediated through digital technologies, we see Remy enacting a playfulness, grittiness (*lo sucio*), and engagement with posthuman imaginings of a new possible future.

In the digital age, and more so during the current pandemic, drag queens have taken to performing on the digital stages of streaming and social media platforms as they are no longer confined to the physical stages of nightclubs. This shift to the digital stage has happened gradually for drag performers but has been accelerated given the COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing stay-at-home orders. This has led to publics engaging, learning from, and being mobilized by drag queens on their own time, in their own spaces, and without having to, or being able to, go to the club. This is particularly salient as the stages that once existed for non-dominant drag performers have disappeared, given the role of gentrification and the resulting displacement of queer people of color (Hutson, 2015; Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019) and pinkwashing (Duggan, 2002) that major cities have undergone over the past 15 years. In this context, Latinx drag queens have amplified, troubled, and connected performance and pedagogy. There are new modalities with which the public can engage in drag performance, such as viral music videos, videogame play on Twitch channels, and digital drag shows, to name a few.

As learning scientists who examine the political and ethical possibilities of relational work, we are interested in the historical formation of authentic and dignity-conferring (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014) relationships that are fostered in digital networks of queer people as they engage publics in practices and activities of social dreaming (Espinoza, 2008). In particular, we are interested in how people build with one another to engage in distributed expertise (Siemens, 2005), and how these practices mediate how people think and act (Pea, 1993). In this respect, given the role that digital technologies play in facilitating new types of collaboration, negotiation, and provocation in everyday practices, we argue that our very bodies are augmented by the everyday tools we use in these new communication ecologies, making us cyborgs (Haraway, 2006). Lupton (2012) further posits that as *cyborgs*, we engage in “regular use of computerised devices [that] shape physical aspects of human embodiment, including changing brain structure and functioning, or consciousness, modes of seeing and operating

within the world” (p. 233). Our leveraging of the cyborg helps us argue against the notions that technologies completely determine the function of our daily lives (an overly structural account) or that we have full reign over what we do with technologies (an overly agentic account). Instead, we propose that cyborgs navigate structure and agency in sophisticated ways that both leverage and subvert the original designs of creators of the technology (Noble, 2018). It is here that we find concrete resonance with the practices of drag queens who, like cyborgs, leverage and subvert the aesthetics of gender performativity (Hewitt, 1993). In the following we further claim that the cyborg drag queen is especially equipped to enact the liminality of performativity across the physical and digital realm in powerful pedagogical moves.

We heed the call of this special issue on *Queer/Trans* Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Pedagogies* to point to the transformational potential of the queer drag cyborg that engages in relational work on digital and social media platforms. In our view, the liminal disposition and pedagogical performativity of the cyborg drag queen is amplified by Latinx drag queens who, as *nepantleras*, navigate the borders of multiple cultural, linguistic, and spatial realities (Anzaldúa, 1987). Moreover, in an age of the digital and technological cyborg, we are compelled by the potential distributed and multi-sited amplification of these *jotería* pedagogies by these queens.

We draw on previous work examining the digital queer gestures of drag queen educators (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019) and the *nepantla* literacies (Lizárraga & Gutiérrez, 2018) developed by line-stepping (Gutiérrez et al., 2017) border-crossing individuals, to explore how non-dominant people that exist and fluctuate in the in-between of boundaries—of gender, race, sexuality, the physical, and the virtual—enact *cyborg jotería pedagogies* that are playful, gritty (*sucio*), and decenter the Anthropocene through Posthumanism.

Jotería Pedagogies and Drag Queen Cyborgs

We build upon the work of previous scholars who have outlined a *jotería* pedagogy. Alvarez (2014) offers a working definition:

Jotería pedagogy focuses on the heterogeneous lives and lived experiences of jotería but also on the erasures and omissions of queer bodies of color. Attentive to homophobia, transphobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, ableism, and other forms of institutional and discursive violence, jotería pedagogy is theory and praxis that connects the global, the local, and the individual. It is not shallow multiculturalism, but poses overt critiques of capitalist formations and neoliberal

agendas. (p. 218)

We are inspired by the heterogeneous, and often intersectional, communities that *jotería pedagogy* centers. Further, we are motivated by the activist and counterhegemonic stance such a pedagogy takes against systems that seek to erase and eradicate our queer-of-color communities. Finally, as learning scientists, we are compelled by the transformational praxis that can be animated by this pedagogy.

We aim to complicate notions of transformation that can emerge simply from connection and access via technologies. Specifically, the cyborg helps us see how *transmedia mobilization* (Jenkins, 2016) and *transliterations* (Stornaiuolo, Smith, & Phillips, 2017) can offer collective transformation across digital and physical terrains of practice. These considerations resonate profoundly with the types of transformative and expansive learning potential that have been advanced by learning scientists who have examined learning in today's digital and interconnected world (cf. Garcia, 2017; Kirshner & Middaugh, 2014).

By leveraging cyborg theory, as an active interplay between the human and technological, the structural and agentic, we aim to animate *jotería pedagogy* in ways that do not stop at critiquing formations but rather engage in a reimagining of and organizing toward a new possible world. It is our claim that in order to work towards a queer utopia that José Esteban Muñoz (2009) described as an extension of the not-yet-here, a *cyborg jotería pedagogy* must necessarily engage in both critique and organizing for new possible futures. In an attempt to define a *cyborg jotería pedagogy*, we bring in the analytic of the digital queer gesture (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019) that we have defined as one that “blends the semiotic affordances of video, audio, and text in the digital realm and is animated, hybridized, and revived across time and space to inspire queer Latinxs to disrupt taken-for-granted normative practices and discourses” (p. 154). We propose that what makes queer gestures part of a *cyborg jotería pedagogy* is that they are practices that are oriented toward the future. Furthermore, we see queer gestures as, with other enactments of *cyborg jotería pedagogy*, engaging in forms of mediated praxis (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010) that animate personal and collective histories and critique of social formations in order to organize for new learning and transformation.

Through our analyses of the virtual practices of two Latinx drag queens and one Xicanx doggie drag queen, we have identified three *cyborg jotería pedagogical practices*, or *digital queer gestures*: playful queerness, lo sucio, and the posthuman. *Playful queerness* refers to pedagogical

practices that center humor and play as avenues for the necessary relational work of teaching and learning. Practices of *lo sucio* (or that which is profane) refers to the enactment of an aesthetic that purposely counters politics of respectability and opens opportunities for imagining decolonial queer futures. Finally, *posthuman* practices move toward challenging human-centeredness in imagined social futures. While we do not claim that *cyborg jotería pedagogies* are limited to these three practices, we aim to illustrate how these three drag queens skillfully engaged in these salient pedagogical moves.

Methods for Examining Jotería in a Cyborg World

In our work we are especially attuned to the ways that digital technologies mediate learning across the virtual and face-to-face. In doing so, we draw from tools in the digital humanities (Jockers, 2013) to capture how ideas travel and are appropriated (Rogoff, 1993) by individuals and communities. The examples presented in this article come from network and textual analyses of Facebook posts and tweets by our participants and those of our canine avatar RuPawl whose content was generated by the first author of this piece.

The initial analyses were triangulated by semi-structured interviews that were conducted and transcribed with two of the participants, Persia and Reina de Aztlán. As will become clear in the sections that follow, we have some familiarity with all the participants involved in this work, as we are active members of the queer community in the San Francisco Bay Area. This is to say that our participants were recruited by virtue of our participation in a shared community. In the case of data collected on the activity of RuPawl on their social network, which was voiced by the first author, we were keenly aware of our roles as participant-observers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In this regard we considered our own positionalities as queer scholars of education, how we contributed to the activity of our avatar's online community, and how members of this community responded to our comments and queries.

The multiple data sources that were gathered were triangulated and analyzed using three main processes. First, from a review of our participants' activity on their social network sites of Facebook and Twitter, we tabulated the frequency and types of participants' postings to their digital networks—including their digital artifacts, comments on contributions, and their public communications with others. A second type of analysis was open-ended and focused on thematic codings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Dyson & Genishi, 2005) of interviews. Through these

analyses we aimed to elucidate the nature of our participants' engagement online: their semiotic, linguistic, and social choices, intentions, needs, and aspirations. A third cycle of analysis aimed to identify patterns in clusters of data (Huberman, et al., 2014). These clusters and patterns are what inform the findings of this article.

Digital artifacts were analyzed using previously developed multimodal analysis techniques (Hull & Nelson, 2005), focusing on how those products conveyed meaning through different semiotic systems (such as image, sound, and language) and through combinations of multiple modes of meaning-making. Data was further reduced through analytic memos to help identify salient themes shared across all data.

Cyborg Jotería Pedagogies: Learning and Transformation

In the following we present examples of *cyborg jotería pedagogical* practices that we saw enacted by drag queens connected in a cyborg ecology. First, we revisit Persia, a San Francisco drag queen who was the subject of our previous writing (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019). By continuing an exploration of her⁴ online and face-to-face practices, we aim to highlight how Persia enacts *playful queerness* as a central tenet to her *cyborg jotería pedagogy*. We then present Reina de Aztlán, also a San Francisco fixture, to show how centering *lo sucio*, or that which is unclean, is a potent pedagogical move towards critically examining the humanization of queer people of color, and what it means to be a desirable queer Latinx in a rapidly changing city. Finally, we present an example of a virtual canine drag queen named RuPawl to illustrate how a *cyborg jotería pedagogy* that engages in the *posthuman* begins to imagine a queer future that is attuned to the world beyond the human experience.

Persia and Pedagogies of Playful Queerness

As members of the San Francisco queer community, we have known Persia for close to a decade. We are intimately familiar with her drag performances at the, now shuttered, Esta Noche night club: a haven for Latinx queers. We also have come to know her as a gifted elementary school teacher, where he goes by Socrates. In our previous writing of Persia (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019) we exalted the potent pedagogical contributions of her *digital queer gestures*, both in her online community and in her experiences as a teacher of fourth graders in a San Francisco Bay Area school. In this aforementioned essay we highlighted the travel of her

⁴ Gender pronouns are self-reported and will fluctuate as we speak about our participants in varying contexts.

famous “Google, Google, Apps, Apps” (Persia, 2013) viral video which offered a satirical yet sharp critique of the technology industry-driven displacement of queer people of color in the Bay Area. In our conversations with Persia, she attributes the success of this video to its humor and playfulness. Persia’s reputation as an educator who leverages her playfulness has garnered wide attention and resulted in a short feature, produced by San Francisco’s KQED Public Media in the summer of 2017, that highlighted her teaching philosophy (see Figure 2). In the following we focus on the signature *playful queerness* of Persia’s *cyborg jotería pedagogy*, a playfulness that was evident in the “Google, Google, Apps, Apps” video and also permeates her practices in other contexts.

Figure 2

Screengrab of Video Feature on Persia (Escobar, 2017)



In our recent interview with Persia, she commented that her playfulness and humor have and continue to be necessary for her survival as a marked queer person. In the context of her upbringing in Southeast Los Angeles, she expressed that play mediated her relationship to hypermasculine *cholos* in her community. She explains:

I was able to make friends with everyone because of my humor and my, I don’t know, my silliness I guess, and the ambiguousness of like “is he really saying sexual queer shit or is he just fucking around?” So I played that very fine line and that was my saving grace. (Interview, February, 2020)

Persia links her queerness to playfulness and humor in explicit ways, explaining that because she has and continues to be markedly queer, she needs to be funny. Persia explained that even as an out queer teacher (where he goes by his given name Socrates) humor and playfulness continues to be a tool for navigating heteronormative spaces where he's been able to "get away with a lot of things because of [his] humor and [has] been safe because of [his] humor" (Interview, February, 2020).

Persia's *playful queerness* manifests in her virtual presence. In addition to her viral "Google, Google, Apps, Apps" video, Persia has collaborated and starred in other music videos that lampoon elite culture: "Santa Claus is Coming" (2011) and "Stop Being Poor" (2014). In these videos, Persia presents a caricature of the hopes and desires of (presumably white) women. Both videos make use of sexual innuendo as well as other playful narrative devices to critique the impending sanitation of the San Francisco Bay, particularly in a time of systemic displacement of the more undesirable "poor" queer people of color. Throughout the years, Persia has been cognizant of how her online activity permeates to other parts of her life, specifically in her work with youth as a teacher. Persia, as Socrates, has reported instances where his students will quote from videos that she has published online, often replacing curse words with more child-friendly ones. For instance, in 2017, Persia posted Excerpt 1 on her social media accounts:

Excerpt 1: Facebook, 2017

When you're on a field trip with the kids and suddenly they start singing, "Google Google Apps Apps, I just wanna be white. For xmas Gurl. Where the fudge are you moving to?" I CANNOT!

Beyond references to these online artifacts, Socrates also enacts the *playful queer pedagogical practices* with his youth in the classroom. Currently, Persia works as a first-grade teacher at a school in San Francisco, California. In her interview she expressed that she often finds herself enacting playful queer banter with her youth, namely the "throwing of shade" or "reading" each other. In a social media post from January 2020, Persia recounts an interaction with one of her students in Figure 3.

Here, Persia is referring to her absence from teaching due to her performing drag in a local theatre production called "Translating Selena." In her Facebook post, Persia illustrates a

moment where she brings her identity as a drag performer into the context of the classroom that then offers an opening for her student to engage in a *read* of her clothing choice.

Figure 3

Facebook Post by Persia



She confesses that this type of *shade-throwing* is a common practice in her classroom, and is meant to flatten the teacher/student hierarchies. However, she is clear that she draws a distinction between a good-spirited *read* and mean-spirited attack. Moreover, she underscores that this *queer pedagogical practice* is not enacted simply on a relational level but is part of the intentional design of the social organization of learning (Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010) of her classrooms. Persia explains how playfulness is imbedded in the design of learning environments where she can have “order in chaos”:

Something that I’ve learned over the years is that when I have classes that like say “this is the goal, these are the supplies, now go.” And so when you give kids agency then, it’s, they’re all engaged and that’s been most of my classes, even with the, quote, uhm, the most troubling, you know, groups of students. (Interview, February, 2020)

This statement illuminates a pedagogical stance that recognizes the heterogeneity of the students in her classroom and a desire to re-mediate (Gutiérrez, Hunter, & Arzubaga, 2009)—or fully transform at the system level—the deficit lenses that are often used to assess young people at her school. It is our claim that a *playful jotería pedagogical* stance is what undergirds her practice. We further contend that the permeability of her online queerness (as seen in

Excerpt 1) allows for this *jotería* to be instrumentalized in the classroom in powerful ways that impact learning for youth.

Alvarez (2014) reminds us that a *jotería* pedagogue “[r]equires the teacher to share some of his or her own story, to become vulnerable, to be a translator and an architect of bridges between different worlds” (p. 218). Indeed, Persia does this as part of her normative practice as a *cyborg* who blends her online, in-person, drag queen, and teacher identities across her everyday contexts. Through her unabashed queer performance across the digital and face-to-face stage, she ushers her young learners to imagine a *queered* social organization of learning in her classrooms where the encapsulation of formal and informal learning spaces (Engeström, 1991) and teacher/student hierarchies are ruptured, mediated by playful queer practices such as “throwing shade.”

Pedagogies of *Lo Sucio*

Our second example of *cyborg jotería pedagogies* revolves around the practices of San Francisco drag queen Reina de Aztlán. A self-professed activist drag performer, Reina is a mainstay of the alternative drag scene. Reina also works as a PrEP and HIV Benefits and Navigation Manager at a local non-profit organization. We first met Reina through mutual friends who are active in the queer health community of the San Francisco Bay Area. We soon became familiar with her edgy, avant-garde drag performances as well as her prolific online presence. In our conversation with her, Reina de Aztlán admits that her everyday activist work and paid job are inextricably entwined and that her online presence is an important part of her practices across the multiple terrains that she navigates. Reina further underscores that her engagement in all she does is marked by an unapologetic grittiness, which we have come to describe as pedagogical practices of *lo sucio*.

Reina de Aztlán boasts an online following of close to five thousand on Facebook. She reports that her following consists of members of the diverse communities that she is part of, including the drag community, the queer of color community, the immigrant community, and the AIDS health communities. In this respect, her online presence has a broad reach and therefore has far-reaching pedagogical potential. Reina states that she curates her content in ways that are intentionally provocative and *unsanitized* in order to have impact in these varied social networks.

Reina is no stranger to controversy and public displays of resistance. In 2015, she was prominently featured in news coverage of a protest calling for an end to the detention and deportation of undocumented immigrants, specifically those who are LGBTQ and have been reported to be abused in detention facilities (Schiavenza, 2015). She, along with four other protestors, were arrested for failure to disperse after an unlawful assembly. The news report (abc7 Eyewitness News, 2015) and images of her arrest were distributed across her social network, sparking conversation and admiration from members of her intersecting communities, namely the queer and immigrant ones (see Figure 4). In her work, Reina explains her position:

The things that I still have tension within this thing around not wanting to conform, not wanting to be, you know, respectable; in the way that I speak, in the way that I dress, in the way that I engage with folks, like at work, or just everywhere. Blurring that line between like professionalism and protocols and like actually connecting with folks. Because from my experience in the healthcare system, these notions of professionalism, these strict boundaries, these protocols, are not just symbolically or figuratively, but they [are] quite literally killing people. (Interview, February, 2020)

Reina de Aztlán's aversion to institutional protocols and respectability stem from personal experiences through the juvenile detention system and being hyper-surveilled and criminalized as a young queer person of color. She also is open about her substance use at a young age. In this sense, she states that for many the interrogation of systemic oppression of people of color is theoretical but for her it is embodied. In our view, Reina animates her *jotería pedagogy* by historicizing these embodied experiences, in ways that are intentionally counter-hegemonic and lack respectability.

Reina de Aztlán's lack of reverence for respectability manifests as a *sucio* aesthetic and pedagogical practice. While she appreciates and is involved in many genres of drag in the San Francisco Bay Area, she is especially drawn to the grotesque, punk, and anti-establishment aesthetic which can carry a strong political message. Further, she states that "the gross is fun and so natural," underscoring that often Latinx drag has to be sanitized and refined to be accepted and legitimized: a cultural practice in the Latinx drag scene that she aims to disrupt. In our interview with her, Reina states that she draws a lot of inspiration from other Latinx activist drag performers who also engage in *lo sucio* and the political. One significant inspiration

is the late Hija de Perra⁵ who was active in Chile and engaged in political drag performances. Hija de Perra's work inspired Reina to produce and perform a faux scatological piece at a San Francisco bar. The performance garnered much attention on social media, at times lauded for its avant-gardeness and others derided for its shock value.

Figure 4

Screenshot of Video Showing Reina de Aztlán Being Arrested



However, Reina's performances on the digital and face-to-face stage exalt the profane and unclean as part of the human condition. More importantly, she foregrounds human desire and pleasure that can often involve sex and consuming substances. Reina aims to push the limits of representation on both the digital and in-person stage in an attempt to reach those members of her community who can often feel ostracized for their drug use or other social practices that are seen as profane. Relatedly, Reina explained her desire to trouble the false dichotomy of addiction and sobriety: a dichotomy that she feels leads to the social disposal of individuals who do not conform to these politics of respectability.

Social media posts that arguably glorify drug use, like the one shown in Figure 5, offer openings for Reina's followers to have conversations about substance use that are not framed in the deficit. This is important for Reina's work in public health with vulnerable communities,

⁵ Hija de Perra was a famous drag performer in Chile. Her performances were characterized by a strange, humorous, and hypersexual aesthetic. She was known for her constant critique of Chilean conservative society.

specifically queer people of color. Reina confesses that she does not have sufficient data to determine the broader impact of her pedagogy of *lo sucio* but that she has had individuals tell her that her posts that are accompanied with commentary have helped shift their perceptions on addiction which often hinge on socially discarding those who use substances or forced into coercive rehabilitation.

Figure 5

Facebook Post Caricaturing Reina's Use of Substances



Instead, these individuals have communicated to Reina their shifted intentions:

This person is like literally saying, like “Here on out I’m able to, whoever I

encounter, approach with compassion, approach with love, with understanding.” And that’s just less people being ostracized, it’s less people, you know, being socially excluded or killed. (Interview, February, 2020)

Reina told us that several people have communicated these types of sentiments and shifts in their thinking about substance use, specifically from a perspective that offers connections on a compassionate level and aims to parse out the individual from broader structural narratives around the addiction. However, sometimes these *sucio* pedagogical moves are not well received by her communities, but she argues for maintaining a more critical view:

Like I said, I’d rather put myself out there and do the best that I can, and feel good and sometimes not, because it sucks you know, I lose friends. People will be like “Oh I have addiction stuff and you trigger me so I can’t talk to you anymore.” Uhm, and those kinds of things hurt, but it’s also like, at the end of the day for me it’s like greater than that relationship, it’s like countless people, literally being harmed because of the way that we see things and I respect people’s boundaries and triggers. But I often think triggers are confused with uncomfortability, as you may know, uhm and they’re just used to justify, you know on the very micro level, ending relationships and on the macro level incarcerating and killing people, and denying them health services, and denying them housing.

Reina de Aztlán is astutely aware of the broader impact of her *sucio cyborg jotería pedagogy* in facing structures of oppression head-on and the potential for changing those structures. Indeed, in her interview, she reveals that she often positions herself, both online and in-person, as a person who has used and continues to use substances, and whose life has been “fucked” up but, oftentimes, not because of drugs. Rather, she explains that her life has been difficult because of a racist juvenile justice system, the policing of her communities, and a faulty education system.

In her work, we believe that Reina enacts Vargas’s (2014), *lo sucio* aesthetic of “lewd, obscene, offensive hypersexual undisciplined bodies” (p. 716) that aids in “cultivat[ing] a presence and lingering perseverance of queer sex and joy within neoliberal hetero- and homonormative violences” (p. 715). She does so in ways that center the human condition as innately imperfect and that critically interrogate the structures that oppress peoples. In the context of a highly regulated society that often seeks to sanitize queer bodies of color, her *sucio*

cyborg pedagogical practices on the digital and face-to-face stage can be met and received varyingly. However, this does not make her pedagogy any less revolutionary.

RuPawl and Jotería Pedagogies of the Posthuman

We end with an example from a personal project involving our chihuahua named Xóchitl, also known as RuPawl, the world's first doggie drag queen. RuPawl emerged as an online creative project after multiple face-to-face interactions with strangers where they aggressively inquired about our dog's gender and were not satisfied with our usual response of "they haven't chosen one yet." In response, the first author, Dr. Lizárraga, created an online identity where they dressed the dog as cast members (Figure 6) from the popular reality television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*. From the onset, the content posted on RuPawl's Instagram and Twitter accounts were meant to underscore the performativity of gender (Butler, 2006) and how people's obsession with classifying the binary of gender extended to relationships with animals. In this regard, we became interested in examining how the online practices of an anthropomorphized chihuahua would engage with *posthuman cyborg jotería pedagogies* that imagine a queer world that considers a broader non-human ecology.

Figure 6

RuPawl Dressed as RuPaul's Drag Race Alum Ongina.



In many respects, RuPawl is a manifestation of both the aforementioned *playful* and *lo sucio cyborg jotería pedagogical* practice, by both engaging in meme culture and countering notions of respectability. Our pivot toward examining RuPawl's online presence and influence as a *posthuman jotería* is meant to underscore the ways in which digitized social media can mediate engagement around key socio-political issues even when the boundaries between the human and machine are blurred, and, indeed, the human face is not visible. We are especially compelled by Gough's (2004) guidance in seeing the "ways that the 'machineries' of texts constitute sociotechnical relations, and the textual and intertextual effects of cyborg relations in transgressing and transforming the discursive fields in which they move" (p. 255). That is to say, that if indeed a cyborg analytic can help us disrupt notions that there is an essential human, then how can a perceived non-human actant (RuPawl) help animate new ways of seeing and engaging in the world? We take heed from this examination of the cyborg and the posthuman to take a close look at how an anthropomorphized chihuahua, who dresses like popular drag queens, can mediate conversations around serious issues by leading with playfulness and their distinct *posthumanism*.

RuPawl has a considerable following on both Instagram and Twitter. Given the liminality of their identity (as a chihuahua who dresses in drag), RuPawl has a following that consists of drag queens (those formerly and currently on RuPaul's Drag Race and queens from local scenes), dog lovers, A-list celebrities, queer communities, and even gay pornography actors. However, they also have a solid following of prominent learning scientists and scholars of queer studies. In this regard, our canine avatar crosses the boundaries of the everyday and the academic, and of the respectable and *lo sucio*. Our claim is that this is facilitated by the *posthuman cyborg pedagogical practice* that obfuscates the human user (the first author of this piece). In one such instance, RuPawl engages in a serious conversation around the merits of a college education with a famous drag queen, winner of the eighth season of the reality television show RuPaul's Drag Race.

In the exchange captured in Figure 7, RuPawl responds to Bob The Drag Queen's initial claim that "college is the biggest and most successful scam" by offering a more nuanced perspective. Namely, our perceived non-human actant challenges the generalizing statement by offering a historical context, specifically in regards to how higher education (while faulty) can and has benefited non-dominant populations in important ways, economically and socially. Our

claim here is that this exchange was made possible by RuPawl's intersectional celebrity status across multiple terrains: that of the drag community and that of the academic community.

Figure 7

RuPawl Twitter Discussion with Bob The Drag Queen



We propose that someone of Bob The Drag Queen's celebrity, and status as a public figure, was comfortable engaging in an online conversation that was academic in nature, to the extent that it was being had with an anthropomorphized doggie drag queen. Further, the *posthuman*

jotería pedagogical practice was directed both at the celebrity drag queen and the broader audience that both Bob The Drag Queen and RuPawl reach in their social networks.

RuPawl's playful *posthuman* pedagogy is akin to Gough's (2004) exploration of the enigmatic cyberneticist Mayakovsky's children's book called *Cyberantics*. As explained by Gough (2004), this oeuvre reported Mayakovsky's purported research findings of a cybernetic ant that he had created and introduced into an ant colony. The book was widely derided by the research community because of its fantastical claims and genre. However, Gough (2004) notes a key feature of the book that is instrumental to our argument here:

As I argue at much greater length elsewhere, much fiction (including children's fiction but especially science fiction) is 'more faithful to the aims' of education than the 'dogma and conceit' of many contemporary education texts . . . Also, by being cast within the conventions of a children's talking animal story, *Cyberantics* invites the reader to bring the wide range of cultural meanings associated with this literary mode to bear on the text, such as mocking and subverting the modern scientific practice of maintaining clear distinctions between humans and other beings. (p. 258)

RuPawl, much like *Cyberantics*, subverts the conventions of human to human interactions and pedagogy. As a *cyborg jotería pedagogy*, RuPawl's practices further queer the boundaries of being and knowing by proposing that a queer identity and engagement with deep social issues can extend beyond the human. This was in no small part due to the fact that RuPawl is voiced by the first author who embodies a queer identity and is active in social issues through his scholarship.

Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

In our view, the vignettes presented in this article illustrate the powerful learning and transformation facilitated by *cyborg jotería pedagogies*—manifesting as practices of *playfulness*, *lo sucio*, and the *posthuman*. From our previously developed analytic, we see these practices as nuanced instantiations of a digital queer gesture that “blends the semiotic affordances of video, audio, and text in the digital realm, [and] is animated, hybridized, and revived across time and space to inspire queer Latinxs to disrupt taken-for-granted normative practices and discourses” (Lizárraga & Cortez, 2019, p. 154). As exemplified by Persia, Reina de Aztlán, and RuPawl, everyday queerness, while seemingly innocuous, has the power to catalyze learning across digital and physical ecologies.

It is important to note that there are likely other *cyborg jotería pedagogical* practices that are not accounted for in this article. Further, we hope that we have made clear that all of our participants enacted the three described practices to varying degrees. In this regard, while we have outlined three discrete *cyborg jotería pedagogical* practices through our examples, it is helpful to see them as part of a repertoire of practices that can often be enacted in combination depending on an individual's intent (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Our work aims to contribute to understandings of how to leverage everyday practices of non-dominant individuals. Moreover, we offer considerations for how to design learning opportunities for non-dominant communities in a digitally-mediated ecology that is unprecedented in its connectivity, with access to flows of information and texts on a global and local scale, as Castells (1996, 2011, 2015) reminds us. In this regard, researchers and practitioners must take heed of broad shifts in how access to knowledge is becoming increasingly democratized and how it has charted new possibilities for social transformation (Couldry, 2012; De Kosnik, 2016). An equity focus on teaching and learning in a *cyborg* world is particularly pressing in these uncertain times.

Through the examples described, we offer openings for exploring the critical pedagogical moves that everyday digital technologies can mediate, specifically in advancing *cyborg jotería pedagogies*. We have much to learn specifically from cyborg drag queens, whose use of media across physical and digital terrains contribute to the learning of broader communities in ways that shift perceptions around the displacement and visibility of queer Latinx communities. Our analysis reveals that participants actively drew on their liminality to provoke and mobilize communities in local contexts, and beyond, around socio-political issues. In this regard, we see Persia, Reina de Aztlán, and RuPawl engaging in transformative pedagogies that are made visible and historicized in the digital and physical world. By amplifying the powerful transformative work of these *nepantlera* (Pacheco, 2014) cyborg drag queens, we highlighted how non-dominant populations leverage and repurpose digital instruments to organize for new social futures.

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Imagining the Future of Jotería Studies as a Framework in the Field of Higher Education

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Abstract

Although research on queer Latinx/a/o college students has increased in recent years, only a few studies employ frameworks that originate from queer Latinx/a/o communities. To center ways of being and knowing rooted in queer Latinx/a/o experiences, this manuscript argues that educators, scholars, and practitioners interested in the study of higher education should mobilize Jotería Studies as a framework. In this manuscript, the authors offer an overview of Jotería Studies before discussing how Queer of Color frameworks have emerged in education. Following this foundation, the authors generate recommendations for how educators, researchers, and higher education professionals can use Jotería Studies to guide their work.

Keywords: higher education, Queer of Color, theoretical frameworks, Jotería Studies

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.14.2.360>

The study of the interconnections between race, ethnicity, and sexuality continues to become richer in the field of higher education with scholars increasingly exploring the lives and experiences of Queer Students of Color (QSOC) on college campuses (Duran, 2019). In examining these studies, it is evident to see that researchers made a concerted effort to push back against the reliance on samples of white students that once defined queer and trans scholarship in postsecondary education (Renn, 2010). Although formerly limited, the scholarship on queer Latinx/a/o college students considerably grew in the field of higher education in the 2010s (e.g., Duran & Pérez, 2017, 2019; Duran, Rodriguez, et al., 2019; Eaton & Rios, 2017; Garcia, 2015; Orozco & Perez-Felkner, 2018; Peña-Talamantes, 2013a, 2013b; Rios & Eaton, 2016; Tijerina Revilla, 2010). These studies shed a light on a number of different issues that queer Latinx/a/o individuals face within collegiate settings. Whether illustrating how self-authorship may differ for those at the intersections of these two identities (Orozco & Perez-Felkner, 2018) or examining the nature of familial relationships for these students (Duran & Pérez, 2017, 2019; Eaton & Rios, 2017; Rios & Eaton, 2016), the research on queer Latinx/a/o collegians expanded the ways that professionals in higher education understand and work with these individuals.

Albeit a positive development to see more scholarship about queer Latinx/a/o collegians, another pattern is clear that mirrors a consistent reality of queer and trans literature focused on postsecondary settings. Despite Renn's (2010) calling for the use of queer and trans frameworks in order to shape the study of higher education (including research on queer and trans people's experiences), the number of scholars employing these frameworks are few and far between (Duran et al., 2020). Namely, studies on queer Latinx/a/o college students regularly failed to use theories designed with queer Latinx/a/o individuals in mind with a few notable exceptions like Tijerina Revilla's (2009, 2010) work mobilizing queer/Chicana/Latina feminist epistemologies and Duran, Rodriguez, et al.'s (2019) scholarship using influences from Muñoz's (1999) disidentifications. As Duran, Jackson, et al. (2020) argued, the epistemological and theoretical foundations researchers use in studies on LGBTQ+ individuals in higher education have serious ramifications for how these populations are represented and the subsequent implications for practice. To investigate the lives of queer Latinx/a/o collegians without using explicitly queer Latinx/a/o theories, for instance, can lead to crises of representation and continue the whiteness, heteronormativity, and/or trans oppression that has defined queer and trans postsecondary research.

Therefore, this paper will imagine what it means to use Jotería Studies in pedagogy, research, and student affairs practice in higher education. Specifically, we locate Jotería Studies under the umbrella of queer Latinx/a/o theories and frameworks that can be meaningful to center queer Latinx/a/o experiences. As a growing body of research, Jotería Studies is uniquely situated to examine how racism, heterosexism, trans oppression, and settler colonialism manifest for queer Latinx/a/o communities (Hames-García, 2014) but can also be mobilized to challenge these systems in postsecondary settings broadly. Specifically, we contend that educators, scholars, and student affairs practitioners interested in transforming higher education contexts need to embrace the use of Jotería Studies (e.g., Alvarez Jr. & Estrada, 2019; Hames-García, 2014; Perez, 2014; Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014) as an analytic to inform pedagogy, research, and practice.

We begin by offering a brief overview of Jotería Studies, discuss the emerging attention to Jotería in educational literature, and then describe specific recommendations for how it can be leveraged in higher education as a discipline. Although we focus on its use in pedagogy to align with this special issue, we also generate implications for higher education researchers and student affairs practitioners hoping to mobilize Jotería Studies. In doing so, we argue Jotería Studies works in expansive ways—as a research framework, a way to drive pedagogy, and a liberatory politic. Though Jotería Studies has always been needed in the discipline of higher education, we contend that the current sociopolitical climate in which queer Latinx/a/o lives and continues to come under attack by rhetoric in and outside of college campuses necessitates frameworks that interrogate these structures, while highlighting the resilience of these individuals.

An Overview of Jotería Studies

We find it important to provide an overview of Jotería Studies and trace its emergence in higher education scholarship. To begin, we acknowledge the way queer Latinx/a/o communities have historically been targeted through derogatory terms (e.g., joto, jota, maricón, and pato) that further perpetuate heteronormativity and homoantagonism. Despite the negative connotation carried by these words, including joto and jota, Jotería scholars, activists, and artists have reclaimed these terms to posit a form of resistance against heteronormative renderings of being Latinx/a/o (Alvarez Jr. & Estrada, 2019). Additionally, a distinction exists between Jotería and Jotería Studies. We define Jotería as an embodiment of marginalized sexual

or gender identifications. Jotería “is a political project that seeks to reconfigure historically and socially negative understandings of an identity that has been used in colonizing ways” (Bañales, 2014, p. 160), namely as it relates to racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual politics. Critical to this definition, Hames-García (2014) challenged the use of Jotería as a simple ascription to Latinx/a/o individuals “whose lives include dissident practices of sexuality and gender” (p. 139). For this reason, Jotería is also a production of personal and cultural politics that engage practices and processes that disrupt interlocking systems of oppression. In turn, Jotería Studies is the study of queer Latinx/a/o people’s realities that resist racist, heterosexist, patriarchal, and settler colonialist systems of power and oppression (Alvarez Jr. & Estrada, 2019; Hames-García, 2014). More specifically, Ochoa (2015) asserted Jotería Studies “continue the critical project of Chicana feminisms by destabilizing the hegemonic Chicano subject, usually imagined as male and heterosexual” (p. 188). Jotería Studies is an asset-based framework rooted in intersectionality and empowerment (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). Jotería Studies propels a critical consciousness given the unique emphasis on individual and collective joy, love, and healing (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014).

The development of Jotería Studies is a response to the exclusionary practices toward queer Latinx/a/o individuals that permeated community and academic spaces (Tijerina Revilla, 2014). As such, the history of Jotería Studies traces back to the prominent work of lesbian and queer Chicanas and Latinas whose scholarship and activism names and theorizes the marginality of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Anzaldúa, 1987; Moraga, 1983; Pérez, 1999). Both Anzaldúa and Moraga explicitly named Jotería in their work. For example, Anzaldúa (1987) made the call to the Chicano/[Latino] community to “listen to their Jotería” (p. 85) and Moraga (1993) imagined a world she named as “Queer Aztlan” where Chicanos embrace “all its people, including its Jotería” (p. 147).

Furthermore, the prominence of Jotería Studies in the last two decades was then amplified in spaces like the Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship (AJAAS), “an organization dedicated to nurturing queer Latina/o, Chicana/o culture through practices that recognize the intimate relations of art, activism and scholarship” (Tijerina Revilla, 2014, p. 253). In 2014, several members of AJAAS contributed to a dossier on Jotería Studies in *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, which was curated and edited by Michael Hames-García. This dossier contained conceptual and empirical writings that moved Jotería Studies forward and offered

multiple ways of conceptualizing Jotería bodies and experiences. Furthermore, this dossier offered social and political methods of theorizing realities of marginalization and exclusion of Jotería, as well as Jotería Studies (Hames-García, 2014).

Furthermore, the academic genealogy of Jotería Studies traditionally finds its home through an interdisciplinary lens in the fields of Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies, Ethnic Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Performance Studies (Hames-García, 2014; Pérez, 2014). Jotería Studies is an explicit analysis of structural oppression, similar to other theoretical considerations for Queer People of Color (QPOC) (i.e., Queer of Color Critique; Quare Theory). These methodological and analytical frameworks propel the necessity to interrogate the intersectional and material oppression of Queer People of Color (Ferguson, 2004; Duran, 2019). Most recently, scholars whose work focuses on Queer and Trans People of Color, particularly queer and trans Latina/o people, embedded Jotería Studies in fields like media and cultural studies and communication studies (e.g., Alvarez Jr. & Estrada, 2019; Ochoa, 2015). Thus, the field of Jotería Studies continues to evolve and transform as it is taken up in academic fields, such as in the study of higher education.

Queer of Color and Jotería Studies in Education

Over the last two decades, the burgeoning research on Queer People of Color in education, specifically in higher education, provides a foundational analysis of narratives and experiences of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality within the educational system (Brockenbrough, 2015; Kumashiro, 2001). Furthermore, engaging issues of sexuality within research on People of Color has moved beyond hegemonic notions of racialized experiences. Scholars have posited frameworks to center Queer Students of Color in education, specifically the K-12 system (Brockenbrough, 2015; Kumashiro, 2001; McCready, 2004). Kumashiro (2001) offered multiple analyses accounting for “the intersections of racism and heterosexism” within education (p. 1). Similarly, Brockenbrough (2015) engaged a Queer of Color critique that asserts an agency for Queer of Color youth as a way for them “to perform identity, belonging, and resistance” through and within oppressive structures of education (p. 31). Beyond K-12, several scholars have examined the experiences of Queer Students of Color in higher education. Research on Queer College Students of Color often focuses on examining the way these individuals navigate multiple marginalized identities in higher education contexts, especially in co-curricular and curricular spaces (Duran, 2019; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Tijerina

Revilla, 2009, 2010). These studies have shown the ways that environments in postsecondary settings perpetuate racism and heterosexism, while at the same time highlighting the agency and resilience of Queer Students of Color.

Although this larger body of scholarship using Queer of Color perspectives is invaluable, engaging Jotería Studies and higher education as a site of analysis requires a commitment to challenging normative understandings of Latinx/a/o people specifically. As noted in the introduction, studies specific to queer Latinx/a/o individuals continue to rise and set the stage for Jotería Studies, albeit focused largely on undergraduate students. The scholarship on queer Latinx/a/o undergraduate students primarily discusses the experience of coming out (Duran & Pérez, 2017; Peña-Talamantes, 2013b), in addition to perceived support from family, peers, and faculty and staff (Duran & Pérez, 2019; Eaton & Rios, 2017; Rios & Eaton, 2016), sense of belonging on and off campus (Tijerina Revilla, 2009, 2010), navigating multiple marginalized identities (Peña-Talamantes, 2013a; Orozco & Perez-Felkner, 2018), and building queer Latinx/a/o kinships (Duran & Pérez, 2017). Although this research provides insight into the experiences of queer Latinx/a/o students, the theoretical frameworks used in these studies have often been through a non-queer Latinx/a/o lens with a few exceptions (see Duran, Rodriguez, et al., 2019; Orozco & Pérez-Felkner, 2018; Tijerina Revilla, 2009, 2010). Using this collective body of scholarship as a foundation, an opportunity exists to apply frameworks that better honor, give agency, and validate the lived realities of these individuals.

Research on queer Latinx/a/o college students rarely takes up the term Jotería or explicitly notes their contribution to the field of Jotería Studies. Alvarez Jr. & Estrada (2019) noted that some scholars may be uncomfortable naming their work as a part of Jotería Studies because of the contested and fraught nature of the term Jotería as a marker of social identity. Furthermore, research on queer Latinx/a/o students primarily centers the narratives and experiences of cisgender gay Latino men (Duran & Pérez, 2017, 2019; Eaton & Rios, 2017; Orozco & Perez-Felkner, 2018; Peña-Talamantes, 2013b; Rios & Eaton, 2016). Consequently, the majority of research on cisgender gay Latino men focuses on their coming out process and the challenges they face (Duran & Pérez, 2017, 2019; Eaton & Rios, 2017; Orozco & Perez-Felkner, 2018; Peña-Talamantes, 2013b; Rios & Eaton, 2016). Furthermore, centering cis gay Latino men in research that examines queer Latinx/a/o students reinforces structures of patriarchy, as well as trans oppression, and is a perpetuation of the challenges that arise when

cisgender gay men become the focus of discourse on gender and sexuality. As a response to this, Jotería Studies can further provide a theoretical and analytic comprehension that moves forward the scholarship and improved material realities of queer Latinx/a/o people in higher education.

Our Journey to Jotería Studies

Before proposing how higher education can benefit from Jotería Studies, we see it necessary to first name what Jotería Studies has offered us as scholars, practitioners, and people moving through postsecondary education settings. This naming of our stories and backgrounds exemplifies what is at the heart of Jotería Studies, the notion that the political is personal (Hames-García, 2014). It is because of these stories that we came to be in relationship with one another and imagined a world where higher education institutional agents centered Jotería Studies as a priority. However, we recognize how we gained access to Jotería Studies represents a form of academic privilege, necessitating a more widespread conversation about this analytic.

Antonio Duran

My journey to Jotería Studies has been both recent and long-lasting, leading me to a framework that has always been ingrained in my being. Notably, my scholarly journey began due to my interest in how Queer and Trans People of Color navigated collegiate settings, knowing that the founders of higher education institutions never created colleges and universities with these individuals in mind. The questions that I had percolating in my mind could not be answered with theories that similarly failed to consider the ways that heterosexism, trans oppression, and racism functioned in society. This in turn led me to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and Queer of Color critique (Ferguson, 2004) that welcomed these curiosities. These frameworks both spoke to these ideas but also fell somewhat short of taking up my queer Latino ways of thinking/being.

These sentiments are what have brought me to Jotería Studies, challenging me to center queer Latinx/a/o people not only in highlighting their experiences but also by shedding light on their analytics. I now attend to Jotería Studies in my teaching by naming how my own subjectivities are deeply attached to my teaching philosophies. Specifically, I often assert how my queerness and Latino identity intersect in the ways that I interpret higher education systems. Moreover, I mobilize this framework in my research by showing how institutional structures minoritize queer Latinx/a/o individuals.

Roberto Orozco

My first interaction with Jotería and Jotería Studies came through my involvement with AJAAS in the fall of 2015. As the Director of the Center for Social Justice at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, I had the unique opportunity to accompany a delegation of students to the 2015 AJAAS conference. Additionally, the history of AJAAS has a unique connection with the center I directed, given the planning meetings that took place at the center during AJAAS's inception. As I continued to work with queer Latinx/a/o student activists on campus, I challenged myself to more intimately engage with research and practice that centered these students' experiences.

Consequently, I attend to Jotería Studies in my own work through my commitment to queer Latinx/a/o communities. I specifically rely on epistemologies and theories that I consider to be a part of a Jotería genealogy. For example, I use Anzaldúa's (2002) concept of *conocimiento* as a culturally congruent framework that examines the identity and consciousness development of queer Latinx/a/o people. Furthermore, my work with queer Latinx/a/o student activists has shifted my Jotería consciousness and informs my being and doing of Jotería and Jotería Studies. As a Joto and someone who engages in Jotería as an act of social, cultural, and political resistance and disruption, my own experience along with the community of Jotería as a site of analysis is a move towards a praxis of liberation.

Sergio Gonzalez

My understanding of Jotería has and continues to be an ever-evolving process that allows me to explore my past, to make meaning of my present, and guide my future. Jotería is how I am redefining what it means to be queer and Latinx/a/o. I have come to realize that my Joto-historia, or queerstory, is a counternarrative not fully embraced by the traditional form of queer theory. My existence within the walls of academia in my brown queer skin has become my resistance. Through Tijerina Revilla & Santillana's (2014) framework of Jotería Identity and Consciousness, I am able to understand what it means to be living, loving and surviving in a space like higher education (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). Whether I am teaching a class or working with cultural centers, Jotería creates a space to innovate and build community interchangeably. Additionally, I see Jotería Studies informing the ways that I conduct research, trying to push back on normative qualitative methods and instead embrace a praxis grounded in *comunidad*.

The Potential of Jotería Studies for Higher Education

As mentioned in the introduction, when deployed with care and respect, Jotería Studies can be an analytic that can move the study of higher education environments and experiences forward because of its community-centered and liberatory nature. To offer readers examples of how scholars and practitioners leveraging Jotería Studies can accomplish this work, we find it necessary to highlight potential contributions to both practice and research. Specifically, we contend that educators and professionals can employ the framework to shape pedagogy and student affairs programming. We also argue that postsecondary education researchers can use Jotería Studies to interrogate how institutional structures minoritize queer Latinx/a/o individuals, to challenge ahistoricism on college campuses, and to shed a light on individuals' experiences of resistance and liberation.

Practice: Mobilizing Jotería Pedagogy

The lessons that one can learn from Jotería Studies translate into the classroom context. In fact, Alvarez Jr. (2014) wrote about the practice of Jotería pedagogy. In this article, Alvarez Jr. extends the work of queer pedagogues like Krywanczyk (2007) to envision what Jotería means as it relates to teaching. In particular, Alvarez Jr. constructs Jotería pedagogy to be an approach that “focuses on the heterogeneous lives and lived experiences of Jotería but also on the erasures and omissions of queer bodies of color” (p. 218). This focus appears throughout the curricular experiences—in the ways that people teach about content but also the ways in which queer Latinx/a/o pedagogues show up in the classroom to how they invite students to share about their stories.

Engaging a Jotería pedagogy invites educators to consider how they are integrating conversations about the intersecting systems that shape the material and social realities of queer and trans Latinx/a/o people. For example, the three authors of this manuscript are trained in the field of higher education. We understand how the organizational structures of higher education function and how they impact student development. As a part of graduate studies curriculum, a majority of higher education programs have some form of a diversity, equity, and social justice course. These classes generally challenge higher education professionals to consider the unique needs of minoritized student populations. However, the issue that some courses exhibit is that they separate weeks based on social identity groups without interrogating how a class on sexual minorities may unintentionally erase those who

also experience racism on a daily basis. In fact, this approach which involves seeing identities and oppression as discrete categories is common across various disciplines although it renders Queer of Color knowledge invisible by failing to recognize how structural oppression is interconnected (Aguilar-Hernández, 2020). Jotería Studies serves as a reminder to interrupt this practice by asking educators, administrators, and staff to initiate conversations about the intersectional forms of oppression facing the lives of queer Latinx/a/o individuals. In doing so, they can resist fragmenting the interconnections of identities and power that may manifest within the classroom.

However, beyond content, Jotería pedagogy would also serve as a pathway for conceptualizing issues of embodiment by recognizing that “our bodies and ourselves are lived legacies of colonialism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and heterosexism” (Hames-García, 2014, p. 136). What this requires is an act of critical reflexivity on the part of the instructor to consider how their presence in the classroom space both functions as a perpetuation of privilege but also a marker of overcoming oppression. For those who identify as queer Latinx/a/o educators, for example, how is it that our appearance in the classroom pushes back on the overwhelming whiteness and heterosexism that demarcates the academy sphere? How is it that we share these stories and these realities with our students to expand their awareness or affirm their selves? For the three authors of this article, it means being clear with students about how our identities and our teaching are in a reciprocal relationship with one another. It is our Jotería that influences how we think about pedagogy, and our teaching shapes our Jotería. Similarly, it would also behoove instructors to engage students in the same type of exploration. In Alvarez Jr.’s (2014) formative article, for instance, they offer the example of how Spoken Wor(l)d Art Performance Activism (SWAPA) functions as a way for individuals to perform the practice of witnessing that allows them to reflect on their body, mind, and spirit. Thus, learning is not a disembodied experience but is intricately connected to who a person is and where they are situated within larger systems of power. Such moves push the consciousness of students into one that is aware, healing, and radical—all components of Jotería Studies.

Practice: Jotería Studies in Student Affairs Programming

In addition to shaping pedagogy, Jotería Studies can inform student affairs practice. Research shows that higher education scholars frequently acknowledge that student-centered

resources (e.g., campus centers, identity-focused centers) and campus environments play an important role in student learning experiences, opportunities, and outcomes (Mayhew et al., 2016). Thus, LGBTQ+ students need student services to support their academic careers (Pitcher et al., 2018), including those who identify as queer Latinx/a/o individuals. So, the question then becomes, what are student affairs practitioners doing to ensure queer Latinx/a/o students feel safe and supported on campus?

Student affairs as a field needs to begin critical discussions that critique the invisibility of queer Latinx/a/o students, as well as other Queers of Color within institutions, in research, and curricula. Jotería Studies can support programming by addressing the institutionalized racism that currently exists in affinity centers/cultural centers campus wide. This lens in turn will help create continuous accountability and assessment practices essential to reestablishing a more nuanced campus culture and climate inclusive of queer Latinx/a/o students. Furthermore, student affairs programming needs to challenge institutional practices that make no attempt to bring in critical discussions on multiple identities or their intersections, such as those pertaining to queer Latinx/a/o students. As Jotería Studies is not gender-specific or limited to a single ethnic group or form of sexual identity (Pérez, 2014), it can support the creation of intentional space designed from a queer Latinx/a/o student's perspective.

The narratives of queer Latinx/a/o students are essential when looking to decipher the interconnections between academic and social success together with persistence rates. Fine (2012) described that although LGBTQ+ students are present on campus across the country, very few institutions appear to be taking the appropriate measures such as developing centers, providing counseling, and refining curriculum to be more inclusive of LGBTQ+ topics necessary for the academic and personal success of LGBTQ+ students. The field of higher education has come to a point where it must reimagine the intent of programming and how it can bridge the gaps between academic and student affairs departments. Jotería and Jotería Studies develops a transformative pedagogy as it can be created to be physical by way of a cultural center, emotional by holding space to affirm one's voice and experience, and social by connecting students, faculty, and staff across departments and disciplines. Because of this, we affirm Pérez's (2014) argument that "Jotería voices and images materialize in multiple forms: cultural production, history, politics, and the everyday lives of individuals" (p. 145). Ultimately, Jotería Studies inherently resists the siloing that may happen with queer Latinx/a/o individuals'

experiences (i.e., separating social, academic, and cultural domains). As a result, those using Jotería Studies in higher education would see the benefit that is gained from collaborating with departments across campus in order to recognize how queer Latinx/a/o individuals are complex and require holistic attention.

Research: Critically Examining Institutional Structures

What Latinx/a/o students often find in colleges is a culture that is finely tuned to the needs and interests of a historically white student body, faculty, and staff (Naynaha, 2016). The research on sense of belonging and the experiences of queer white college students in higher education continues to be much more abundant than the research on the experiences of Queer College Students of Color (Strayhorn, 2019). When the search is limited to queer Latinx students across colleges and universities specifically, the lack of research is even more evident. The dearth of research and the increasing number of queer Latinx/a/o students pursuing college degrees warrants an increase in literature that can honor their voices and provide visibility. Jotería Studies creates a space that centers the Jotería subject as an arbiter of knowledge concerning social locations and uses their perspectives to understand how systems of oppression function (Pérez, 2014).

Jotería Studies can thus contribute to research projects in higher education that seek to understand how institutional structures disproportionately marginalize those who identify as queer *and* Latinx/a/o. This area of research is necessary because a majority of scholarship on queer and trans individuals in higher education has focused on students' experiences without interrogating how policies, practices, and structures at institutions create oppressive environments for these populations. What does exist for example in the realm of queer and trans student success frames this from a race-neutral perspective (e.g., Pitcher et al., 2018), not examining how racism might also frame the ways that institutions marginalize those who hold multiple minoritized identities. Because Jotería Studies centers the epistemic perspective of queer Latinx/a/o communities, it is a helpful framework to leverage to understand how structures at institutions can oppress these individuals, a task that we as authors are doing in our own work. Additionally, Jotería Studies may also be particularly meaningful in sites such as Hispanic-Serving Institutions that enroll large numbers of Latinx/a/o students because it can interrogate how a racialized institution can still (re)produce systemic inequity for those at the intersections of Latinx/a/o and queer identities.

Research: Ahistorical Nature of Queer Latinx/a/o Experiences in Higher Education

In addition to thinking about examining institutional structures themselves, Jotería Studies also challenges scholars to push back against the ahistorical nature of queer Latinx/a/o experiences in higher education settings. This is because Jotería Studies exists to not only conceptualize how systems like colonialism, racism, heterosexism, and trans oppression manifest in contemporary settings, but also, it reveals how these structures have existed historically (Gutierrez-Perez, 2015; Hames-García, 2014). Therefore, to engage with Jotería Studies in higher education involves wrestling with the racist and heterosexist histories of postsecondary settings (Graves, 2018; Museus et al., 2015).

In research studies on queer Latinx/a/o individuals, scholars frequently ask participants to describe the ways that systems of power operate on their college campuses in present-day times. For example, Peña-Talamantes's (2013b) exploration of how gay and lesbian Latina/o college students negotiate their identities across contexts (i.e., hometowns and college campuses) underscored the presence of heterosexism and racism at their institutions broadly and with support services specifically (e.g., LGBTQ centers). Although important insights, findings such as these beg the question of how historical legacies of minoritization also play a role in how students perceive their climates and understand their identities. With models of campus climate containing historical dimensions (e.g., Hurtado et al., 2012), it is imperative that researchers seek to understand how colleges and universities have not been mindful of attending to the unique realities of queer Latinx/a/o people and the ramifications of this fact. Thus, scholars should consider not only asking research participants about the ways that institutions marginalize queer Latinx/a/o identities and knowledges currently but also how those are tied to their understandings of how colleges and universities have functioned since their inception. Another way that Jotería Studies can challenge ahistoricism involves unearthing the stories of queer Latinx/a/o collegians that have always been present on campuses.

Though historians of higher education have made strides in bringing to light the ways that queer students have existed and resisted in these environments throughout the decades, these histories are overwhelmingly devoid of racial analyses (e.g., Graves, 2018). To this point, Gutierrez-Perez (2015) articulated, "as a marginalized community, *Jotería-historias* are often hidden, made invisible, and forgotten" (p. 94, emphasis in original). Though Gutierrez-Perez (2015) discussed their experiences in communication studies, this remains true in research

about higher education institutions broadly. Thus, Jotería Studies encourages higher education researchers to historicize in order to showcase how queer Latinx/a/o people have long been enacting agentic behaviors in oppressive college contexts. Such insights would be beneficial for increasing the consciousness of students, practitioners, and scholars alike about the experiences faced by those at the intersections of queerness and Latinx/a/o identities. Speaking to the potential of such scholarship to transform perspectives in higher education, Martínez (2011) described the following:

One need only to peruse the work of writers as diverse as Audre Lorde, and Gloria Anzaldúa, Ricardo Bracho and Essex Hemphill, among others, to see firsthand how resistance and enfranchisement have often been nurtured through narratives where identity and politics are written about from the perspective of queers of color. (p. 226)

These narratives would also locate the issues of racism, settler colonialism, trans oppression, and heterosexism in a historical trajectory in order to create action steps to interrupt the ways they are ingrained in the U.S. higher education system.

Research: Illuminating Narratives of Resistance and Liberation

At the center of Jotería Studies is the importance of narratives that center experiences of resistance and liberation for queer Latinx/a/o people in higher education. In essence, Jotería and Jotería Studies become necessary for several reasons. First, Jotería researchers have found that too often, queer Latinx/a/os and Chicanx/a/os and other Queer Communities of Color are pushed aside to the margins of society (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). Furthermore, Jotería Studies reiterates how queer antagonism, patriarchy, and white supremacy are deeply embedded in academia and our communities; consequently, there is a lack of literature that speaks to the collective experiences of queer Latinx/a/o people (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). Within higher education, Jotería Studies can be particularly meaningful as a framework to showcase not only how queer Latinx/a/o individuals navigate these systems but ultimately, how they thrive within these structures.

Scholarship on queer Latinx/a/o students in higher education has begun to highlight the narratives of resistance that come from negative experiences navigating their race, ethnicity, and sexuality. For example, Tijerina Revilla (2009) explored sexual identity in a Chicana/Latina student organization, Raza Womyn at UCLA, where a *Muxerista* vision of social justice centered the voices of Chicana Latina women. Tijerina Revilla (2009) stated, “By challenging and creating

spaces of resistance that create a different reality for fluid/Queer resisters, Raza Womyn created the space for radical transformation in the identity and politics of *muxeristas*” (p. 59). Moreover, Duran, Rodriguez, et al. (2019) investigated how five gay Latino college men engaged in love involved a complex negotiation of their environments and desires. In embracing their desires, these participants resisted heterosexist and racist norms, creating their own queer Latinx/a/o realities in the process. These examples communicate how scholars have started to slowly illustrate the resilience that comes with identifying as part of the queer Latinx/a/o community.

To make meaning of their intersecting identities, queer Latinx/a/o students find a way to be seen, which often times is shunned from the dominant narrative that is higher education today. Tijerina Revilla (2010) went on to illustrate strategies used by students to create not only safe spaces but also “counterspaces” of resistance within academia—that is, spaces in which they are actively resisting mainstream perspectives, particularly those that uphold white supremacist, imperialist, patriarchal, heteronormative, and citizenist ideologies (p. 39). Tijerina Revilla and Santillana’s (2014) Jotería identity and consciousness framework further provided ways that queer Latinx/a/o people engage in asset-based approaches to marginality. Critical Race Theory in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 1997), Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Bernal, 1998), and Tijerina Revilla’s (2004) Muxerista Framework can be seen as the foundational tools used to create a Jotería identity and consciousness, as they each acknowledge the ways that structural inequalities shape the lives of minoritized people while foregrounding their practices of resilience. With these foundations in mind, Tijerina Revilla & Santillana (2014) described Jotería identity and consciousness with the following terms: counterstories; heterosexism; queer; Latina/o/x; Jotería; brown; and queerstory (p. 178).

These terms are imperative to note as they reinforce empowerment, are intentionally radical and decolonial, as well as personify an oppositional consciousness (Pérez, 2014, p. 144). When queer Latinx/a/o individuals’ counterstories are shared, it is necessary to show the presence of “fun, laughter, and radical queer love” (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014, p. 174). Specifically, Jotería identity and consciousness pushes back against deficit narratives that queer Latinx/a/o people solely experience oppression and lack agency in the face of such structures. Instead, Jotería Studies as a praxis acknowledges how queer Latinx/a/o individuals resist, grow, transform, and ultimately belong to oneself. Thus, future research in higher education would

benefit from employing these Jotería Studies terms collectively as an organizing framework to center the liberatory potential that queer Latinx/a/o people actualize within postsecondary settings.

Conclusion

To open up the possibilities for liberatory consciousness and practices in the study of higher education means to articulate and resist the structures of oppression that are interwoven into the tapestries of the academy. Taking up this call, Jotería Studies functions as an analytic that not only centers the experiences of queer Latinx/a/o people but also pushes back against the very fibers of colonialism, racism, heterosexism, trans oppression, and more. Therefore, this article informs higher education educators, scholars, and student affairs practitioners to reflect on how Jotería Studies can serve to move their practice forward. Specifically, we argued that Jotería Studies has the potential to help faculty and staff understand intersectional struggles of oppression, as well as the practices of resistance that queer Latinx/a/o individuals exhibit. Queer Latinx/a/o individuals have always existed on college campuses, and we as authors assert that it is time for Jotería Studies to be taken up more substantially in the field of higher education.

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Joaquin's Refusal: An Embodied and Geographic Active Subjectivity

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Abstract

This essay explores a Latinx, queer and trans, student's resistance to a gender-neutral restroom at a high school in an agricultural community of the Central Coast of California. Through a close reading of a field note, I analyze Joaquin's narrative of refusal to demonstrate how queer and trans youth engage in an active subjectivity (Lugones, 2003). For decolonial philosopher María Lugones (2003), an active subjectivity is the process through which oppressed communities become conscious and critical by engaging in a meaning-making process centered on their socialities. I argue that queer and trans high school students' active subjectivity is in relation to their embodied knowledges and geographies. The body and space are both critical in learning to think in community and reflexively. Joaquin's refusal of the restroom becomes useful in understanding how queer and trans youth tell narratives of their self, grounded in a social history capable of alternating the story told about space and place.

Keywords: queer and trans youth, active subjectivity, Latinx geographies, queer geographies, resistance

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.14.2.362>

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You are concrete. Your spatiality, constructed as an intersection following the designs of power, isn't.
(Lugones, 2003, p. 10)

The high school's "gay club" sits together during their lunch inside a bungalow classroom off to the backside of the school, across from the school's barn. I can smell the combination of wet dirt and the manure from the cattle. Inside the room, the broken air-conditioning exuberates the heat, but the students continue their conversation as they fan their faces with their nail-polished hands, share a family size bag of Doritos chips and eat dried mango dipped in a contortion of lime and Tajín.² I watch and listen from a side desk whose cracked tabletop is engraved with a series of f-bombs and whose bottom corners are plastered with old gum. From their discussion, I gather that the only gender-neutral restroom in the school is in the back of the campus near the football field. The toilet flushes occasionally and the restroom doubles as a storage room.

The debate at hand is around the type of energy that is worth putting into the restroom. They ask each other how much responsibility they owe the restroom. Should they fix it? What is the role of the administration? What school do they want for future queer and trans students? I listen patiently until Joaquin, a trans student, says that the restroom marks his body.

What does the marked body uncover? The queer and trans youth in this ethnography contend with narratives of race, sexuality, gender, and class that serve to surveil, restrain, and contain their bodies. Indeed, a growing body of critical scholarship and education researchers have uncovered how systems of oppression and domination work congruently to marginalize and undermine the livelihood of queer and trans youth (Brockenbrough, 2013; Cruz, 2011; Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2013; Shange, 2019). Joaquin's statement, however, is a bodily and spatial consideration of resistance. His affirmation amounts to a historical knowledge of the high school's geography that interacts with the multiplicity of experiences of queer and trans youth as they navigate different topographies in search of life-affirming spaces. For queer and trans Latinx youth whose lives are dominated in a multiplicity of ways, engaging in the reflexive work of traveling to each other's worlds allows them to develop a critical consciousness from their socialites, a type of collective meaning-making María Lugones calls an "active subjectivity" (Lugones, 2003). The body and space are both critical in learning to think in community and

² Tajín is a popular Mexican chili seasoning that is primarily used to season snacks like chips and fruit.

reflexively. It is through an embodied knowledge that queer and trans youth tell narratives of their self, grounded in a social history capable of alternating the story told about space and place. This essay describes the practice of an active subjectivity in relationship to geographies of oppression and liberation (Anzaldúa, 1999; McKittrick, 2006) for queer and trans youth at Villa High, a high school in an agricultural community where space and the body are central to a sense of self.

A Resistance Sociality

In my ethnography of queer and trans youth, I read resistance through their socialites—a tug and pull of experiences and opinions that brew into a process of meaning-making—away from the common infrastructure of their school where their being is marked by difference. Lugones (2003; 2010; 2016) suggests that resistance is not the end goal of a political struggle or a complete action but rather a beginning of a possibility. As such, she defines resistance as:

the tension between subjectification (the forming/informing of the subject) and active subjectivity, that minimal sense of agency required for the oppressing ⇔ resisting relation being an active one, without appeal to the maximal sense of agency of the modern subject. (Lugones, 2010, p. 746)

For Lugones (2003), resistance is the strain within the messy moment one understands the condition of their oppression while simultaneously understanding that *that* very condition is antithetical to their well-being—“the forming/informing of the subject.” The tension that arises and that is felt from that knowing is the foundation of a possibility for an alternative way of being, distant and different from what oppression makes possible. Liberation, in this sense, is the ability of the individual to construct their material being from their own perspective but in relation to others.

Active subjectivity is a derivation from agency. For many resistance scholars of education, particularly those of Marxist and Kantian thought (see, for example, Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985), agency is the ability to break from one’s predetermined condition in order to establish autonomy. However, Lugones (2003) understands this framing of agency as too individualistic and an illusion of liberation formulated by dominant groups that lack an understanding of the social dynamics and structures that allow *certain* individuals to accomplish their emancipatory aims. The subject who can in fact bring its intentions to fruition under this frame of Western liberal agency is who Lugones (2003) names the “modern subject.” To

destabilize the individuality of the modern subject, Lugones (2003) thinks through an active subjectivity, where one becomes conscious by moving with people, and “by the difficulties as well as the concrete possibilities of such movings” (p. 6). Because the “I” is thought through the “we,” Lugones (2003) represents an active subjectivity as $I \rightarrow we$, wherein the “we” is not necessarily a homogeneous collective. Lugones (1987) instead reminds us of the multiplicity of the self and the *interdependence* on the multiplicities of individuals that help us to make meaning of oppression and domination. Through this lens, Lugones (1987) also reminds us of the existence of multiple “worlds of sense” and the multiple selves that attend to those worlds. “World” for Lugones (2003) is a spatial temporality through which the social is made—a “world” where one is subjected to inescapable oppression, where refusal that is read as defiance may exist alongside another “world” where refusal is an act of liberation (p. 55). The trick is in learning how to read the distinction.

Throughout my time with the queer and trans youth in this ethnographic work, I witnessed various moments in which their resistant practices were opaque by logics of delinquency in their school. Criminalized was the errantry of a queer youth with alcoholic parents who would skip school after lunch to go feed their younger sibling. To understand this youth's negotiation, not as disobedience but rather as an enactment of love, dignity, and self-sovereignty, one must have the ability to travel to their world and learn “what it is to be them, and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes” (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). The exercise of world traveling, of leaving our world of sense to willfully move into one another's world of sense as *they see it*, is the technique through which one comes to understand a communal but often opposing syntax of resistance and afford an understanding of oppression as a process that is never truly complete. Lugones (2003) teaches us that the relation between oppressing \Leftrightarrow being oppressed is always ongoing. As she eloquently writes, “Resisting meets oppressing enduringly. It is the active subject resisting \Leftrightarrow oppressing that is the protagonist of *our own creation*” (Lugones, 2003, p. 31). In other words, our learning to recognize others' reclamations to dispossession—a gesture of refusal, a rainbow bracelet—by traveling to their world of sense steals oppression's success. When we fail to recognize each other's worlds, when we cease to travel within another's geography, we also fail to render oppression futile.

A Geography of the Body

The U.S.–Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country. (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 25)

In the Borderlands/you are the battleground (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 216)

When Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) writes of the U.S.–Mexican border as an open wound—*una herida abierta*—she writes the land onto her body. Through her poetry and essays, Anzaldúa (1999) gifts her readers a map with a different set of topographies, where borders expose flesh, healing is contested by an arrangement of rugged edges, and blood gives birth to a different set of landscapes. Anzaldúa (1999) also writes the body into the land. She tells us of bones, legs, and lips as the locations of a war for her own being. Her sense of body and land, as synonymous and tethered together, is a declaration that the body is inscribed as territory, rendered conquerable, and made property (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cruz, 2001; McKittrick, 2006). Indeed, as Anzaldúa (1999) endures the hauntings from the colonial past and imperial present at the borderlands, her writings illuminate how through the body the border extends past the U.S.–Mexico nexus and continues to define a broader Latinx community as foreign and out of place (Cahuas, 2019, para. 12). No wonder claiming ownership to one's body and stitching our made faces (Anzaldúa, 1990) are acts of insurgency.

Geography, subjectivity, and the body are intimately connected (Cruz, 2001; McKittrick, 2006). In the broad sense, geography refers to the social arrangement of space and the systems of meanings produced through such arrangements (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 1991; McKittrick, 2006; Massey, 2005). As such, geographies are often determined by physical and material objects like highways and roads but also by non-physical items imbued with human meaning and signification like borders and territories. The meaning-making that happens through space, therefore, has the power to organize and naturalize human hierarchies and to displace differences in order to make particular bodies seem misplaced (McKittrick, 2006).

In “Toward an Epistemology of a Brown Body,” Cindy Cruz (2001) asks, “how does the brown body know?” (p. 658). To interrogate her question, Cruz (2001) utilizes Anzaldúa's (1999) *mestiza* consciousness as a methodology to outline how, when traversing different world

landscapes, the brown body negotiates transcultural spaces equipped with the “tactics and worldviews” that help us change and develop (Cruz, 2001, p. 661). The brown body, Cruz (2001) asserts, is capable of rearranging subjectivities and of “comprising the impetus for the mitigation of racialized, classed, and queered intersections” (p. 660) in the production of new forms of being. Anzaldúa (1999) exemplifies the ways in which the body is always/already supplied with the necessary momentum to shift and adjust. Indeed, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999) she writes of the body at U.S.–Mexican border as a:

1,950 mile-long open wound / dividing a pueblo, a culture, / running down the length of my body, / staking fence rods in my flesh, / splits me splits me / me raja me raja / This is my home / this thin edge of / barbwire. / But the skin of the earth is seamless. / The sea cannot be fenced, / El mar does not stop at borders / To show the white man what she thought of his arrogance. / Yemayá blew that wire fence down. (p. 25)

Anzaldúa's (1999) proclamation is that her body is inescapable from the violent tear in the land that splits her and the U.S. and Mexico nation-states. Through this perspective, one can understand the brown body as entrenched in “divergent thinking” (Cruz, 2001, p. 661), allowing Anzaldúa (1999) to negotiate her relationship to herself according to the transformation that she undergoes as she moves through different geographies and worlds of sense. But she is seamless like the ocean. Without fences to contain her. Incapable of being “disciplined to obey the dominant social and cartographic order of borders” (Cahuas, 2019, para. 15). In this sense, Anzaldúa's (1999) open wounds are not symptomatic of a fragmented body. Rather, Anzaldúa's (1999) open wounds are the spillage of her “*resistance to the mutilation [emphasis added]*” of the brown body (Cruz, 2001, p. 661). *Before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again*, overflowing with her sense of self and a sense of place. It is not surprising then, that Anzaldúa (1999) finds a home at the thin edge of barbed wire, where the *lifeblood of two worlds* merge together to *form a third country*, a limen from her plurality.

The narratives, memories, and histories that are prompted from within the brown body remind us that space is socially constructed and therefore alterable (McKittrick, 2006). Because the brown body is a location of multiple ways of knowing, it is capable of charting new geographies that insist “on the possibilities for Latinx life in the most inhospitable of places” (Cahuas, 2019, para. 15)

A Method of Faithful Witnessing

How does one recognize resistance? A rich genealogy of Women of Color have asserted that traditional understandings of knowledge production have forced them to create and develop alternative methodologies for the study of their communities (Collins, 1989; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). In following the teachings of Women of Color researchers, scholars, and cultural practitioners, this ethnography is grounded on a Lugonian framework of faithful witnessing (Lugones, 2003) or what Yomaira C. Figueroa (2015) describes as a “method of collaborating with those who are silenced” (p. 642).

In the introduction to *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, Lugones (2003) writes that faithful witnessing is an epistemic praxis of “conveying meaning” to oppositional thoughts and movements fashioned by “subjects negotiating life in the tension of various oppressing ⇔ resisting relations” (p. 21). As such, she states that:

To witness faithfully is difficult, given the manyness of worlds of sense related through power so that oppressive and fragmenting meanings saturate many worlds of sense in hard to detect ways. A collaborator witnesses on the side of power, while a faithful witness witnesses against the grain of power. To witness faithfully one must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression. (Lugones, 2003, p. 21)

Indeed, a method of faithful witnessing “requires researchers to develop literacies that are differential” (Cruz, 2011, p. 550); in other words, it requires a grammar that enables a reading that produces meaning across multiple “worlds of sense.” A commitment to witness faithfully defuses the dominant narrative of a singular interpretation of truth and knowledge (Figueroa, 2015). As such, ethnographers who witness faithfully must be responsible for two things: First, they must recognize oppression, in all of its subtleties, and second, they must recognize the myriad of ways in which subjects assert their dignity and humanity in spaces where these practices would otherwise be illegible. Witnessing faithfully, however, can be dangerous. In underscoring a thread to domination—in telling the story of how the oppressed challenge national investments of dispossession—faithful witnessing ruptures the knowability of domination, often naturalized by liberal and progressive notions of equity. Telling a different

story than school principals, district officials, and education non-profit organizations is a treacherous act. However, it is in the faithful witnessing of the moments of deceptions, stubbornness, and gestures that refuse violence that ethnographers can actively participate in the declaration of other voices and the affirmation of other truths. Certainly, as Figueroa (2015) writes, “without this kind of recognition, histories are erased, silenced, and ultimately invalidated as human experience” (p. 644).

An Ethnography of Queer Resistance in La Villa

La Villa is a pseudonym for a town widely known as Mexican and field working. Villa High, where this ethnography takes place, is the oldest educational institution in the town. Central to the story of La Villa is a strong and deep history of immigration and agricultural labor that pays homage to the legacy of the Bracero Program on the West Coast of the United States. As such, Villa High's yearbooks tell the story of immigration and racial segregation, with each turn of the page literally illustrating the transition from a homogeneously white to a homogeneously Latinx, but primarily Mexican, school. Villa High is a Title I school, and the year I first started visiting, the school increased its student population to a total of 2,170 students.

The stories at the center of this ethnographic work are the product of two years of active participation at the high school. All names of the protagonists are pseudonyms. During class periods, I assisted in a U.S. History class where I met some of the students whose voices are central to this story. Other students, like Joaquin, I met after being invited to the “gay club” which met once a week during lunchtime and with eight to twelve high school students from all grades. Conversations during this time allowed me to create bonds with these youth and gave me insight into their social world. Lunchtime, I quickly learned, is an opportunity for students to share stories of migration and homelessness, heartbreaks and crushes, and other secretive adventures away from the gaze of power that often interrupts and restructures their narratives.

Throughout the two years at Villa High, I utilized field notes to capture the negotiation and resistance processes that took place as participants reflected on their experiences as queer and trans youth in their school. As students interacted with their peers and staff, I wrote descriptive notes that resembled scenes of plays often with dialogue (Emerson et al., 2011). At times when I was alone walking the neighborhood and the corridors of the school, I engaged in ethnographic sketches—descriptive writing of stills much like photographs (Emerson et al., 2011). Characterizations of the students helped me effectively capture how they talked, moved,

and the nuance ways students relate to each other without the need of spoken words (Emerson et al., 2011). It is important to note that my role as a researcher and as a queer Latina is implicated in the collecting of the youths' stories. It is often common for queer Latinx folk to ask "¿si es familia?"³ as a means of investigating someone else's sexuality. These students quickly evaluated my ties to that kinship. Therefore, my own lived experience as an out queer Black Latina, combined with a youthful aesthetic, facilitated a transition from peripheral researcher to trustworthy queer kin with an ambiguous role as an adult in the school. This, no doubt, facilitated trustworthy relationships.

Refusal as a Historical and Spatial Resistance

At the time this field note was written, I had known Joaquin for a whole academic year. At seventeen years, he possessed wisdom far beyond his age and took leadership positions in many of the school's clubs. Prior to this conversation, I had participated in one of Joaquin's "safe binding" workshops that he made for his queer and trans peers at school. Here, he shared his experience with different binding methods, offering product suggestions, warning others of what would happen if this was not done right and sharing his experience navigating school absence when he needed to rest from the physical fatigue binding caused his body. At that workshop, Joaquin offered to share his address to his peers if they felt unsafe having binders shipped to their homes. In another occasion, I witnessed Joaquin explaining to his peers the need to make their club a commitment to a safer school *and* community. This time, he told the story of the time a few students from Villa High harassed him and his best friend a few blocks from the school, but the dean of students took no action because the event happened off campus. He proceeded to tell his peers that other students who had graduated from Villa High had experienced similar situations. He finished the story by making fun of himself and saying, "I wear these ripped Vans, 'cause they're lighter to run with." Joaquin's knowledge of a history of homophobia in and out of his school sets the basis for his refusal of the restroom.

Audra Simpson (2016) defines refusal as a commitment to a historical truth. Refusal, in this sense, is the embodied knowledge and understanding that domination and oppression are not one single event but instead are constituted by a history of dispossession. By situating a historical knowing at its core, refusal "maintains and produces [a] sociality through time"

³ Familia is the Spanish word for family.

(Simpson, 2016, p. 330) that exposes a social-historical vision irreconcilable with liberal progressive projects that propose that dignity has been restored. Joaquin's deep awareness of the past is what allows him to point to the specific way that queer and trans youth continue to experience violence. Therefore, Joaquin's refusal to have an X on his back is an attempt at avenging a set of prior injustices and a denial that a gender-neutral restroom is a step toward inclusivity.

Joaquin's refusal also proposes that homophobia, transphobia, and sexism are not only bodily or identity based but are spatial acts that illustrate geographic experiences as they are made possible through domination. The home, the restroom, and the liminal borders of Villa High and La Villa are sites of struggle where queer and trans youth cannot do the emancipatory work their livelihood demands. Certainly, part of the work Joaquin's refusal does is link the historical past and present with a recognition of the locations of an urgent struggle for a socially just world. Joaquin provides an astute examination and practices of resistance to gendered and sexual domination across different borders that bring into focus queer and trans youths' complex relationship with geography.

Active Subjectivity as a Pedagogy of Resistance and Geography

Though Joaquin is the president of the student organization, he did not start the conversation. Instead, the impetus came from a student who wanted to know if it was okay with the group to beautify the gender-neutral restroom as her community capstone project. When this student asked the question, a freshman learned of the restroom but quickly became disappointed when he also learned that the restroom was by the bleachers, that the toilet did not work properly, and that the custodial staff stored their work items there. He made everyone laugh when he said, "*Uhh pues, ¿pa' que?* I'd pee my pants before I make it to the toilet."

Joaquin was silent for most of the conversation. Testosterone had made his face much rounder since the last time I saw him and had broadened his shoulders, but his giving nature ceased to change. The first thing he said came from a space of care—"But is that your job?" He assured the student that if beautifying the bathroom was something she wanted to do, he would be supportive, but reiterated that perhaps this was not a job that she needed to take on. Though the conversation was respectful and entangled with jokes and laughter, coming to a conclusion on the matter required narrating different experiences and perspectives that were

highly contested. For example, Joaquin's partner, an undocumented cisgender gay male felt that beautifying the restroom would help facilitate a safer campus for queer and trans students who were yet to attend the school. After all, he asked, was a safer and more inclusive campus not part of the commitment they had made as a group? Another student felt that beautifying the restroom was not going to change things because the toilet itself was not functional. As such, Joaquin listened, nodded his head, agreed with some points, and, before he asked the question, he let everyone know that he also thought that his opinion would not be as popular as others. After some hesitation from his part and encouragement from his peers, he finally said:

I don't think this gender-neutral restroom would be safer," Joaquin speaks up. He pauses for a bit and then continues "Dre, do you have any thoughts or advice about changing the sign? I really think a sign that says, 'gender neutral' makes the bathroom 'the trans bathroom' and I don't want us to have another X on our backs. Maybe a sign that says 'single stalled restroom' would be better. What do you all think?" (Field note, October 17, 2019)

When Lugones (2003) writes of an active subjectivity, she recognizes that an active subjectivity comes into contact with systems of oppression, and therefore, understanding the achievements of an active subjectivity will often be impaired by logics of domination. In fact, she writes that "from the standpoint of liberalism, [active subjectivity] would look like an almost inconsequential or attenuated sense of agency" (p. 5). However, Lugones's (2003) understanding of active subjectivity as a process of "resistant meaning-making" (p. 5) provides a comprehensive appreciation of resistance that encompasses the dispositions, thoughts, and opinions that make critiques of oppression thinkable. As such, what started as an ask for collective permission developed into a meaning-making process where students engaged the "contradictions of the world" (Cruz, 2013)—Is inclusivity indeed a measure of safety?—and engaged in a practice where they are "actively constructing meaning together as a political activity" (Cruz, 2013, p. 449). Central to this discussion is the construction of knowledge, where students in intimate proximities like Joaquin and his peers of four years (and even his partner) share risks as they share different, and sometimes opposing, narratives of erasure, violence, desire, and hope attached to the gender-neutral restroom. Yet when Joaquin states that his opinion may not be a popular one, he opens the door of vulnerability for his peers and simultaneously conveys to them that he understands their world while allowing them to travel

to his world. Thus, what is at stake is the collective narrative that the gender-neutral restroom represents. In this sense, the multiple readings of what the restroom can mean for queer youth is important in seeing the world and learning to think differently and reflexively.

The spatial and embodied nature of the student's meaning making is also significant. A visible challenge for each student is the negotiation of how the restroom can make visible and invisibilize their bodies within the structure of Villa High. Indeed, a single-stalled restroom sign with no bodies that space can mark is a viable option. This is not the first time that Joaquin critiqued space through embodied knowledge. During another lunch hangout, Joaquin flashed an honor roll certificate with a girl's name. As he showed it to me, he said "Look, how cute, this girl is a star!" He then proceeded to tell me that earlier that day a teacher asked him if he wanted his name changed in the school's roster. My field note reads:

"She asked me in front of everyone," his eyes locked with mine, fire within them. "I know she meant well, but *the new students in that classroom* wanted to know what she was talking about." Joaquin left his certificate on top of a desk, exposing a previous embodied life. As students entered the classroom Joaquin greeted them, at times waving the certificate, laughing when students asked, "*who's that?*" This time he started the meeting by saying, "Y'all, before you hear it from someone else, I want to tell you what happened *in Ms. Smith's class* today." Whispers of "she thinks she's sooo woke," "I'm never taking a class with her," and "*You won't see me in her classroom,*" escaped from the group. (Field note, February 29, 2019, emphasis mine)

The X Joaquin spoke of is an understanding of how, as a trans person, he is both a target and disembodied even in the hospitable spaces of Villa High. Geographies of domination or what McKittrick (2006) defines as the "displacement of difference," wherein particular kinds of bodies are materially and visibly structured by a hierarchy that underscores a right to humanity (p. xiv), are present in the youths' active subjectivity. The purpose of Joaquin's story was not only to put out gossip fires but to also acknowledge the way in which space intersects with oppression to highlight the knowings that arise from the many terrains queer and trans youth travel. In this meeting, while students traveled to Joaquin's world, they learned how domination is a visible spatial project that organizes and *literally* names difference. It certainly is infuriating to Joaquin that he cannot be treated with dignity as he is outed and named by those who hold authority. The students' consideration of a restroom sign without a representation of

a body is a way of resisting the dismembering of their X'ed bodies. In this sense, the knowledge that stems from the body's journey to different terrains makes its way to their active subjectivity, refusing the story Villa High wants to tell about queer youth.

The Margins Aren't Marginal

During my time with Joaquin and his peers, I also witnessed how queer and trans youth made a home in a bungalow next to the school's barn. Here the youth were free to laugh, break bread, develop as teachers and activists, and engage in life affirming politics in an intimate space away from the core infrastructure of their school. These life affirming practices were simple: sharing chips when a student did not have money for lunch, making fun of a homophobic teacher, and enjoying the pleasures of sharing a kiss. These practices were activities that could not be situated within the gaze of the broader Villa High community without the fear of repercussions. They had to take place away from the surveillance of heteronormativity, homophobia, and transphobia.

McKittrick (2006) writes of the metaphoric use of "the margins" in social theory. Starting from the vantage point of Black feminists, McKittrick outlines how the idea of the margin is indeed interrelated with the displacement of the marked body but cautions social scientists of the reductionist potential of the margin, particularly as it relates to geography. For example, in writing of the way that bell hooks (1984) utilized the margin, McKittrick (2006) states that:

While black feminist theory and black women's struggles in general, are underwritten by a radical disruption of white patriarchal space, it should be emphasized that we think of this disruption not simply through the language of space... Indeed, metaphors like the margin are repeatedly and sporadically called on to name difference: the margin is emptied out, placeless, just theory, just language, and seemingly the *only* black feminist geography available in wider social theories. (p. 57)

As a descriptive and analytical tool, "the margin" and other places "outside" the dominant discourse allow black feminist and other disposed communities to locate the complexities of their unique relationships to domination and a struggle for liberation. As such, taking stake to the margin speaks back to processes of bodily territorialization. However, McKittrick (2006) argues that implicit in the *language* of the margin is the notion that "politics are where one speaks from" (p. 56), rhetorically and metaphorically placing certain

communities always/already in geographical margins. A margin is an edge, a border, the ignored space, the crust no one wants to eat. As McKittrick writes, "This language, the where of the margin shapes it [the spatiality of the margin] as an exclusively oppositional, unalterable site that cannot be easily woven into the ongoing production of space because the bifurcating geographies—margins are *not* centers—prohibit integrative processes" (p. 57). As such, the language of space inherently orients the understanding of the materiality and physicality of space. In doing so, the language of space also orients the value of the bodies and knowing of those who occupy that space.

Following McKittrick (2006), I want to suggest that Joaquin's and his peers' spatial and resistant politics are not at the margins. Their narratives, their teachings, their historical social memory, and their active subjectivity refashions spaces like the classroom by the school barn as central to their geographies. Like Anzaldúa (1999) who makes a home from barbwire because she knows the condition of her oppression, the queer and trans youth in this ethnography retell the story of space through their socialites. For example, when Joaquin tells the story of the teacher who outed him, his peers help rewrite the topographies of the school by shifting class schedules that rewire their movements throughout Villa High and thus push against the hegemonic routes the school wants them to use. In this sense, the youth not only reimagine their geographies but actively reconstruct them. For these youths, taking claim to space is not determined by ownership. Their geographies are underscored by a movement toward liberation (McKittrick, 2006).

Conclusion

Contrary to contemporary movements where young queer and trans people of color demand social change (e.g., Terríquez, 2015), the queer and trans youth I work with practice a resistance from *within* their social relationships. Resistance that stems from the intimacies of the quotidian is difficult work because it requires an acknowledgment of the way domination attempts to control the deepest sea beds of our being while also having to understand what that sea bed looks like for others. When Joaquin states that the X marks their bodies, he bridges his peers' understanding of the world and searches for a place where they can move toward liberation. Indeed, he provides a new set of literacy practices where he reads the body and transforms space.

What would it mean for educators to take Joaquin's pedagogy seriously—to start from the embodied socialites of queer and trans youth? To teach from a perspective where space is not the backdrop but rather a vital and dynamic ever-present actor in schools? At its bare minimum, it would require teachers to become attuned to the ways students located their stories and how they reinvent themselves. Joaquin's refusal demands the same engagement and labor from educators. His pedagogy of refusal is teaching the way youth work within a social history to interpret relationships and geographies of resistance. In a world where violence is inflicted by those who are supposed to love and protect us—cops, principals, teachers, friends, lovers—we cannot afford to ignore Joaquin's argument. We must listen to Joaquin.

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Centering the “T”: Envisioning a Trans Jotería Pedagogy

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Abstract

In this piece, the author reflects on his Trans Chicanx identity and how his embodiment shapes his teaching and pedagogy. The author begins with a spoken word piece that captures his journey to his own *trans-conocimiento*. Then the author looks to the foundational work of Chicana/Latina Feminist pedagogies and transpedagogies to envision a trans *jotería* pedagogy that centers trans migrants—and trans women and people of color—that is grounded in disruption and vulnerability through the unsettling of borders and binaries tied to systems of power. In doing so, the author reflects on his trans *jotería* praxis in the classroom and through his podcast *Anzaldúing It*. The author concludes with looking to the tensions that arise when disruptions of systems of power are central to teaching and pedagogy and highlights the vulnerability necessary of both teacher and student to embark on consciousness raising and healing exchange.

Keywords: *Jotería*, pedagogy, *trans-conocimiento*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.14.2.364>

Dear Mamá,¹

*When I was 8, as we laid in bed I said “mom, no me siento como yo.”
You laughed at me and said, “qué quieres decir con eso?”
I didn’t know then what I meant, but maybe I can better articulate now what I mean.*

*No me siento como...
No me siento como la hija que querías tener.
I’m not the daughter you expected
the one you dreamt of after bearing two sons and
taking one more shot at a girl.*

*I came
I came in the body you and dad wanted.
But that didn’t keep him here.
He left when I was one,
so you did what you could to raise us three.*

*You struggled with depression and taking meds,
Because at 6 you had to be a mother to your brothers,
and at 16 you had to leave your home in Yucatan to come to LA
because of the violence you experienced from grandpa and dad.
And though you couldn’t be all there emotionally, you’ve always been my mayan queen.*

*You were always committed,
a poor migrant single mother on welfare and SSI, tell me how ya’ did it.
I finally understand for you ma’ - it ain’t easy trying to raise me.*

We were so close until I was about 11,

¹ This spoken word piece was inspired by Tupac’s song “Dear Momma.”

I found safety and comfort in you.

We shared a bed until I 2 because we couldn't afford more than one bedroom.

I could never be with my brothers because I was too young a girl.

When I was old enough you tried to teach me to cook because you said “necesitas aprender para tu esposo.”

I protested, because I never wanted un esposo!

*The first time my heart broke at I 6, I couldn't tell you because
a woman did it to me,
so I turned to drugs to mother me.*

*I didn't know how you'd take it,
you did everything to comfort me.
But I learned early on that as the youngest female,
“Me veia mas bonita calladita.”*

*At I 7, drugs gave me the courage and the voice to not give a fuck!
I told you that I was bisexual,
and you told me,
“Que hicie mal, did I not love you enough?”
You loved me in the way that you could
but not in the way that this baby queer needed you to.
All I could do is snap at you and say,
“I'm normal - I don't have a disease!”*

*For so long, dressed in drag,
performing femininity so that you,
my brothers, and everyone else could accept me.*

The dresses, the make-up, the long hair

*going on as many diets as I could to be a size two...
My body was never mine. It was for you, for him, for them.*

*At 18, went away 'cause I couldn't stand it anymore,
so college became my only escape.*

At 19, I stopped looking to drugs and started my spiritual journey practicing and chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

It grounded me, it held me, and it embraced every part of me.

Soon after, the four of us started practicing together and through it we've been able to heal the pain.

But it doesn't stop there.

The pain is so deep!

It's taken years for it to come up to the surface.

For so long anyone who got close I would push away, because I still wasn't me.

I hated my body

I was too afraid for someone to see, to really see me

I couldn't see myself.

I got into relationships that would end

that would be filled with the emotional abuse and neglect I was used to.

I learned to push intimacy away just like you did after dad.

I always knew you were strong

but I've come to learn of how afraid you are of sharing yourself too

and I don't want that for myself.

*It wasn't until I was 26 and going through yet another emotionally abusive breakup
that I said, "I can't keep living this way!"*

*Hurting myself
looking to others to validate me
to validate my body and love me.
Nobody can do that for me!
And I can't do that for you.*

*I met Bamby and the TransLatin@ Coalition.
Through them, I started to find myself, through my work I've started to find myself.
Through the beautiful trans and genderqueer people of color I've been surrounded by,
the universe was telling me to open my eyes
to see the mirror of myself: it gave me permission.*

*So at 27, I cut off my long hair. I never imagined I would.
It was never a thought but I knew that I needed to do it for me.
You liked it, you didn't go away.
Even as I started dressing more masculine - I still feel your love.
Even though you may not understand, you don't let me see.*

*You've seen me go through so many changes,
and you've come to understand my queerness and you even love my partner - and accept us as
we are.
My favorite times are when we come and chant and pray together.
You support my work, and even when I think you won't understand, what the hell I'm doing in a
PhD, you let me teach you about transphobia and queerphobia.*

*You tell other señoras there's nothing wrong with being a queer, because your daughter is a
Lesbiana and she's at UCLA getting her PhD.*

*But here we are again, this time I don't have the drugs to tell you,
I only have my mind, body, spirit and my prayer to guide me.
But I need to tell you again, I'm not the daughter you once thought you had.*

I'm not the lesbiana you've come to know.

The reality is I'm so confused with who I am, y lo que soy.

*Last year you told me you were shopping at TJ Maxx next to a transwoman, and you asked me,
“Te sientes como niño?”*

Again, I snapped, because I was too scared. I didn't know. I still don't. So I said “NO!”

Ashamed.

So I shoved it back down.

*But here I am - I haven't told you yet, but part of the reason I sound ronca all the time is
because in December I started taking Testosterone.*

*So it's been over two months, and I'm re-learning how to use my voice, re-learning my power,
learning to live in my body.*

My doctor at UCLA asked me if I wanted to freeze my eggs,

'cause insurance can cover part of it.

I didn't know what to say.

*Always thought I'd carry, but that was before - when my body was Yours – his, theirs. Taking T
or having a baby?*

Shit, I don't know.

*But now my body is becoming mine. I'm also thinking of having top surgery. I haven't decided
but I know these breasts were never mine.*

They never felt like my own.

Maybe if I do decide I can still carry in my queer ass body. But who's to know.

Now at 29, I'm finding it a lot harder to become the woman you expected of me.

*I'm at a crossroad, and I'm learning that to take autonomy of my body I have to cast off the
expectations you had, he had, and they've had of me.*

The expectations I internalized as my own.

I get to take my body back and make it my own.

I know and trust that no matter what, you and my brothers will always love me.

I love you,

Jack

I have never shared this spoken word letter with my mother or brothers. I shared this poem with close friends and many strangers at an event hosted by California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) called, “Healing our Hearts: A Night of Latina/x Storytelling” in early 2018. The act of writing the pain I was experiencing during my transition was healing for me. While most storytellers were cisgender, I was one of few gender queer individuals who had the mic that night. While I had been very “out” about being a lesbian for over 15 years, this night of storytelling was also one of the first times I “came out” publicly about my Trans identity. For months, I had experienced fear, paralysis, numbness, and denial at the thought of my own Trans identity. But the act of being vulnerable, through writing and performing my spoken word piece, created a bridge toward my own healing. This spoken word piece also encapsulates my path of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2002), or awakening, and the beginning of my path to greater self-actualization and acceptance. I choose to open this reflection with being vulnerable and conveying my trans narrative and *Jotería-historia*² (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014) to position myself and demonstrate that there is a direct connection between who I am as an individual, what I have been through, and how that shapes who I am as an educator and scholar. As I reflect on why I teach the way that I do as a Transgender Chicanx educator, I want to highlight how both vulnerability and disruption are key aspects of my pedagogical practice.

As I think through the role the body and embodiment play in both teaching and pedagogy, I draw on the foundational work of Chicana/Latina Feminist pedagogies and the

² Tijerina Revilla and Santillana’s (2014) *Jota-historia, Joto-historia, Jotería-historias* in the tradition of Critical Race Theory to serve as “counterstories,” which are told from the perspective of marginalized people. In sharing one’s queerstories or *Jotería-historia*, it demonstrates how an individual’s story informs their activist and academic community of queer Latina/os and Chicana/os.

growing field of Jotería pedagogy and Transpedagogies. In doing so, I also imagine a Trans Jotería pedagogy that centers vulnerability and disruption grounded in a trans of color analytic.

Defining Chicana/Latina Feminist and Jotería Pedagogies

Delgado Bernal (2020) asserts that traditional understandings of pedagogy are limited and do not account or include “embodied ways of teaching and learning, political and ideological aspects of teaching and learning, and pedagogical practices that take place in intimate, multiple, and intersecting informal spaces” (p. 161). Chicana/Latina Feminist pedagogies, or what Delgado Bernal calls “Feminista pedagogies,” have drawn heavily on the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Chela Sandoval, and Cherríe Moraga, among other U.S. women of color, to highlight coalitional relations and to think through the intersectional and multidimensional problems of teaching, learning, and schooling (Cruz, 2019; Delgado Bernal, 2020).

Building on Feminista pedagogies, Alvarez (2014) theorizes a Jotería pedagogy by stating that it:

looks at the role of sexuality and desire . . . sexuality is central and not additive to the study of migration, immigration, and the borderlands. Jotería pedagogy focuses on the heterogeneous lives and lived experiences of jotería but also on the erasures and omissions of queer bodies of color. Attentive to homophobia, transphobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, ableism, and other forms of institutional and discursive violence, jotería pedagogy is theory and praxis that connects the global, the local, and the individual. (pp. 217–218)

This pedagogy is both challenging and transformative, and Alvarez asserts that educators must be willing to be vulnerable and share their own story/themselves with students. In practicing this type of pedagogy, educators address intersectionality, make room for diverse ideas and perspectives, and validate the emotional lives of students. Furthermore, educators create non-hierarchical, critical spaces for both students and teachers to learn, and educators become healers and bridge builders between different worlds.

Two concepts from Chicana Feminism in particular have contributed to the development of Feminista pedagogies: Cherríe Moraga’s (2002) “theory in the flesh,” and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2002) “*conocimiento*.” “Theory in the flesh” refers to how “the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longing—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (Moraga, 2002, p. 21). In this way, theory in the flesh

functions as an examination of the body in pain that allows us to theorize from that pain. Cruz (2001) elaborates on racialized, gendered, and sexed embodiment in her conceptualization of the “brown body,” which she describes as “a pedagogical devise, a location of recentering and recontextualizing the self and the stories that emanate from that self” (p. 668). Thus, while Chicanas/Latinas are a heterogenous group, the body serves as a place from which knowledge is created and learning and teaching take place.

While embodiment is essential, consciousness and healing are also essential to Feminista pedagogies. Anzaldúa’s (2002) concept of *conocimiento* is also tied to theory in the flesh and knowledge production from the mind, body, spirit. In terms of *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa (2002) offers seven stages of *conocimiento* which include: (a) El Arrebato, (b) Nepantla, (c) Coatlicue State, (d) The Call, (e) Putting Coyolxauhqui Back Together, (f) The Blow Up, and (g) Spiritual Activism (Cueva, 2013). While the stages do not happen in a linear or chronological order, they are part of the process of consciousness awakening and consciousness raising. Anzaldúa teaches us that going through this process is necessary for inner transformation and is necessary to contribute to social change and collective consciousness raising. Through doing the “inner work” of healing, we engage in “public acts” which take the form of “writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism . . . the body, too, is a form as well as a site of creativity” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 542). *Conocimiento* becomes a motivating force that pushes one to use newly gained knowledge to push one’s culture and communities forward to “create new paradigms, new narratives” (p. 558).

Informed by Feminista pedagogies, story-telling becomes central to my pedagogy. The spoken word poem that opened this article serves as an example of my own path through my trans-*conocimiento*. In coming to awaken to my own queer and then trans identity, the poem became a way for me to process my trauma around my racialized trans gender identity and my own internalization of cis-heteronormativity. Thus, in writing and performing the poem, it becomes a public act of sharing a new narrative of my trans Chicax subjectivity of dealing with familia, cultura, patriarchy, reproductive justice, and my autonomy. Sharing this in such a public way, I write and perform my body and self into existence as a body that defies many boundaries. Further, my awakening creates a ripple of awakening for those who are exposed to it.

Transpedagogies and Transformational Pedagogies³

With the growth and institutionalization of Trans Studies in higher education, the experiences of trans identities and experiences in education has been minimal (Nicolazzo, Marine, & Galarte, 2015). In 2015, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* published a special issue titled “Trans*formational Pedagogies,” to explore and understand issues of schooling, learning, and pedagogy to address the significant gap in the field. In the introduction, Nicolazzo et al. (2015) argue that spaces of formal education foster conformity and serve to regulate students rather than radicalize them. The authors state that regulation and conformity that takes place in formal education does so through the concept of genderism. Genderism, as defined by Hill (2003), is “the notion that gender is an important basis by which to judge people and that nonbinary genders are anomalies” (p. 119). In this way, genderism, or this assumption that the gender binary of male and female is inherent, regulates the lives and experiences of trans people within educational contexts and mediates how they move through such institutional spaces (Nicolazzo et al., 2015). They add that the way in which bodies are regulated and surveilled in educational contexts varies and is subject to one’s gender, race, class, sexuality, dis/ability, religion, and that further dictates who can enter, navigate, and succeed in education. Furthermore, Grant et al. (2011) found that trans people, especially trans people of color, experience discrimination at every level in employment, housing, healthcare, and financial security and further face decreased life chances. Thus, entrance and retention in educational structures can be inaccessible altogether and once inside educational contexts can be increasingly dangerous, risky, and alienating to trans people (Nicolazzo et al., 2014; Rankin et al., 2010).

Nicolazzo et. al (2015), note that the special issue explores how education can be a “practice of freedom” (Freire, 2000; hooks, 2014) through the ways that educational processes challenge oppressive aspects of the binary gender system (Nicolazzo et al., 2015). While they do not define what a transpedagogy is outright, Galarte (2014a) has defined what a pedagogical perspective in Trans Studies should look like:

³ Transpedagogies was first termed by Muñoz and Kaeh (2008). Galarte (2014a, 2014b) makes use of the terms transpedagogies. Then on the special issue on Trans*formational Pedagogies, there is a shift to using either Transpedagogies or Transformational pedagogies.

A pedagogical perspective on transgender phenomena can also help unsettle historically and contextually specific knowledge(s) that shape understandings of normative gender. Transpedagogies should offer students the tools they need to participate in the political and economic power structures that shape the boundaries of gender categories, with the goal of changing those structures in ways that create greater freedom. In a transpedagogical approach, processes of learning become political mechanisms through which identities can be shaped and desires mobilized and through which the experience of bodily materiality and everyday life can take form and acquire meaning. (p. 146)

Additionally, Galarte (2014a) notes that transpedagogies should challenge the production of social hierarchies, identities, and ideologies across local and national boundaries. In this way, transpedagogies should critique the ways in which gender embodiment is produced as a form of cultural production and knowledge. Similar to Cruz's (2001) assertion of centering the brown body as a pedagogical source, Galarte (2014a) emphasizes that a crucial transpedagogy centers the transgender body as a site of knowledge production. Doing so "creates new opportunities for teaching and learning by working to understand how transfolk critically understand their places in the world and tactically maneuver through it (i.e., how they negotiate relations of power, privileged subordination) as well as how they actively participate in the transformation of their world(s)" (Galarte, 2014a, p. 147). He maintains that engaging in this type of transpedagogy is radical as it has the potential to critique and transform how power and authority construct and organize knowledge.

Transmasculine Teachers in the Classroom

Last, I draw on Prosser (1998) and Platero and Harsin Drager (2015) who discuss the experience of being transmasculine teachers in the classroom. In *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, Prosser focuses on the autobiographical accounts written by transsexual people⁴ to show that they have a different experience of embodiment than non-transsexuals. One of his arguments is that trans individuals use narrative to literally "compose" a self—through a "body narrative" Prosser says is "the story the transsexual weaves around the body in order that his body may be 'read'" (p. 101). His introduction chapter illustrates his

⁴ He uses the term transsexual to refer to transgender individuals who have gone through medical transition.

own personal narrative of his medical transition from female to male during the first month of transition while he was teaching an undergraduate class.

Prosser (1998) reflects on the confusion this caused his students and himself, especially as he did not address any part of his transition to the class:

For the entire month my poor students remarkably, collectively, assiduously, and awkwardly avoided referring to me with a pronoun or a gendered title . . . The group’s uncertainty on how to read me earned my immediate sympathy. Yet in no way did I seek to resolve its predicament. I felt unable, too caught up in my own predicament, the circumstances of teaching at this most transitional point in my transition . . . to name oneself transsexual is to own precisely to being gender displaced, to being a subject in transition, moving beyond or in between sexual difference. So, I left them uncomfortably (all of us horribly uncomfortable) leaving me to my ambivalence; and as the class progressed, this not attributing me with a gender, in my experience, became more and more glaring—a kind of deafening unspoken. In this gendered nonzone, I felt too embodied (only body) yet also disembodied: for what on earth did I embody? Not surprisingly, I was massively relieved once the course was over, and I sensed students felt similarly. (pp. 1–2)

Prosser’s choice not to disclose the physical changes that were happening were part of his own process in navigating his own transition. While Prosser was not writing his narrative to bring insight to his pedagogy, the unspoken changes caused a clear disruption in his class and left him vulnerable as a gendered other in his class. However, it seems contradictory to his argument that he would not share his body narrative with students in order for the class to “read” him as he would like to be read.

Like Prosser (1998), I also went through the initial stages of my medical and social transition to look more masculine while teaching both as a teaching assistant and as I began my tenure-track position in fall 2019. Yet, transitioning some two decades after Prosser, my teaching and how I share with students has been shaped by my training in Chicana Studies and my understanding of U.S. women of color, Feminista, and *jotería* pedagogues, who theorize from their trauma and pain. In this way, naming the parts of myself that make me vulnerable and exposing and shedding light on my transition as well as other parts of my intersectional identity creates disruptions within an academic system that is solely invested in intellectual extraction

and production. Vulnerability is essential in building rapport and trust with students in the classroom, bridging, healing, and it becomes a reciprocal process that I model for students when I share parts of my autobiography and through what I teach.

Furthermore, Platero and Harsin Drager (2015), who are both trans teachers in Spain, agree that just being trans and being a teacher/professor is not enough to engage in a transformative pedagogy. They do agree that just announcing themselves as trans can create ruptures in the room and may help with student prejudice by challenging their transphobia and stereotypes. Platero and Harsin Drager state that ultimately a transformational pedagogy that is grounded in freedom is about “disrupting notions of how the teaching–learning relationship takes place through fostering curiosity, providing students with skills for critical thought and inquiry,” and “showing the intersectional connections between ableism, sexism, classism, and other inequalities that are present in our society. It involves addressing different ways to express gender identity, as well as presenting heterogeneous representations of trans lives that are raced, classed, and embodied differently” (pp. 447–449). Building on the work of Platero and Harsin Drager, I continue the discussion of what I see as trans pedagogy grounded in a feminista and *jotería* approach.

Envisioning a Trans Jotería Pedagogy

Trans *jotería* pedagogy is an intersectional and coalitional approach that critically challenges the gender binary and genderism. It is grounded in an understanding that gender is a colonial construct that is defined by patriarchy and [cis] heteronormativity (Lugones, 2007, p. 186). That being said, it acknowledges that gender is a system of power that shapes one’s socialization and life chances within a white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, sexist, and transphobic society. Furthermore, it understands that gender identity, gender performance, and gender presentation are also shaped by one’s culture, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, dis/ability, nationality, and legal status among other things.

A Trans *jotería* pedagogy simultaneously centers trans women of color, trans migrants, and trans people of color’s trans embodiment, experience, existence, and resistance. Trans *jotería* pedagogy draws on trans of color feminisms, which “is a feminism that responds to the violence done to trans women of color, the historical absence of trans women in both white and women of color feminism” (cárdenas, 2016, p. 55). Trans *jotería* pedagogy is uniquely situated to disrupt a cis-heteronormative, white supremacist, patriarchal system. Drawing on

feminista pedagogies, jotería pedagogies, and transpedagogies, in order for trans jotería pedagogy to move toward liberation of those systems, disruption and vulnerability are essential to the facilitation of this pedagogy. The unsettling of borders and binaries tied to such systems of power is necessary in a trans jotería approach. That disruption begins in the class with the student–teacher relationship and the emphasis on vulnerability for the pursuit of learning as well as healing.

Trans Jotería Praxis

A few weeks after sharing the spoken word piece at CLRJ’s event that I opened this reflection with, I also shared it with students in a class I developed titled, “Queer Deviant Bodies: Migration, the Border, and Making Home.” The course took a structural approach to examine the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and trans Chicanxs and Latinxs in the US.⁵ As part of the course, students were asked to produce a creative project to submit as their final that incorporated what we learned about LGBT/Queer Chicanx/Latinx socialization, identity formation, policing, migration, resistance, and resilience throughout the quarter, but pushed them to bring visibility or awareness to a topic of their choice. Students worked individually and in groups to identify an issue they wanted to address and created websites, Tumblr, and Instagram pages, podcast episodes, and even art that was dedicated to bringing awareness to their issue. Inspired by the assignment and the students’ interest in it, I asked if it was okay with my students to share my own creative project that was unexpectedly produced alongside them (the spoken word piece). I read through the piece struggling to hold back the tears, feeling so raw in my own emotions. I kept my eyes glued to my paper, but as I continued, I could hear students’ reactions through their “oohs” and sniffles. All quarter I was too afraid to name what I was going through, as my voice continued to drop and I felt so exposed by my changes. Yet in that unplanned moment of vulnerability, there was trust and community that was built. As they saw their teacher being vulnerable, being human, our shared stories created a new dynamic in the classroom. My ability to be vulnerable with my students led them to be empathetic: It made students feel seen in their struggle to be themselves, led them to bond with

⁵ Some of the texts we read/saw included Juana Maria Rodriguez’s *Queer Latinidad: Queer Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*, Lionel Cantu’s *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossing and Mexican Immigrant Men*, Katie Acosta’s *Amigas y Amantes: Sexually Non-conforming Latinas Negotiate Family*, as well as shorter pieces or articles from Eithne Luidheid, Gloria Anzaldúa, Anthony Ocampo, Carlos Decena, among many others. Films included: *Tranvisible: The Bamby Sacedo Story*, *El Canto Del Colibrí*, and *Paris is Burning*.

me as their instructor, and broke down hierarchical structures within the classroom that can limit what students take away from the learning experience. It also showed the students that they can theorize from their own pain and lived experiences. Ultimately, students produced beautiful creative projects that not only showed their deep understanding and application of what we learned in class, but their work was grounded in their personal journey as LGBTQ Latinx individuals themselves or co-conspirators of the community. This teaching experience, which was shaped by the first months of my medical transition, showed me the importance of vulnerability in disrupting assumptions, boundaries, and binaries, not only in relation to gender but also hierarchies between teacher and students and other systems of power that function to erase the life chances of racialized gender variants.

In being vulnerable, I also emphasize the importance that students interrogate their own socialization around gender and sexuality and how they understand their own lives and what shapes how they come into the classroom. This also requires vulnerability on their end. I do this in various ways. I always begin each of my classes with an activity that requires students to reflect on their childhood and to recall any time they remember their families making comments about what they could or could not do because of their gender. I ask them to think about their siblings or cousins of the opposite gender and ask if their parents had different or similar expectations of what was allowed or what had to be learned. I also ask them to think about any commentary from their family that may have put them in a gendered box. This makes students' life experiences central in the course. Their own reflections then serve as the lens through which they see the theory. I immediately personalized the class so that they can use their own lives to learn and apply to the readings. For many of my students—a majority of whom are first-generation students of color—thinking of their gendered self is not something they had much experience with inside or outside of a class setting. I often begin with sharing a brief personal example of how my mom gendered me as a child. I share, “since I was about 12 years old my mom would tell me ‘necesitas aprender a cocinar para cuando tengas esposo’ (you need to learn how to cook for your future husband).” Then I share with students how I always hated when my mom told me this, mostly because while I didn’t know it when I was younger, I didn’t want a husband, but her messages conveyed two very clear things. First, that I was expected to be a woman and a good Mexican woman at that and, two, that I was heterosexual. When I am able to share from my own experience and in a sense refer back to pre-transition

when I did identify as a woman, I am able to disrupt assumptions of gender and gender roles through being vulnerable. In this way, students are able to begin their own disentanglement with their own racialized gendered identities and begin storying their gendered selves.

Concluding Reflections

Another improvement would be that she specify her readings/films we analyze implicitly just to women studies. What I mean by this is that she mixed women studies with gender/ lgbt+ sometimes. This made me feel like I was taking a lgbt+ studies class rather than Women’s 101. Although these two tend to intersect/overlap, it would be better if it was more directed to general women studies. (From a student course evaluation, Fall 2019)

In my first semester as a professor, I taught a course titled Women’s 101: Sex, Power, Politics. The course takes a body politics approach to understanding of power and discipline and how women’s bodies are shaped by hierarchies of gender. Grounded in an intersectional approach throughout the course, the reading, assignments, lectures, and activities interrogate the social construction of gender via history, medicine, and media. Throughout the semester, it was very powerful for students to go through their own path of *conocimiento* by interrogating the disciplinary racialized gendered functions they have internalized via how they accessorize, why they accessorize, and how they groom themselves.

While most of my evaluations from students were very positive and met me with their own vulnerability, disruption, and curiosity, I initially met the evaluation above with anger and frustration. There are many reasons for this, including how the student misgendered me throughout the evaluation responses after I shared my pronouns throughout the semester which at that point were “they/them” pronouns. I also had my pronouns on the syllabus, on the course website, in every email signature, and even incorporating the importance of pronouns into a lecture in class. As a trans Chicanx educator, I am often the only trans person in the room. As a trans educator, moreover, I am already rupturing the assumptions of which bodies can teach women’s studies, not only in academia but also in that specific discipline. While the student was not directly speaking about my presence, their critique of making a Women’s 101 course have a trans and queer perspective underscores those assumptions of women, gender, and sexuality studies being a place where only cisgender women can be. Ultimately, they resisted the notion that gender is a social construct for all bodies. The majority of the readings

in the class were authored by cis-women, but because of the body that was standing before them each day teaching them these concepts, their intake of the material was different. Merely by having a professor who did not fit neatly into their idea of gender normativity, their idea of what a women's studies class should be was challenged. For this student, and possibly many other students who may have felt similarly, being taught by a visibly queer and Trans person was a point of tension as they learned the material. In and of itself, that tension is knowledge, information, and data for the student—as well as for me as the teacher—about how to teach these concepts in a way that leaves the students with the idea that all genders are socially constructed and all systems such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia work in concert with one another to uphold each other in our society.

Furthermore, another space I am able to share my trans *jotería* pedagogy in praxis is through the use of the podcast, *Anzaldúing It*. I co-created the podcast with my friend and colleague, Angelica Becerra, and we originally started it to talk about the experiences of being queer Latinxs in graduate school as we navigated the many material and metaphysical borders of academia. While the podcast has moved to discuss all things pop culture, astrology, academia, politics, and whatever we may be navigating at the time, the podcast became a space where I brought visibility not only to my own transition but to unpacking internalized homophobia, transphobia, and sexism within myself. Since these systems function together, the classroom is a space where naturally these conversations come up, but the podcast allowed for a larger platform and reach of those who listened. The podcast was an opportunity for me to talk through every step of the process of my transition: Every episode, I was able to talk about milestones, and the podcast itself is an archive of my voice and the documentation of the audible transition of my gendered self. In the digital, you get instant feedback; I was able to get support and affirmation, people that were not necessarily expecting this conversation but that were willing to listen and were empathetic to my process. In that same vein, listeners were also learning about the process, from what it meant to take a testosterone shot, hearing the effects through the changing of my voice, talking about the growing *pelitos* on my chin, sharing about the struggles of coming out to my family, and going through top surgery together with me. Once you go listen to someone's process of pain and vulnerability, there's no way to mess up someone's pronouns or not be understanding of the effort it takes to be seen as a full person—they have been on that journey of *conocimiento* with you.

In this way, as a Trans Chicanx educator and scholar, I see my responsibility as offering students the tools to be critical of gender binaries and sexual dichotomies, as well as to be critical of the structures that shape racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and migration. My presence in the classroom, my body, my voice, and my identity, are the additional tools in my pedagogical toolbelt as I teach and learn alongside my students. As I bring my whole personhood to the classroom, my hope is that my students feel brave enough to bring their full selves to the classroom as well.

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The Power of Testimonio Pedagogy: Teaching Chicana Lesbian Fiction in a Chicana Feminisms Course at a Predominantly White Institution in the Midwest

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Abstract

In this essay I extend Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies to demonstrate using testimonio pedagogy to teach Chicana lesbian fiction: *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings* opened up dialogical spaces for students as pensadores to critically examine the impact of racialized gender and sexual normativity within Chicano culture. Exploring the significance of students as pensadores using testimonio pedagogy cultivates pathways of epistemic disobedience that should be understood as responses to institutional power. I suggest testimonio pedagogy mediates marginalization by breaking down the false dichotomy between students and teachers, cultivates feminist consciousness-raising, and refuses hegemonic conceptualizations of schooling.

Keywords: Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies, testimonio pedagogy, Chicana lesbian fiction, Chicana feminisms

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.14.2.365>

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Camino of Testimonio Pedagogy: Theorizing the Flesh

Testimonio pedagogy is my praxis that serves as a compass for teaching and learning with my students. Rather than a compass that directs north, south, east, or west, testimonio pedagogy directs cartographies of non-dominance, non-hierarchy, reclamation, and solidarity. “*Testimonios* focus on collective experiences of conditions that have contributed to oppression, as well as the agency of those who suffer under these conditions. As such, *testimonio* is a pedagogical tool that lends itself to a form of teaching and learning that brings the mind, body, spirit, and political urgency to the fore” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 367). Therefore, testimonio pedagogy offers a way to not merely document my experiences and share practices of *sobrevivir* and of getting there *cuando no hay camino* but also to claim my own epistemic disobedience in a theory of the flesh. The telling is political (Blackwell, 2011). My use of testimonio pedagogy is informed by Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) conceptualization of a mestiza consciousness that is “reimagining a theory of feminist practice that is enacted by a Chicana lesbian whose movement between and among different worlds generates a subject with agency rather than subordinate abject positionalities” (Diaz-Kozlowski, 2015, p. 89). I contribute to scholarship that breaks down false dichotomies between teachers and students (Cortez, 2015; Cruz, 2012; Freire, 1970; hooks, 2003; Love, 2019; Torrez, 2015), refusing students as consumers, teaching as transactional, and the academy as a marketplace wedded to hegemonic standardization (Giroux, 2011; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2000). I do this by putting into practice theories of the flesh to re-center voice and agency in the relationships between teachers and students, curriculum and pedagogy, and learning and community.

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

We are the colored in a white feminist movement.

We are the feminists among the people of our culture.

We are often the lesbians among the straight.

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

(Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 23)

Through testimonio as pedagogy I offer insights that build upon the socio-political historical interventions of fellow Chicana/Latina feminists that continue to reimagine equity driven research, teaching, and learning and theorize from those standpoints:

Testimonio is and continues to be an approach that incorporates political, social, historical, and cultural histories that accompany one's life experiences as a means to bring about change through consciousness-raising. In bridging individuals with collective histories of oppression, a story of marginalization is re-centered to elicit social change. (Delgado Bernal et. al, 2012, p. 364)

Using testimonio pedagogy in this essay bridges the epistemic disobedience I witnessed my students cultivate in my Chicana Feminisms course with my own. Walter D. Mignolo (2009) articulates his argument for epistemic disobedience in this way:

My humble claim is that geo- and body-politics of knowledge has been hidden from the self-serving interests of Western epistemology and that a task of decolonial thinking is the unveiling of epistemic silences of Western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued, and decolonial options to allow the silences to build arguments to confront those who take 'originality' as the ultimate criterion for the final judgment. (p. 160)

Mignolo's scholarship in conversation with Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies have helped me recognize the significance of using testimonio pedagogy to teach Chicana lesbian fiction in a Chicana Feminisms course at a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Midwest. Using testimonio pedagogy enables my epistemic disobedience as an ongoing practice that uproots hegemonic conceptualizations of schooling by affirming the brown body is a source of knowledge, the linkages between marginalized subjectivities and experiences are productive tensions, and theory is mediated through everyday experiences. Testimonio pedagogy showcases my epistemic disobedience as embodied resistance that must be understood as a response to white heteropatriarchal institutional power.

Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies (Cruz, 2006) are particularly significant as it relates to epistemic disobedience because they challenge Eurocentric conceptualizations of schooling that pervasively use deficit theories to normalize the experiences of Chicanas/Latinas and other marginalized groups within education as lacking. Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies specifically contribute to refusing and challenging deficit theories of Latino students in education by

reimagining culturally specific ways of organizing teaching and learning in informal sites such as the home and community that embrace Chicana and Latina ways of knowing and generating knowledge that go beyond formal schooling (Darder & Torres, 2013; Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2011; Elenes, 2000; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Using testimonio pedagogy to theorize the significance of my students becoming pensadores teaching Chicana lesbian fiction in a Chicana Feminisms course demonstrates queer modes of disruption with Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies is the insistence that the everyday experiences of survival, resistance, compliance, and dis/identification must count as knowledge. Therefore, testimonio pedagogy mediates marginalization², my own and my students, by breaking down false dichotomies between teachers and students so that we confront loss, alienation, and powerlessness and restore connection to ourselves and one another that points towards a practice of healing and learning rooted in the body.

Catalysts of Testimonio Pedagogy: The Pieces I Am³

On the morning of August 5th, 2019, I was sitting at my desk grading final exams. Suddenly the Twitter notifications on my cell phone began to ping. I glanced down to see at the age of 88 Toni Morrison had died. I sat in disbelief. I fell backwards into a memory, recalling a significant trip to the public library when I turned eleven years old.

Sometimes I shuffled up and down the aisles of books, head titled sideways, reading every title, fingers touching every book's spine. Other times I marched to the center of the library, pulling out the drawers of the catalog acting like I knew what I was looking for. This day was special. At eleven years old my mom and I walked together to the library. I was running. My mom was walking. But because I have such a short stride it all evened out. I normally walked to the library by myself which if you think about it was both transgressive and remarkable. Where else could an eleven-year-old brown queer girl go without being accompanied by her little brother, her step-dad, or her mom? I had been waiting for this day since before time existed in its colonial construction. I walked into the public library with a swagger that would

² Marginalization is a process by which members of a certain community have historically been and continue to be denied access to dominant decision-making processes and institutions; stigmatized by their identification; isolated or segregated; and generally excluded from control over the resources that shape the quality of their lives. Marginalization occurs in part when some observable characteristic or distinguishing behavior shared by a group of individuals is systematically used within the larger society to signal the inferior and subordinated status of the group (Cohen, 1999).

³ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9358206/>

have made the baddest Chingona want to take off her hoops. I signed my name in cursive on my first library card.

Initially, I turned to books out of escape from abuse, but that changed after I got my own library card. My stepfather physically beat me throughout my childhood and adolescence because I had the audacity to repeatedly question his absolute authority as a white man. Pero, soy lo que soy. Books became my respite, nourishing my spirit while tempering a rage that seethed. Words became my fuel, reading my superpower. During my adolescence the library became my homeplace—a site of resistance and liberation struggles (hooks, 1990). Books became a place where my imagination, my curiosity, and my body could soar. I read and I wrote to save my own life. Yes, my life. Soy chingona, y que? I found Toni Morrison's fiction at the public library as a brown queer girl, but I didn't understand the depth of her writing. But when I read, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (Morrison, 1973, p. 92), I wanted to make Sula Peace a mix tape and ask her if I could hold her hand. None of my high school teachers or college professors incorporated Morrison's writing into their curricula. Defiantly reading Morrison's books on my own led me to literature written by Chicana and Latina writers such as Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Isabel Allende, Julia Alvarez, and Helena Maria Viramontes. The writings of Black and brown women exposed me to a genealogy of women of color that I did not have the vocabulary to name as feminist until decades later. Reading fiction by Black and brown women taught me writing is a way to name the conditions that contribute to nuances of oppression and cultivates agency for women of color under those conditions. They taught me that writing is power. I stopped grading final exams, logged into Hulu, and watched the documentary *The Pieces I Am* for the rest of the morning.

It took a week to make the epistemic connections between Toni Morrison the writer–editor and Tanya Diaz-Kozlowski the teacher–scholar. Midway through the documentary, Dr. Farah Jasmine Griffin and Hilton Als both point out when Toni Morrison worked at Random House as an editor she strategically published the writing of Black women writers such as Gayle Jones, Lucille Clifton, Toni Cade Bambara, and Angela Davis. I kept coming back to Toni Morrison's strategic decisions as an editor at Random House to publish the writings of Black women and the significance of her writing throughout my life as feminist consciousness-raising. Two things came into focus: do what you can where you are and the power of fiction. I grabbed the copy of my Chicana Feminisms syllabus. I realized I needed to make a change. Here's why.

Do What You Can Where You Are: Feminist Consciousness-Raising

Toni Morrison's strategic decision as an editor to publish the writings of Black women challenged me to reevaluate the conceptual framework of my Chicana Feminisms course. Toni Morrison's writing and strategic decisions as an editor are linked to a genealogy of women of color writers whose larger project of epistemic disobedience I know well. The Combahee River Collective along with the authors of *Some of Us Are Brave* and *This Bridge Called My Back* refused the hegemonic notion that gender is the primary analytic of oppression for women, illuminating how gender subordination is produced, represented, and resisted among women. It was women of color writers who first challenged the notion that *woman* is a universal category of analysis and identity while unmaking the embedded racism within hegemonic feminism, refusing the claim that all women experience sexism in the same ways. This genealogy of women of color writings effectively re-conceptualized *difference*⁴ as a feminist concept that must be applied to the power relationships between and among women, not merely between white cisgender heterosexual able-bodied men and white cisgender heterosexual able-bodied women. These women of color genealogy writings are the foundation for what Brittany Cooper (2018) writes in her book *Eloquent Rage* as intersectionality, "the idea that we are all integrally formed and multiply impacted by the different ways that systems of white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy affect our lives" (p. 99). In this way Women of Color writers reclaim and reimagine feminist consciousness-raising that is attentive to difference, employs intersectional analyses of power, commits to political activism, justice, and equity, and contends the body is a site of knowledge and agency.

I reviewed my Chicana Feminism's course reading list and wrote down four names: Ana Castillo, Emma Pérez, Cherrie Moraga, and Carla Trujillo. I decided to incorporate Emma Pérez's book *Gulf Dreams* and Carla Trujillo's book *What Night Brings* because I knew their fiction could compliment the non-fiction essays⁵ I already used in the course. I had a hunch that reading fiction written by these two Chicana lesbian feminists would create opportunities for

4 Audre Lorde's (1984) essay: "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" is integral to teaching feminist theory because of how she challenges hegemonic feminism and re-conceptualizes difference.

5 Already in the Chicana Feminisms course reading list were: Carla Trujillo's (1991) essay "Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community", Carla Trujillo's (1998) essay "La Virgen de Guadalupe and Her Reconstruction in Chicana Lesbian Desire", and Emma Pérez's (1991) essay "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor."

my students to partake in the power of *sitios y lenguas*.⁶ Teaching *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings* could fundamentally change the essence of my Chicana Feminisms course by *showing* my students instead of *telling* them *how* Chicana lesbian feminist writers cultivate intellectual tools as theories of agency (modes of acting upon their world) to respond to multiple forms of oppression happening simultaneously. The classroom is a dialogical space where we would be able to collectively investigate these questions: What can we learn about the conceptualizations of racialized gender normativity and heteropatriarchal power from the fiction written by Chicana lesbian writers? Whose voices and stories have we been taught to value? What role do institutions play in normalizing the devaluation of Chicanas within Chicano culture?⁷ How do Chicana lesbian fictions reimagine and attempt to decolonize Chicano culture? My students would be able to witness how Pérez and Trujillo as Chicana lesbian feminist writers cultivate in fiction Chicana lesbians as agents in their own lives queering the sites/discourses/places/tongues within and of Chicana imaginaries.

Teaching Chicana Lesbian Fiction: Cultivating Pensadores

Re-evaluating the conceptual framework of my Chicana Feminisms course⁸ was my attempt to engage with the example Toni Morrison set as an editor. In November 2019 my students and I read *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings* chronologically over a three-week period. After completing both books, the students read articles in which Lisa Cacho (2012), Cristina Herrera (2009), and Ellie Hernandez (2003) offer concise analyses of *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings*. I had the students read both books consecutively to experience the depth and diversity of Chicana lesbian fiction unmediated by scholarly voices. The only instructions I

6 Emma Pérez's (1991) essay "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor" introduced 'sitios y lenguas' as a conceptual framework that "attempts to create space and language amid an occupied (read colonial patriarchal) space," (Ikas, 2001, p. 13).

7 The scholarship of Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998, 2020), Maylei Blackwell (2011), and Calderón et. al. (2012) documents the myriad ways knowledge produced by Black Feminist Thought and Chicana Feminist Thought have resisted subjugation within academia. This archive of scholarship chronicles the power of Black Feminist Thought and Chicana Feminist Thought as potent political projects that offer us roadmaps towards decolonization.

8 In the Illinois State University course directory, the course I teach is not listed as WGS 391: Chicana Feminisms. The course is listed as "Women's and Gender Studies Seminar Course: WGS 391, credit hours: 1-3, course approved for graduate credit, no prerequisites. The way the course is catalogued by the university serves as a chronic institutional barrier (Ahmed, 2017) to enrollment because accessing the course information is convoluted and thwarts cultivating interest in a Chicana Feminisms course. Enrollment in WGS 391: Chicana Feminisms has varied over the last 4 years between 5-19 students, primarily women of color, Humanities and Social Science majors, and range from sophomores to graduate students. During the fall term I teach WGS 391: Chicana Feminisms and during the spring term I teach WGS 391.001 Latinx Popular Culture.

gave my students prior to reading each book was: Read each book wholeheartedly. Stay curious. Come to class prepared to ask questions and to read passages out loud from the book that you found significant, confusing, or that made you want to post on Facebook or Twitter. As we made our way through each book, theoretical questions foundational to the course organically emerged. The students read, got lost, and found their way into the Chicana lesbian fictions, creating class discussions that centered on their questions, their interpretations, and undetermined lines of inquiry which collectively positioned Kerime, Shani, Stacy, Esther, and Damaris to see and come to know themselves as *pensadores*, which means they saw themselves as “active thinkers who build on their cultural foundations to form political and practical meanings about learning, knowing, teaching, and power” (Godinez, 2006, p. 24). I witnessed my students come to see and know themselves as *pensadores* in the ways they gave themselves permission to take risks, grappled with contradictions, and closed the distance between teacher and student by co-constructing the classroom as a relational and dialogical space we could learn from each other.

A Pedagogy of Pérez’s *Gulf Dreams*

Students came to class prepared to share and read out loud at least two passages from *Gulf Dreams* (Pérez, 1996) they found compelling, confusing, or worth posting on social media. This encouraged students to read carefully rather than skimming and at the same time gave them autonomy to select whatever passages they wanted, as many as they wanted. Some students shared and read passages they were confused by while others read passages they deemed important to a Chicana Feminisms course. For example, during the first class discussion of *Gulf Dreams* all the students began to have a conversation with each other about how the structure of the book left them feeling disoriented. Students said: I am not sure what to think about this book but I know something important is going on. I am excited but nervous to talk about it with everyone. I keep wondering why the narrator doesn’t have a name. Is it weird to say I want to keep reading this book even though I have no idea what the point of the book is? I am feeling some kinda way. I can’t tell if the book is a dream, a really long poem, a complicated breakup rant, or short stories.

Collectively the students became *pensadores* by recognizing Pérez (1996) is not writing a hegemonic coming out narrative about Chicana lesbian identity that seeks to de-pathologize non-normative sexualities and desires or affirm non-normative sexuality and desires as

tolerable. The pensadores were affectively attuned to Pérez's project of exposing the gendered racialized power dynamics of Chicano/a historiography through the writing of fiction. After a while Damaris spoke up and said,

"*Gulf Dreams* is like nothing I have ever read. To be honest it's hard and confusing, and we've only read half the book. But I get why it's art. Chicano/a art creates un sitio y una lengua, a space and a language, for those who try to fight these colonial norms. It's like, in this world, Chicanas are constantly rejected or pushed to the side, to have this space and language gives other Chicanas an opportunity to speak about their own issues they have experienced. Like Blackwell was so hard to read too. I wanted to give up a lot. Sometimes I think I did. But when I came to class I started to try again. Now I understand that *Gulf Dreams* is a part of that legacy of a Chicana feminist counter public Blackwell wrote about. I know I say this all the time because I am a theatre person, but can you imagine if this book was a play?"

Damaris like her classmates, as pensadores, were developing a vocabulary to articulate:

"The novel itself seems to embody a different historical account of the cultural representation of Chicana lesbian sexuality by making the visible the psychological ruptures of colonial memory in Chicano discourse. By framing historical memory as desire, Pérez makes the aesthetic claim that representing Chicana lesbians in history is next to impossible without summoning the violent tropes embedded in a Chicano/a colonial and nationalistic history." (Hernandez, 2003, p. 155)

The students' embodied knowledge guided them to collectively trust in their disorientation in order to sit with not knowing why Pérez played with what is real and what is representable. During the second class discussion about *Gulf Dreams*, Esther brought up a passage that led to a deeper understanding of the ways Chicana feminisms are rooted in theories of the flesh that function as de-colonial strategies and tactics. Esther read:

A spring day invited muggy heat. I'm awake. Dew scattered droplets on a rusty window screen. Outside, the wrens that woke me sing. Stumbling I bump into my brother. Through a bathroom door my father shaves his face. I lean against the wall. I doze. Pangs of hunger force gurgles in my stomach, burying the last night's dreams. When pain jolts through me, I double over, arms crossed my abdomen. "What's wrong?" my brother asks. I look up with arms protecting a burning stomach. "Stomach hurts," I am barely

audible...I wipe my face with a stale towel. Beads roll down my waist and navel to pubic hair. For months, soft curls have begun to poke through underwear. I've wanted to shave, assuming I shouldn't. But in the night once, I snuck a razor into bed slicing tender skin, leaving a scar. Now my hair grows out prickly. (Pérez, 1996, pp. 39-41)

Esther spoke of how struck she was by Pérez's attention to the physical pain the Chicana narrator's body endured during menstruation. Fellow pensadores nodded their heads in agreement and commented about how difficult it is for them to go to class when they are menstruating but friends, roommates, boyfriends, and even parents minimize the pain of it. Damaris responded to Esther, "I marked that passage too while I was reading. I am glad I am not the only one who felt that way." It became more apparent to the pensadores as we got lost in collective consideration of *Gulf Dreams* that Pérez is critiquing the heteropatriarchal violence enacted through the institutions of the family, the law, and religion in the way they distort, erase, and fragment brown queer bodies. The pensadores were uprooting what lies beneath the systemic devaluing of the brown female body. Trujillo (1991) says it best:

Our culture voices shame upon us if we go beyond the criteria of passivity and repression, or doubts in our virtue if we refuse. We, as women, are taught to suppress our sexual desires and needs by conceding all pleasure to the male . . . Moreover, we (as well as most women in the United States) learn to hate our bodies, and usually possess little knowledge of them. (p. 186)

The conversation shifted again when Shani looked directly at Esther and said, "It looks like you have more to say, so you should say it." Esther hesitated then said, "I just thought about shaving. Like we're supposed to shave because you know...guys like it. But maybe we start to do it because we start to internalize a deep-rooted shame we have for our bodies." Laughter then silence. Their silence demonstrated a collective recognition of how hegemonic white cis heteronormative beauty standards become normalized during adolescence into adulthood.

Then I asked the pensadores to think deeper about why a Chicana writing about her body was so important. Stacy chimed in and said, "This is what Hurtado (1998) means when she writes the ways gender subordination is culturally specific, right?" I smiled and said yes, drawing attention to how the passage points to the nuanced impact of racialized heteronormative gender and sexual norms upon the bodies of Chicanas. The pensadores snapped their fingers in affirmation. The snap functioned as an ongoing collective recognition of the students seeing and

knowing themselves as pensadores (Ahmed, 2017). It is reclamation. Class discussion shifted again when Damaris spoke up. “I have to be honest. I had to put this book down several times in order to finish it. I have read books about sexual violence before but nothing compares to this. I have never read anything written by a Chicana lesbian in a class before and I am 23 years old. This was hard.” Silence. Damaris looked around and said, “Like I knew there was gonna be violence. How can there not be violence? Right? But when I read, “Her bruises internal, her skin unscathed, the police would lie. She is scarred inner flesh” (Pérez, 1996 p. 78), I lost it. Pérez captured those feelings that never leave a woman if she has been sexually assaulted.” Faces flushed, then deep exhales swirled linking Kerime, Shani, Stacy, Esther, and Damaris as pensadores who were collectively reckoning with Pérez’s project of decolonial memory in the ways gendered and sexual violence endured by Chicanas dehumanize us across generations. The rape of Ermilia is not singular but gestures to the collective rape of colonization as well as informs how through colonization the practice of “the policing of female desire thus extends beyond the sexual act as a form of violation” (Hernandez, 2003, p. 167). The pensadores generated deeper understandings of Pérez’s decisions to not name the narrator, to queer colonial constructions of time and space, and transgress genres opening up opportunities for her to write Chicana lesbians into history and at the same time critique the multiple levels of trauma inscribed upon Chicana lesbian bodies in the multiple forms of institutionalized violence through the law, the family, and the Catholic Church. As students began to see and know themselves as pensadores, the epistemic significance of *Gulf Dreams* became more apparent in how Chicana lesbian fiction challenges hegemonic historiography as truth because it decolonizes the Chicanx imaginary.

The Pedagogy of Trujillo’s *What Night Brings*

Once the class finished reading and discussing *Gulf Dreams* and turned towards discussing *What Night Brings* (Trujillo, 2003), a substantial theme emerged. The pensadores became co-teachers of the course material and their uncontrollable excitement and imagination flourished. I walked into the classroom and the pensadores were already deep in conversation. Stacy sat cross-legged on top of the table and was waiving her copy of *What Night Brings* in the air. Stacy exclaimed, “I love this book. I hate reading, but I love this book. I read more than we were supposed to and didn’t read for another class. I don’t even feel bad about it.” Kerime shouted to Stacy, “Bro, I need my cousins to read this book. Actually like my whole family. But I

might have to do certain people first.” I sat down in the circle and listened. Damaris chimed in, her words bursting out, “I love that this book is written through the eyes of a queer brown girl. I think that is so hard to do. Marci is fierce. Honestly, I wish I was as chingona as Marci.” Everyone snapped. The pensadores settled into their seats and began thumbing through their book for passages to read out loud. While the pensadores searched I went to the board and started writing out pervasive themes discussed throughout the entire semester: the body is a source of knowledge, knowledge is always partial, the *vendida* logic,⁹ gender subordination is culturally specific, and theory is mediated through everyday lived experiences. The pensadores began calling out page numbers that coincided with themes. I couldn’t keep up. Stacy finally said, “Maybe we just start at the beginning. What did you all think about this passage?” I sat down while Stacy read the following passage:

I have to tell you what I need from God. I have to change into a boy. This is what I want and it’s not an easy thing to ask for. Not like wanting a new bike or football. This takes special powers, and let me tell you, I’ve been wanting it a long time. It’s not because I think I’m a boy, although it sure seems like I am. It’s because I like girls. I don’t know how or when it happened. Maybe I was born this way, but the second I saw chichis, I wanted them. I couldn’t stop thinking of girls, during the day at school, at night in my dreams, and especially when I watched TV. (Trujillo, 2003, p. 9)

Kerime said, “Yeah I get this. I’m Catholic. Growing up you kinda know how important religion is to being a Mexican girl. It shapes who you are, how you come to know yourself.”

Immediately the pensadores recognized the significance of the knowledge generated from the everyday experiences of Marci’s brown queer body by having Marci tell the reader she has been praying to God to change her into a boy because she likes girls. The pensadores collectively identified the hegemonic role the Catholic Church and the Chicano family have as institutions that maintain the cultural value of patriarchy, as a sociopolitical system that insists men are inherently dominant, normalizing heteronormative gender and sexual norms. Then Shani spoke up: “Yeah but damn.... the constant violence her and Corin experience...and how all the adults in the book basically make excuses for Eddie or pretend they don’t know he’s abusing his daughters...I had a hard time with it. Like I want to be mad at Delia, Uncle Tommy, and the

⁹ Blackwell, M. (2011). *!Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*. The University of Texas Press.

nuns. I am mad at all of them.” Shani’s anger nurtures her articulation of the nuanced ways heteropatriarchal violence marks Marci and Corin’s Chicana bodies. Critically discussing this passage opened up a deeper understanding of the myriad ways gender subordination is culturally specific for Chicana girls and women, challenging a common trope of hegemonic feminists that gender is the sole source of oppression for girls and women. Testimonio pedagogy loosens the shackles placed upon our imaginations through hegemonic conceptualizations of teaching and learning by bridging the body, mind, and spirit pushing us towards new *conocimientos* through feminist consciousness-raising. Trujillo is making a point about hegemonic heteropatriarchal gender normativity in her fiction, articulating the ways mothers teach their daughters to be silent, subordinate, and submissive. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) put it succinctly: “Culture is made by those in power: men. Males make the rules and laws: women transmit them” (p. 19). Shani’s contribution also demonstrates that cultivating empathy is a practice that is never finished because one must commit to bearing witness to the injustice, violence, pain, and trauma inflicted on communities that we may or may not be a part of. Esther responded to Shani, “I want to hate Delia too but I can’t. Delia is being abused by Eddie too and is complicit in the abuse of her daughters. It’s a both/and. As a white queer woman, I know it’s not as simple as I wish it was.” The exchange between Shani and Esther brings to light what underlies the trauma of abuse for Chicanas:

“Herrera-Sobek describes how the marginalization of women leads to their economic and social dependence on men, which also results in a loss of agency and control over their own bodies. She points to how some victims ultimately seek protection from a man because they may be left with no other resource. The dichotomy of men as perpetrators of violence and then as protectors from violence exists in patriarchal societies because overall men are valued, whereas women are not, men have privilege, whereas women do not, and men possess power, whereas women do not.” (Pérez, 2009, pp. 146-147)

Furthermore, the pensadores bearing witness to the injustice and violence endured by Marci and Corin through analyzing the significance of *What Night Brings* cultivated powerful reactions. They realized the danger in having one story because it erases the multiplicity and plurality of Chicanas’ subjectivities, agency, and voices. “In listening to the story of one, we learn about the conditions of many” (Beverley, 2005, p. 557). Finally, pathways for epistemic

disobedience emerged as the pensadores got lost and stayed lost by refusing to make universal claims about why Trujillo did not kill the character of Eddie. The pensadores listened to understand, not to reply, imagining a variety of theories. Damaris said, “Maybe it’s more realistic Eddie lives because most domestic abusers kill the victims rather than the other way around.” Shani chimed in and said, “I don’t think Trujillo wanted Corin to have to live with the burden of knowing she had to kill her dad because he was going to kill her mom.” Kermie thought, “What if Eddie lives because Trujillo is going to write another book that will pick up where this one left off? What if Eddie lives, but he isn’t really living?” Stacy spoke up and said, “Like Corin and Marci go live with Grandma Flor and they are finally around adults who make them feel seen and heard as the Chicanas they know themselves to be, rather than Chicanas the Catholic Church and heteronormative Chicano families what them to become. What if Trujillo is trying to tell us Chicana lesbians know how to live if society would actually let them?” Damaris, listening to her classmates, jumped in at the end of class to say, “Yeah, maybe Trujillo is telling us what we already knew but we needed a chingona like Marci to remind us: Chicana lesbians aren’t the problem. Heteropatriarchy is.” Ultimately, no one left class thinking they knew it all or that they had it all figured out by reading *What Night Brings* because the pensadores came to a deeper understanding of why knowledge is always partial.

There is a power in testimonio pedagogy: You guide your students to cultivate their own internal anchors rather than expecting them to seek your external validation as teacher. Stay curious with them. Listen to them. Find joy with them. Witness their pain. Let them see you. Dare them to reimagine a more equitable world. Wander together. The pensadores realized there is no one right answer, but a multiplicity of possibilities. We got lost in *What Night Brings* and didn’t want to be found, showcasing that using testimonio pedagogy to direct cartographies of non-dominance, non-hierarchy, reclamation, and solidarity to teach Chicana lesbian fiction cultivated theoretical tools and theories of agency that open up pathways of epistemic disobedience. This is what testimonio pedagogy feels like: an appreciation of ambiguity.

Breaking Dichotomies and Feminist Consciousness-Raising: New Conocimientos

Using testimonio pedagogy to teach Chicana lesbian fictions opened up dialogical spaces for me as a teacher–scholar to scaffold Chicana feminisms course material that broke false dichotomies and cultivated feminist consciousness raising bringing about new conocimientos.

We sat in a circle together. We used each other's pronouns. We found language to discuss trauma. We witnessed wounds surface, yet found joy. During some class periods we spent twenty minutes discussing one passage from *Gulf Dreams* or *What Night Brings*, only to spend two minutes on another. When someone started to use negative self-talk, we did not stay silent, yet we did not shame each other. We asked one another questions. We snapped. These facts may seem inconsequential, but they are not. We created a non-hierarchical and non-dominant class community together that refused to emulate or valorize the culture of power (Delpit, 1988) that informs hegemonic conceptualizations of schooling as individual, neutral, and hierarchal. Individual competition, productivity, and objectivity are contributing factors to isolating and alienating students in classroom environments by normalizing white, middle class, heterosexual norms that determine definitions of academic success. Collective practices of listening, solidarity, and curiosity recalibrated teaching and learning so that our Chicana Feminisms course became a site of resistance to institutional white heteropatriarchal power mediating marginalization.

Using testimonio pedagogy to teach *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings* in a Chicana Feminisms course weaved ongoing analyses of how racialized gender and sexual normativity inform heteropatriarchal violence within Chicano communities into the curriculum rather than tokenizing Chicana lesbian writers. This allowed us to collectively reckon with rape, sexual harassment, binary gender policing, homophobia, and machismo as violence circulating within Latinx¹⁰ communities. Yet discussing Chicana lesbian fictions dared us to reimagine equitable Latinx communities collectively. As the only Chicana lesbian in the room, the pensadores never put me in a position to speak for all Chicana lesbians. I felt relieved and valued as a Chicana butch lesbian feminist teacher-scholar. Teaching at a PWI in the Midwest, the majority of students and faculty are white, middle class, cisgender, and heterosexual. When I am among faculty or staff of color I am usually the only queer. While I am no stranger to the process of othering at a PWI, the gravity of navigating the multiplicity of otherness has become chronically isolating and alienating. *Mi locura no se cura, y me ahogo con locura.*

10 "Latinx" is an intersectional identity term meant to be used by gender fluid and gender non-conforming people, LGBTQIA persons, cisgender men and women, and those taking a political stance that ethnicity and gender exist on a spectrum and are not dichotomous" (Garcia, 2020, p. 38).

A significant question that came to the forefront through collective analyses of *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings* (a question I should have made explicit in the beginning of the semester) is: How can women take responsibility for fighting oppressions they cannot individually relate to? Using testimonio pedagogy to teach Chicana lesbian fiction centered this foundational question rooted in the genealogy of women of color feminist writings (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Anzaldúa, 1983; Davis, 2016; hooks, 1997; Lorde, 1984; Mahmood, 2005; Martínez, 2016), grounding practices of feminist consciousness-raising in political solidarities, not a false sisterhood predicated on perceived shared identities of women. Political solidarity is thinking through structures of power and identities relationally that demand an understanding of the nuances of the socio-political histories of women. It became clear to me witnessing the pensadores collectively analyze Chicana lesbian fiction they confronted why and how women experience oppression in nuanced ways, and sameness can't bring about equity. Esther and Stacy, the two white women in my class, began to confront and grapple with their racial privileges by reading and discussing Chicana lesbian fiction and exploring the culturally specific ways racialized gender subordination for Chicana girls and women functions as a result of the interconnected logics of white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. Kerime, Damaris, and Shani, the self-identified Latinas in the class, began to contend with their own internalized racialized gender and sexual normativity, prompting them to acknowledge their complicity and commit to challenging racialized heteropatriarchal norms in their own lives. Through collective analyses of *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings*, Kerime, Damaris, and Shani in particular succinctly identified that, "For many Chicanas, our identification as women, that is, as complete women, comes from the belief we need to be connected to a man...We are socialized to undervalue ourselves, as well as anything associated with the concept of self," (Trujillo, 1991, p. 187). Solidarity between the pensadores and I developed as each of us grappled with acknowledging and then confronting her attachments to internalized racialized heteropatriarchy. On the last day of class, the pensadores and I discussed Emma Pérez's (1991) essay, "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor." The conversation was slow going, but halfway through class Damaris spoke up:

This essay was hard to read. I had to stop and go back a few times. But if I had read this before I read *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings* I would have been completely overwhelmed and just quit. But I didn't give up. When I got to the last section where

Pérez writes, “We cannot be friends as long as you think you know every part of who I am, as long as you think you can invade my space and silence my language, my thoughts, my words, my rage. Mi sitio y mi lengua” (Pérez, 1991, p. 175). I understood that. I’m still lost, but I am not afraid. I see myself. I see all of us trying to learn, to unlearn.

The growth of the pensadores demonstrates they were able to conceptualize difference as an asset (Lorde, 1984) rather than a barrier between women through practicing feminist consciousness-raising and breaking down false dichotomies. The pensadores reclaimed the classroom, collectively making it clear to me that discussing *Gulf Dreams* and *What Night Brings* cultivated new conocimientos that are powerful and politically urgent. They learned to believe in themselves and in each other. Snap. They recognized the plurality of selves alongside a multiplicity of possibilities, which forged deeper practices of empathy, listening, and solidarity, restoring connection to ourselves, and guided us towards a practice of healing and learning rooted in our bodies.

Writer’s Note: Enseño Desde la Herida

Reevaluating the conceptual framework of my Chicana Feminisms course and making the strategic decision to teach Chicana lesbian fiction became an integral part of understanding the power of testimonio pedagogy. Here’s why. Testimonio pedagogy refuses the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy, the teacher/student dichotomy, and hegemonic conceptualizations of schooling steeped in individual competition, objectivity, and learning as commodity. Testimonio pedagogy highlights the fortitude and resilience necessary to mediate pervasive forces of marginalization in the academy rooted in racialized neoliberal capitalism (Klein, 2007; Melamed, 2006; Taylor, 2019). While students may perceive educators as all the same, we are not. Working at a PWI, my brown Chicana butch lesbian body is read and written over, marked with instructions and narratives that are not of my making. I am consistently taken less seriously, my expertise devalued. We must show our students that our humanity is intimately linked with theirs. Testimonio pedagogy cultivates a radical vulnerability that reclaims teaching as a human act, not a business transaction. People aren’t just things you use and toss. This is why I use testimonio pedagogy to cultivate practices of trust and care with my students because:

all parts of people enter the pedagogical space as sharing and memory often prompt all our senses when reliving or listening to the stories. Feelings, emotions, knowledges,

silences, and identities are integral to learning and connecting with testimonios—to enter a new site of knowledge—a space of reclamation. (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 396)

Using testimonio pedagogy, I extend the genealogy of women of color writings by disrupting epistemological boundaries in order to center voice and agency in the relationships between teachers and students, curriculum and pedagogy, and learning and community. The writings of Toni Morrison sembró las semillas, that root my commitment to the work I do as a Chicana butch lesbian feminist teacher–scholar. “The work. To make revolution irresistible” (Bambara, 1983, p. viii). Toni Morrison taught me that we all have a responsibility to act. Por eso, escribo y enseño desde la herida.

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Reading and Remembering Butch-Femme Worlds

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Abstract

This essay examines the practice of building a syllabus that centers butch-femme literatures as a pedagogy of gathering and recuperation. Prompted by the loss of an early syllabus on lesbian histories, I examine the genre of the syllabus and contend that “butch-femme” is not the same as “queer” or “LGBTQ.” Through reflective and autobiographical writing on memory, place, queerness, and social media, the essay traces an ephemeral archiving revealing the stakes for naming and remembering butch-femme lesbian “worlds.” The essay highlights a sample student project and offers a syllabus as a teaching resource.

Keywords: butch-femme, lesbian histories, U.S. woman of color feminisms, queer pedagogy

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.14.2.368>

This paper is a weaving of two distant yet connected experiences with butch-femme lesbian literatures. Reflecting on the process of creating a butch-femme class, I begin with a memory of a rare lesbian studies course and the lost syllabus I am searching for now. My experience as a student and my experience as a teacher are linked through this special archive that needs to be named or it will be lost. Writing from the perspective of a teacher, I focus on the genre of the syllabus and the coalitional politics of women of color that shape my pedagogy. This essay also highlights the student work that came out of the butch-femme worlds class and contributes a syllabus for a future archive.¹ An insight that emerges is the gathering of new butch-femme literatures that works against forgetting resistant butch-femme worlds.

On Coming Out

Introductions. That perpetual work of coming out to students every class, every year is something I grow weary of and often resist. I'm not comfortable simply announcing it on the first day, yet my queerness is not always legible at first glance. Usually the picture comes into focus when I'm in the company of my butch partner where I am often read as femme or when I drop a "she" or "partner" into a personal anecdote later on in the semester. My femmeness is not always legible along with being a Chicana in academia but certainly in the way that "femmeness" tends to be misread and invisibilized. I always "come out" to the students in my class but usually not on the first day.

I recently taught a class that was part of a sequence on Queer Literatures in the English Department at UCLA. As I prepared to write my syllabus, I drew from my background many times teaching the course "Ethnic American Writers" and my own experience as an undergraduate student taking a rarely offered course on lesbian studies. Focusing on lesbian literatures, I created a class called "butch-femme worlds" which I conceive of as different from and at a significant distance from how "LGBTQ" or "queer" are understood. As a particular kind of relation "butch-femme" is not easily translatable to umbrella terms like "LGBTQIA" or "queer." I wondered if in this era of fluid gender expressions and highly visible queer and trans representations in popular culture there is any place for centering butch-femme stories in a syllabus.

¹ I would like to thank the students of Queer Literatures and Cultures, Spring 2019, at UCLA who contributed their zines to pass on to the next Butch-Femme Worlds.

As part of my introduction of the course to this group of students, I reflected on my own college experience taking a lesbian studies class. I worried a little about my story sounding anything remotely like “when I was young,” but I hoped that these students would be interested in thinking across queer generations. What would be different about this introduction is that this time I felt I had something relatable to discuss about queerness—on the very first day.

I was an undergraduate student at California State University Long Beach in 1993 and had the cosmic luck to take a course in Women's Studies from Sharon Sievers called “The Lesbian.” At the time it was listed as “W/ST 356” and I remember that we had the option as students to have it listed generically on our transcripts, the discreet brown paper package version of the class. I chose to have “The Lesbian” permanently emblazoned on my official transcript. I was a music and French major, but I took several classes in women's studies along with many friends, all the cool out queer students on campus. I teach in a gender and women's studies department now and reflecting on the process of how and why one builds a queer syllabus, especially one focused on butch-femme narratives, reminds me of how important this class was and what a difference it made to my experience as a student to take classes in women's studies. I remember the feminist bookstore Pearls Booksellers on Redondo Avenue that also provided intellectual inspiration and respite when I was a student. Learning through other students that this bookstore was owned by Sievers's partner, Edie Odelle, was almost as important as seeing the works of Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa featured in the glass window cases, stacks of feminist poetry on the display tables, and books and magazines with provocative covers on tidy shelves along the walls. My friend Verónica Reyes worked there when she was a creative writing student and if Pearls were open now her own stunning collection of poetry, *Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives* (2013) would be on display. I think about this and imagine how another first-generation Chicana lesbian student from East Los Angeles like we both were would feel holding such a book in her hands, knowing through the breath of those words that such mujer-centered worlds are real.

Such places of lesbian feminist respite are rare now and most have long closed. You can trace these shifts rather scientifically now with an objective distance of 20 years or more, a simple strategic business pattern that affected women's bookstores and small independent booksellers nationwide. But I remember the start of that in Los Angeles, when Borders Books opened in 1995 directly across the street from Sisterhood Books in Westwood which closed

soon after in 1999. Now the specter of Amazon haunts every fledgling endeavor to dare to sell books and create a community of readers through the love of stories, poems, and like-minded company while making rent. Remembering those bookstores as a student is like travelling to a forgotten world. These are some of the meaningful events that shape the way I teach. I remember these feminist bookstores, these material lesbian histories, because I do not want to forget and I cannot allow them to be forgotten in my classroom or on my syllabus.

Over the years and one move too many after leaving Long Beach, I lost the bulky bubble gum pink 3-inch 3-ring binder that held all my course readings, papers, and the syllabus Dr. Sievers created for us. At the time I believed the class I took was the first time it was offered but in fact the course was born in the middle of the 1980s when programs like Gender and Women's Studies were under threat at CSULB and across the country. Known for such courses like "Women and Their Bodies" that demonstrated activities like vaginal self-examination, practices that remind students that the body is a political site, are now part of the well documented controversial history of that department. These radical feminist pedagogies drew accusations that women's studies and feminism encouraged lesbianism. I didn't know of Sievers's important role in establishing and defending women's studies at Long Beach. The hard work had been done by the time I was a student, and I simply got to sign up for this mysterious class called "The Lesbian." I remember reading Lillian Faderman's (1991) *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* and the stunning *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg (1993). Mostly we read articles hand selected by our professor, a course design practice I follow now, too. The class is still listed in the university catalog as "Lesbian Histories and Culture." I can imagine many kinds of introductions and first days in that class. I would love to see that lost syllabus again.

The Syllabus Genre

What is a syllabus, formally speaking? In its most general sense a syllabus is an organization of knowledge, an outline of a course of study. "Butch-Femme Worlds" is an evocative title for a "queer" syllabus. But in practice it's easy for even the most creatively conceived class to become overdetermined by the conventions of the genre. A syllabus includes expectations and consequences even when such disciplinary language is against your teaching philosophy because it is part of the genre. More than ever now, the established form of the syllabus requires language about measurable outcomes that can take you far from your original pedagogical goals. Even calling it a contract now sounds overly transactional in the increasingly

corporatized university. The syllabus is a genre particular to academia that I struggle with every semester to keep the original spark of inspiration alive. I want to resist some of its conventions because I want to make my syllabus full of butch-femme and femme-butch persistence and resistance to do something else.

The genre of the syllabus has recently found a wider audience beyond academia. There is a trend on mainstream media to publish reading lists as an intervention to urgent topical issues. At moments of national crisis you will see these impromptu syllabi as reading lists on anti-racism, on underrepresented Latinx authors, banned books, and #MeToo circulated on social media. The syllabus has also become a form that gives validation to important cultural events such as Candice Benbow's (2016) immensely popular #LemonadeSyllabus based on Beyoncé's acclaimed genre shattering video album. The author's blog describes its public impact:

With contributions from over 70 Black women, Candice released the syllabus as a free downloadable resource of over 250 works centered around the lives of Black women. Within the first week, it was downloaded over 40,000 times and has reached over 600,000 downloads. National and international libraries created "Lemonade Stands" to highlight the books from the Syllabus that were available.²

These kinds of uses of the syllabus occupy a new inside–outside space, partly in academia, partly in popular culture, mediated by the flash fire speed of cyberspace. Whether it is used to offer a quick reading list to get yourself (or your friends) woke or as an innovation on the traditional course of study, there are discernable ideas about what a syllabus is and what it can do outside of the classroom. The emergence of these popular syllabi seems to express new kinds of public investments towards creating better worlds. If the genre of the syllabus is perceived as something that can offer solutions to systemic problems, the stakes are high. Ultimately, a syllabus is inherently limited and that is good. Even a great syllabus can only do so much on its own. Yet a syllabus can be in good company and in that way begin to work differently with more possibilities to do something else than its conventions dictate.

² See <https://candicebenbow.com/>

For example, in the important black feminist anthology, *All the Women are White, All the Men are Black, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, the editors reserve the last section for syllabi reflecting interdisciplinary and literary approaches in the field of black women's studies (Hull et al., 1982). Organized under the title, "Doing the Work," it was there that I read Barbara Christian's syllabus for the course, "Major Afro-American Writers: Alice Walker Seminar." Reading her syllabus along with those of other black women scholars was profoundly moving. More than a syllabus repository, I see a coalitional practice of women of color enacted within the form of the anthology, much like the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* had done a year earlier (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Against the individualistic, competitive culture of academia, here was a gathering of black woman centered knowledge generously offered to the reader—then and now. In the company of others the academic genre of the syllabus becomes critical work, both articulating and archiving its intellectual and political project. In whose company was the 1993 "The Lesbian" syllabus?

The anthologizing practices of women of color in *But Some of Us Are Brave* and *Bridge* are simultaneously intellectual, pedagogical, and activist in scope. Reading their introductions, I extend these politics in the making of my syllabus. Their introductions reflect the urgency of the work and the expansiveness of their vision that do something else with the form of the anthology. In "The Politics of Black Women's Studies" Hull and Smith state, "The publication of this book fulfills a long term need for a reference text and pedagogical tool" and note that the section devoted to course syllabi was "perhaps the most valuable part of the book for many readers (Hull & Smith, 1982, pp. xxiii-xxxi)."³ This is a practical matter on one level, noting how scholars have had to rely on "informal networks and the lucky acquisition of a syllabus here or there," but these are also the lived conditions that inform the politics of gathering knowledge in the form of the anthology (p. xxiii). In the introduction to *Bridge*, Moraga & Anzaldúa (1981) state, "We envision this book being used as a required text in most women's studies courses" and "by every ethnic studies teacher in the country" (p. xxvi). It's safe to say that this goal has largely been met; however, they also envisioned a home for *Bridge*, "in libraries, bookstores, conferences, and union meetings in every major city and hole-in-the-wall in this country" (p.

³ The introduction to *But Some of Us Are Brave* is co-written by Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith.

xxvi). In other words, the editors of *Bridge* had an academic and general public audience in mind for this “revolutionary tool” (p. xxvi). These are examples of the ways women of color innovate and push the boundaries of established forms.⁴ These anthologies model a way to do something else—because they must. At the same time that they establish intellectual fields, these coalitional works reject those structures and practices that exclude women of color in the first place. The editors of *But Some of Us Are Brave* state:

Originally, we had thought to make this book, not “Black Women’s Studies” but “Third World Women’s Studies.” It became apparent almost immediately that we were not equipped to do so. We hope that this one volume on Black women helps to create a climate where succeeding works on American Indian, Asian American, and Latina women can more swiftly come into being. (Hull & Smith, 1982, p. xxxi)

Furthermore, for Black women, curriculum could not be about exceptional Black women—or a conservative “contributions” approach—but rather it must be clear, courageous work that “saves Black women’s lives (Hull & Smith, 1982, p. xxv).”⁵ For *Bridge*, the writings cut through genres and their stated and coalitional politics exceed the boundaries of atomized departments and discrete genres. These coalitional projects both share a practice of gathering of the knowledge necessary to their respective and interrelated projects and a commitment to “facilitate the necessary sharing” (Hull & Smith, 1982, p. xxviii).

In her contribution to *But Some of Us Are Brave*, “Black Women’s Health: Notes for a Course,” Beverly Smith also sees the possibilities in the form of a future syllabus to properly address Black women’s needs, marked by a glaring absence in the research she gathered:

The greatest shortcoming in the following materials is the frequent absence of awareness that Black women’s health is affected by sexism, racism, and class position. I see the following, though it is in the form of a syllabus, as an initial attempt at gathering the concepts which would be necessary for such an analysis. (Smith, 1982, p. 105)

Smith is calling for an *intersectional* analysis and her careful notes offer ways to make the academic genre of the syllabus work towards an important intervention in the lives of Black women.

⁴ The histories of independent feminist presses are important to note here too.

⁵ See Paul C. Gorski’s (2009) typologies in his study of the philosophies that underlie the “official” multicultural curriculum in Multicultural Teacher Education (MTE).

Teaching in Los Angeles I expect to see first generation, queer, trans, undocumented students of color in my classes and I have them in mind when designing a syllabus. As I began sorting my ever-growing list of potential queer texts, I realized what I wanted my syllabus to do: Even though this was not a race and gender studies class, I wanted it to have a rigorous and nuanced discussion of race and gender. Even though this was a literature class, I wanted it to be a lesbian literature class. I wanted all the literature to be by working class authors of color. Focusing on butch-femme literatures ensured that. Knowing this made the task of narrowing down the texts more clear. I focus on butch-femme literatures so that these stories, lives, desires, and struggles are not forgotten. On a personal level, I want students to know that this lesbian literature exists, that it is beautiful and important. On another level, I want my butch-femme syllabus to embody its woman of color feminist politics as I see modeled in woman of color anthologies. I want my syllabus to be an introduction to lesbian literatures with a radical edge, coalitional more than comparative, that names the linked processes of race, class, and gender on the first week. To center these texts, concepts, and perspectives on my syllabus resists reinforcing the canon and its ordering logics and also resists the survey model that I began with when I thought of the class as part two of “Queer Literatures.” My first draft had a few units dedicated to butch-femme representations but when I decided on the title: “Butch-Femme Worlds,” now I could get to work.

Butch-Femme is Not the Same as Queer

Naming the course “Butch-Femme Worlds” historicizes working class and women of color lesbian literatures in ways that terms like “queer” and “LGBTQ” do not allow these contexts to be seen. In that sense, butch-femme is not the same as queer nor always legible under LGBTQ. These terms have been widely debated and part of the problem with “queer” is aptly captured by Siobhan Somerville’s (2007) entry for *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*:

“Queer” causes confusion, perhaps because two of its current meanings seem to be at odds. In both popular and academic usage in the United States, “queer” is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms “gay” and “lesbian” and occasionally “transgender” and “bisexual.” In this sense of the word, “queer” is understood as an umbrella term that refers to a range of sexual identities that are “not straight.” (p. 187)

Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa warns of the way that queer is used as “a false unifying umbrella which all ‘queers’ of all races, ethnicities, and classes are shoved under” (Anzaldúa,

1998, p. 264). We can see in this pointed statement the “race trouble” E. Patrick Johnson speaks of in proposing “quare studies” to accommodate “racialized sexual knowledge” as part of a bigger project on Black queer studies and why the emergence of a “queer of color critique” is necessary (Johnson, 2001, p. 1).⁶ That “queer” needs these negotiations and interventions by people of color points to the hegemonic status of queer theory in the academy.⁷ More than a convenient or innocuous umbrella term, the homogenizing effect of “queer” actively works to erase gender and race. Theoretically speaking this might be desirable but in practice, in the case of butch-femme histories, there is a need to be specific in order to see lesbians through the queer umbrella.⁸ For instance, writing about the decision to use “gay” in the title to the anthology *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, editors Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez refer to the way that “queer” elides gender difference and therefore “gay” becomes a more representative term for their anthology (Hames-García & Martínez, 2007). Problematically, Anzaldúa (1998) claims that the word “lesbian” “doesn’t name anything in my homeland” (p. 263); however, Carla Trujillo’s (1991) *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* makes “Chicana lesbian” part of *my* intellectual homeland. This naming matters because “lesbian” simply does not retain the same level of status, visibility, or acceptance, however fraught, that “gay” does for men. These discussions are part of what inform how I teach about non-normative gender. We will likely never get to a consensus on the possibilities and limits of these terms that name parts of our plural selves, but that’s not really what needs to be resolved here.

What needs to be understood is how to recognize identity in a way that matters for the survival of marginalized communities. When Anzaldúa (1998) states, with prickly reluctance, “If I have to pick an identity label in the *English language* [emphasis added] ... I pick ‘dyke’ or ‘queer,’” she does so for “different reasons than those of the dominant culture” (pp. 263–264). She is working out the difference María Lugones painstakingly elaborates in her rejection of categorial logics—in the reductive uses of race, gender, queer—for a critical and historicized understanding of identities which arise “at the point of resistance” (Lugones, 2011, p. 52). Forced into an impossible corner, Anzaldúa (1998) acts and makes something with more

⁶ Paraphrasing Judith Butler’s notion of “gender trouble.”

⁷ Other meanings and contexts for “queer” precede its established use in academia.

⁸ Theoretically speaking, Monique Wittig has provocatively argued that lesbians are not “women.”

resistant possibilities out of these terms: “My labeling of myself is so that the Chicana and lesbian and all the other persons in me don’t get erased, omitted, or killed ... Naming myself is a survival tactic” (p. 264). *Can a syllabus really do all of this?*

In the academic setting of an English department where literature by authors of color continue to be marginalized and minoritized, I cannot easily assume that a course called “Queer Literature” means “queer of color” or that “queer of color” means butch-femme lesbians. The history of English departments as arbiters of canonical knowledge, the force of categories and genres, the conventions of the survey style syllabus, all work together so that queer literatures and histories by people of color are hard to see at first glance no matter how much we have done to destabilize its hegemonic meaning. For these reasons, reading white lesbian literature alongside lesbian of color literature lets me see “butch-femme worlds.” But this is not to make new canons or genres. My correction to avoid a bourgeois queer hegemonic syllabus is to bring class to the front. To read butch-femme literatures is to read white working class and woman of color working class immigrant narratives. Moreover, the literature itself demands the confrontation of these intersections, tensions, and difficult coalitions.

A well-known repertoire of classic lesbian literary works point to these communities and the inter-racial, class, and erotic dynamics that echo the classic ethnographic studies, essays, and dialogues published at nearly the same time: *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) by Audre Lorde; *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (1992) by Joan Nestle; *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) by Leslie Feinberg; *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in 20th Century America* (1991) by Lillian Faderman; *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (1993) by Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis. The shared ten-year timeframe for these new literary representations and ethnographic writings about butch-femme communities helps highlight the ways that fiction often works to recover histories that are not officially documented or are marginalized within canonical literatures and genres. It is also important not to make research work to authorize what is told in literature and instead I want to reconsider the capaciousness of literature for representing butch-femme lived experiences, including their aesthetics and formal innovations.

My first selections were the classic memoirs *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg and *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* by Audre Lorde which, in part, document butch-femme spaces in 1950s New York, the surrounding attitudes towards class and race, and the violent policing

of gender. These are indispensable generative works in white working class and black lesbian literature that speak well to each other and to our current moment. But the inspiration for building the course around the butch-femme theme came from reading new Chicana butch and femme characters in the poems of Verónica Reyes (2013). It's not every day that I get to teach Chicana lesbian writers and reading her vibrant debut collection of poems that remember familiar times, places, and sounds set in East Los Angeles, the city I grew up in, made it exciting and urgent. I had also seen the short film *¿Tienes Hambre?* by Margo Rivera-Weiss (2005) at a queer woman of color film festival some years earlier and I never forgot it—but it was not made available in time to show in my class. Nonetheless, I could not pass up the opportunity to pair new literary voices and films with the classic texts. Designing the course this way helped to disrupt the idea that butch-femme is somehow “old school” and problematizes the sense of linear progress in the area of sexuality and gender sometimes assumed by the visible flourishing of new queer and trans subjectivities in popular culture. Of course, I needed to trouble the stability assumed in “The Lesbian” too and make room for my own experiences to count, something I remember in hearing the bilinguality of Reyes's poetry.

I came out among a group of young women of color at CSULB. But it wasn't until I went to a Latina lesbiana support meeting at The East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU) with a friend, another Chicana, that I met Latina lesbians who were not students. We travelled from Long Beach to East Los Angeles to attend Lesbianas Unidas meetings and participate in Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos (GLLU) events. Many activities and events were held in community centers around the city including the Women's Center for Alcoholism, cafés like Café Tropical, and small *jotería* owned businesses during closed hours. Eventually I attended a camping retreat and it was there under the stars and around the fire that I realized that there were lesbians who spoke Spanish. Moreover, Spanish was their primary language. This had not been my experience in college and I felt somewhat out of place at times. I felt the same way at working class lesbiana butch-femme nightclubs. The lesbianas I met in these spaces were not only Mexicanas but Guatemaltecas, Salvadoreñas, Peruanas, Argentinas. If ever there was a Chicana lesbiana awakening, that experience of hearing Spanish spoken, listening, organizing, flirting and dancing to music among lesbianas was it for me! Until then, my sense of being queer and being Mexican were two different worlds that rarely met. Hearing Spanish spoken so easily between women, with intimate inflections of understanding, friendship, and desire was what

gave butch and femme lasting meaning for me. Here I'm thinking with Juana Maria Rodríguez's idea of "queer latinidad" embodied through language in words like "entendidas" that are hard to translate without its intimate, queer, outlaw inflections (Rodríguez, 2003). There are limits and complexities in sharing a language, Spanish is not an equalizing tool, demarcations of class, colonial legacies, citizenship, and degrees of assimilation all play out in the field of language. Somehow, I felt more queer—and more femme—in Spanish. In those spaces we fight to exist in, our hometowns, hangouts, families of our own making, even as subjects of literature, recognizing butch and femme worlds pushes back against the forces of marginalization, erasure, and violence. As Elizabeth Kennedy states in the preface to *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, we must remember these butch-femme communities as "communities of resistance" (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, p. xiii).

Indeed, the terms "butch" and "femme" are quite alive and widely used now, whether creatively paired or kept in the singular. As Stacy Macías (2020) notes, the meanings and popular use of the terms have been expanded, in particular the uses of "femme." This new visibility is reflected in our consumer culture and practices. It's both jarring and fascinating to see a t-shirt for sale at Banana Republic with the word FEMME printed on it. These terms with rich lesbian histories and meanings have new queer and trans articulations, and at the same time they are used to make heteronormative claims. These layered processes are worth paying attention to. There is an important literary and cultural history to which we have a responsibility to keep alive by naming it "butch-femme" and troubling how we read queer and LGBTQ.

Perhaps I could have called this class "Butch-Femme Literatures and Cultures" as the syllabus includes film, art, and sound. I wanted to evoke another perspective, another pedagogy. I wanted to use language and grammar that resisted categories and hierarchies that we are habituated to think in. I include the hyphen in "Butch-Femme" to link the phrase in a relation of complementarity. I call it "worlds" because I wanted room to interpret "Literature" very broadly. I borrow the term "worlds" and the phrase "worlds of sense" from María Lugones (2003) "against the grain of atomic, homogenous, and monistic understanding of the social in any of its dimensions" and to suggest the possibility for "meaning and communication to be both less coded and less determined" (pp. 25–26). Without foreclosing the suggestive possibilities for thinking with Lugones's "worlds," I find this is a helpful partial description:

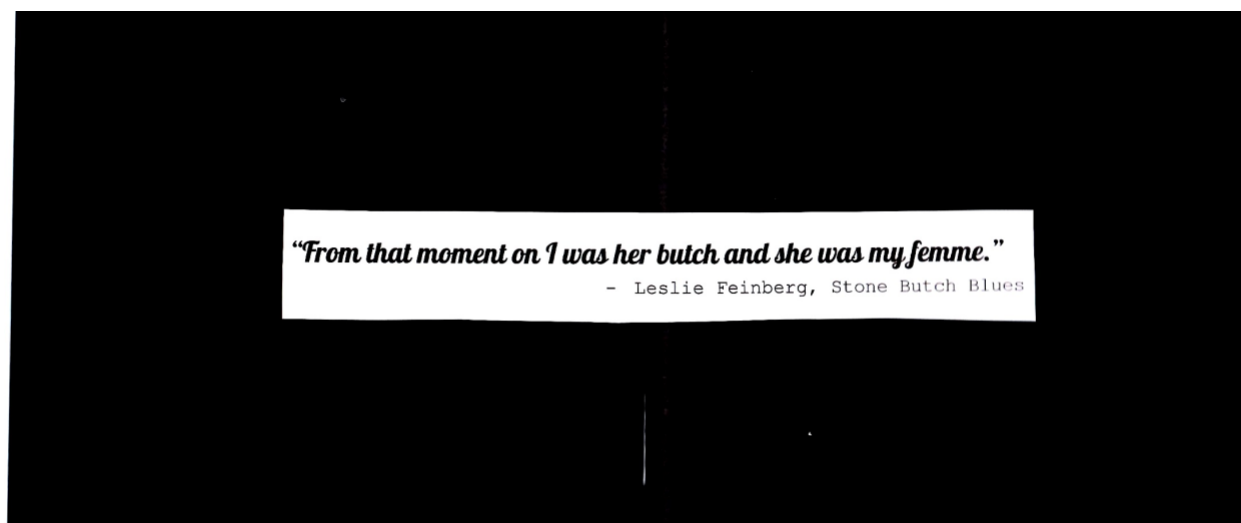
For something to be a “world” in my sense, it has to be inhabited at present by some flesh and blood people. That is why it cannot be a utopia. It may also be inhabited by some imaginary people. It may be inhabited by people who are dead or people that the inhabitants of this “world” met in some other “world” and now have in this “world” in imagination. (Lugones, 2003, p. 87)

By naming the class “Butch-Femme Worlds,” lesbian communities need not be thought of as “subcultures,” and our approach to texts and people may invite the “sensory” and the body into how we study bodies of knowledge and bodies of literature.

Sample Project: A Butch-Femme Zine

Figure 1

Student Work 1



Note. The quote by Leslie Feinberg from *Stone Butch Blues* is typed in a cursive font and spread over two pages of the zine, made in cardstock, a place of prominence and importance.

The goal of the class was “an” introduction to LGBTQ literature. I chose to make this class about lesbian literatures because it’s a body of work I care about: how it’s represented, how it’s read and misread. Having also seen the introduction of new butch-femme characters in film long after the film *Bound* (1996) in the film *Pariah* (2011) by Dee Rees which features a young black “stud” as its protagonist, I felt a twinned sense of responsibility to these works and the young queer and trans students of color I imagined would select to be in the class. I did not need to see the prior iterations of “Queer Literatures and Cultures after 1970” to know that a

class on butch-femme lit would be rare. I knew that and so did the students. On the first day of class, after reviewing the list of books and films, a student who identifies as femme told me that she had taken another queer lit course and that she never read any lesbian literature, let alone butch-femme stories (see Figure 1).

All “queer” meanings gathered in the course of the class need to be kept alive at the same time without competition for the final word. As someone who grew up politically, musically, and queerly in the 1980s, I don’t expect students to identify as butch, femme, or lesbian—or even Chicana. However, we must think and teach historically with these words; we cannot erase them from our lexicon or too much will be lost, forgotten. I created this special topic so that students, whomever they might be, might see themselves in the readings and perhaps imagine their queer forbears speaking to them across time and place, generations, and complex differences (see Figure 2). Working toward these goals, I created assignments that emphasized exploring concepts rather than defining them so that all students regardless of their background in race, gender, and theories of sexuality could draw from their own experiences, discover their own questions and come up with their own insights into our topic. The Raymond Williams-style “keyword” essays and the student group co-led discussions support and reinforce these goals (Williams, 1976). Together they interrupt tidy dictionary logics of meaning, the linearity of chronological time, and orient learning against mastery in favor of playfulness and exploration. A key group activity was close reading which students practiced extensively—and even held a hearty sustained debate over the butch-femme symbolism held in a cup of coffee: black or with sugar and cream.⁹ There is no “test” that makes sense for me to give as the work of the class is done. Ultimately, I wanted students to imagine themselves as part of this literary lineage. I wanted them to write their own stories.

The zine project is the culmination of the class. The guidelines are framed by Lugones’s (2000) healthy suspicion of any meaning that is too pinned down and an open appreciation of “linguistically improper” words. Mimi Nguyen’s (2012) theorization of zines as an important archival site comprised of “materials and absences” offer critical questions for the students to examine in the shared process of making zines:

⁹ Referring to the wildly flirtatious femme seduction scene between Violet and Corky in the film *Bound* (1996).

I like dictionaries. I am also suspicious of them. I am politically discriminate, critical, active, as I 'look up' words. I am particularly attracted to dictionaries of the linguistically improper. (Lugones, 2000, p. 246)

The archive is not just a place for study, but must be itself an object of it. What is in the archive, and how did it get there? What are the criteria for assembling, organizing and presenting materials? Who selects and collects, shapes and donates their stories to an archive? What is not there? How do these materials and absences produce knowledges, including norms and teleologies?" (Nguyen, 2012)

The pedagogy and politics of the zine project are encapsulated in these epigraphs. The simplest description of the project is to create a publication with an accompanying image discussing any aspect of "butch-femme" students choose including new uses not yet captured by dictionaries or official texts. For further definition I offered the following (see Appendix):

A zine, short for magazine or fanzine, is typically a DIY publication made on a very low budget (often "free"), copied in black and white, stapled, focused on a single topic, with hand made, drawn, or found illustrations and graphics, circulated in small batches.

Zines are "unofficial" sites of knowledge and labor and often provide important stories and counter-discourses missing in "official" archival sites. Zines are meant to be easily accessible and readable and passed on by hand.

These definitions link the practical aspect of making the zine and the critical aspect of the politics of the zine. We have a workshop day of high spirits, 80s tunes by request, and shared supplies including sharpies, non-toxic glue sticks, hole-punches, and crafters scissors (see Figure 3). I brought a few sample copies from my collection to share, so did another student, and we watched a great "how to" video from the Barnard Zine Library for a more practical example. I'm happy to see that several students decided to collaborate and make their zines together. The activity is friendly enough but the stakes are higher as they are now the authors of these butch-femme narratives and some insecurities were felt and expressed differently. One student asked me if she could turn in her zine to me in private, feeling that she was not yet

ready to be out to the class. On the final day when students would share and discuss the process of making their zines, she changed her mind and joined in quietly but fully present. I think many students felt the affirming effect of the friendly space they had built with each other.

Figure 2

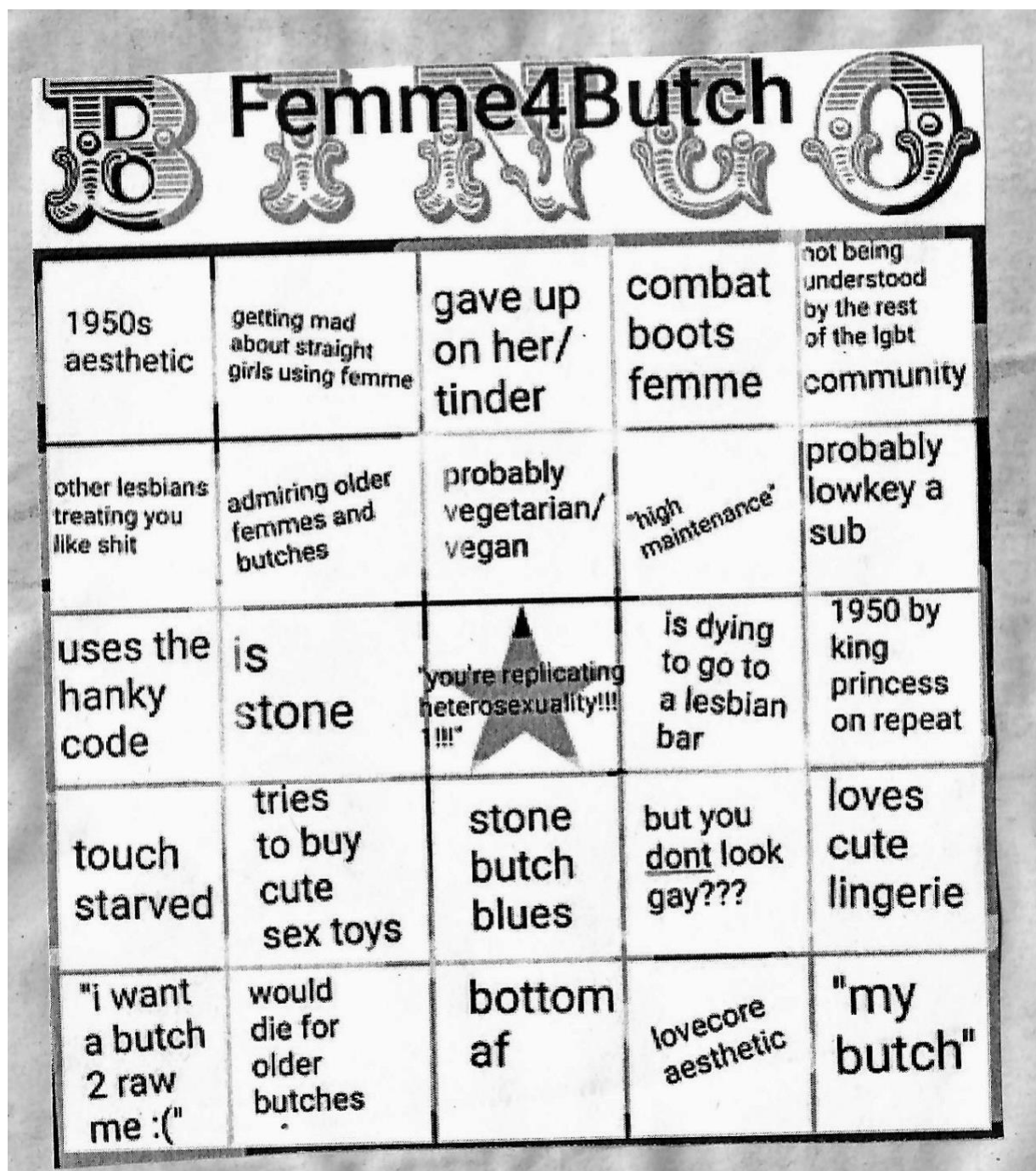
Student Work 2



Note. A poetic reflection on Zami facing a portrait of Audre Lorde illustrated in vibrant watercolors and ink.

Figure 3

Student Work 3



Note. Close up of a found bingo game card collage remixed as "Femme4Butch," juxtaposed on a newsprint background.

Lost and Found, Some Things Do Come Back

Social Media Post, January 18, 2019

My LA peeps, anyone got a copy of *Stone Butch Blues* I can borrow? My copy is in an unmarked box somewhere in storage. There's a free PDF online (courtesy of the author) but bound books are more friendly to my eyes. Thanks!

I should have kept a journal. Instead I left traces of this process on my social media over several months which has helped me immensely in remembering this journey. I did not know this course called "butch-femme worlds" would happen: It was a fortuitous set of circumstances and people that set it in motion. I was to be back in Los Angeles for a few months. It was a perfect temporary gig. In my mind's peripheral vision, I'd always had a copy of *Stone Butch Blues* in my home library, the same edition by Firebrand Books I had when I was in college. Most of my boxes of books were in storage now and I could not find my copy. Moreover, I could not be sure that I had actually stored it. All the certainty I had about that particular book and other lost queer things was undone. I kept my worries at bay with the knowledge that there is a free PDF version available made by Feinberg herself. Part of the greater problem is that the book, like many other lost lesbian works, was out of print. I sent a plea hoping someone in L.A. might still have a copy that I could borrow. I had also sent messages to old college friends about "The Lesbian" syllabus as well as the department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies at CSULB. No luck. All was lost it seemed.

One day later...

Social Media Post: January 19, 2019

My new copy of *Stone Butch Blues* arrived today via special hand delivery. I had to document this epic experience! Thank you so much for this wonderful gift, Luis!

Figure 4

Social Media Post



Note. The author with Luis Alfaro in Hollywood, CA.

Some things do come back, at least in part. I now have a new copy of *Stone Butch Blues*, gifted to me by Luis Alfaro, a generous gesture I like to think he made out of friendship to both Leslie and I—and to a commitment to our shared queer worlds (see Figure 4). His copy included a bookmark from the bookstore A Different Light, an ephemeral artifact documenting so much in its absence. I think of Margo Rivera-Weiss's (2005) beautiful and sexy butch-femme film *¿Tienes Hambre?* that was almost lost—which they posted on YouTube not too long ago—but our loss of Margo and their work in future queer women of color film is felt too now.¹⁰

¹⁰ Margo Rivera-Weiss (2005) made several films through the Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project (<https://qwocmap.org>) based in San Francisco, CA.

I don't believe the syllabus to "The Lesbian" is truly lost. Some of the memories have been awakened by this process and are held now in the space of these pages. Having created an ephemeral space archiving the gathering of memory, stories, and artifacts on social media does not replace the practice of a teaching journal, but it does some work to help document and recover some of what has been gained along the way to this class. Moreover, it gives form to a recurring theme of loss I mediate in the writing and re-making of my own lesbian syllabus. The many unexpected returns remind me of the stakes for reading and remembering butch-femme worlds.

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Appendix

Syllabus: Reading Butch-Femme Worlds

Description

This course is an introduction to butch-femme representations in LGBTQ literatures after 1970. We begin with the Stonewall Rebellions to frame the political and historical contexts for reading “queer” and “queer of color” in U.S. writings and film. Major topics include race, class, gender, sexual identities and politics, and theories of oppressing-resisting. In particular, we will examine butch-femme constructions across several texts. We will read a repertoire of classic and contemporary narratives including such forms as the novel, autobiography, memoir, short stories, and poetry, and we will screen both narrative and documentary films. Select theoretical readings, critical concepts, and frameworks will complement our analysis and original interpretations. We will give plenty of time to practice close reading of texts, film, and visual art. Primarily, this course is dedicated to examining diverse butch-femme representations and creative innovations in the vast repertoire of LGBTQ literature and film.

Books

Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Crossing Press, 1982.
 Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*. (20th Anniversary Edition) Alyson Books, 2003.
 Sharon Bridgforth, *The bull-jean stories*. Redbone Press, 1998.
 Verónica Reyes, *Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives*. Arktoi Books, 2013.
 Dorothy Allison, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*. Penguin Books, 1995.
 Myriam Gurba, *Dahlia Season: stories & a novella*. Manic D. Press, 2007.

Films

Lana & Lily Wachowski (Directors), *Bound*, 1996.
 Dees Rees (Director), *Pariah*, 2011.
 Harry Dodge & Silas Howard. (Directors), *By Hook or by Crook*, 2001.
 Margo Rivera-Weiss (Director), (2005) *¿Tienes Hambre?*, 2005.

Reading Schedule

Introductions

Overview & Introductions

Cheryl Clarke, “Of Althea and Flaxie” & images in *Narratives: poems in the tradition of black women*. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1982.

What’s In A Name

Raymond Williams, “Introduction,” “Culture,” and other selections in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford University Press, 1976.

Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

Class, Gender, Race

Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*

Stacy I. Macías, “Latina and Chicana Butch/Femme in Literature and Culture,” in L. G. Mendoza (Ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latina and Latino Literature*, 2020.

Jeanne Cordova, “Butches, Lies, and Feminism” in J. Nestle (Ed.), *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*. Alyson Publications, 1992.

Representing Butch-Femme

Film: *Bound*

B. Ruby Rich, "New Queer Cinema" in *Sight & Sound*, 1992. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/new-queer-cinema-b-ruby-rich>

Amber Hollibaugh & Cherríe Moraga, "What we're rollin' around in bed with: Sexual silences: A conversation toward ending them" in *The Persistent Desire*.

Madeline Davis, Amber Hollibaugh, & Joan Nestle, "The femme tapes" in *The Persistent Desire*.

Butch-Femme Poetics

Sharon Bridgforth, *The bull-jean stories*

Sharon Bridgforth, "A Wo'mn Called Sir" in R. Labonte & L. Schimel (Eds.), *First Person Queer: Who We Are (So Far)*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007.

Butch Protagonists and East L.A.

Verónica Reyes, *Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives*

Gloria Anzaldúa, "How to Tame A Wild Tongue" in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute, 1987.

Leticia D. Galindo, "Caló and Taboo Language Use Among Chicanas, A Description of Linguistic Appropriation and Innovation" in L. Galindo & M. D. Gonzales (Eds.), *Speaking Chicana: Voice, Power, and Identity*. University of Arizona Press, 1999.

María Lugones, "Wicked Caló: A Matter of the Authority of Improper Words" in S. L. Hoagland & M. Frye (Eds.), *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*. Penn State Press, 2000.

Macarena Gómez-Barris, "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives" in C. O. Chavoya, D. E. Frantz, & M. Gómez-Barris (Eds.), *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* Prestel, 2017.

Queer of Color Coming of Age

Film: *Pariah*

Dees Rees, select interviews (online)

Femme Genealogies and Solidarities

Dorothy Allison, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*

Dorothy Allison, "A Woman Like an Ocean" in *The Women Who Hate Me*. Firebrand Books, 1983.

Maya Chinchilla, "Femme on Purpose" in *The Cha Cha Files: A Chapina Poética*. Korima Press, 2014

New Queer Narratives

Myriam Gurba, *The Dahlia Season*

Juana María Rodríguez, "Gesture and Utterance: Fragments from a Butch-Femme Archive" in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*. Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Femme-Butch Futures in Post-queer Times

Film: *By Hook or By Crook*

B. Ruby Rich, "New Trans Cinema" in *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*. Duke University Press, 2013.

Zine workshop

Zine Presentations & Party!

More Recommended Readings

Dorothy Allison, *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Penguin, 1993.

Maya Chinchilla, *The Cha Cha Files: A Chapina Poética*. Korima Press, 2014.

Sandra Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek" in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Vintage, 1992.

Jeanne Cordova, *When We Were Outlaws*. Spinsters, Ink, 2011.

Raquel Gutiérrez, *The Barber of East L.A.*, 2009. Manuscript held at the University of Texas Fine Arts Library. Link to 2008 performance at the Claremont Museum of Art:

<https://vimeo.com/35643903>

Emma Pérez, *Forgetting the Alamo*. University of Texas Press, 2009.

Tatiana de la Tierra, *For the Hard Ones/Para las duras: A Lesbian Phenomenology/Una fenomenología lesbiana*. A Midsummer Night's Press, 2018.

Kitty Tsui, *Words of a Woman Who Breathes Fire*. Spinsters, Ink, 1983.

Chea Villanueva, *Bulletproof Butches*. Masquerade Books, 1997.

Activities, Assignments, Projects

Notes on the main assignments and activities and the complete zine prompt.

Keyword Essays

These are a series of short (3-5 page) essays based on Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Keywords are drawn from the primary texts and some outside texts. By exploring 1-3 "keywords" across the readings students make an inquiry into a vocabulary and trace how meanings circulate in culture in explicit and implicit ways, in both written and in spoken practices. This approach invites students to contribute their own experiences and knowledges about their keywords. This quote captures the essence of the distinction between a "keyword" from a dictionary "definition" of terms:

This is not a neutral review of meanings. It is an exploration of the vocabulary of a crucial area of social and cultural discussion, which has been inherited within precise historical and social conditions and which has to be made at once conscious and critical—subject to change as well as to continuity.

—Raymond Williams

While not thesis-driven, the student's perspective is reflected in the chosen keywords and how they cluster them. This open-ended approach helps create the conditions for students to be comfortable with multiplicity and ambiguity while thinking historically about the words and language we use every day.

Preparation:

Introduction to “Keywords” (assigned reading, lecture & discussion)

Select entries including “Culture” (in-class reading & discussion)

Background Resource: The Keywords Project, University of Pittsburgh

https://keywords.pitt.edu/williams_keywords.html

Group-Led Discussion Questions

This activity gives significant time for students to co-lead discussion of a major text. Student groups should be formed very early as they will need to spend time outside of class to prepare questions. Students should feel free to explore any theme that interests them with no predetermined answers. Build in times to check in with the student groups ahead of their facilitation day. Students may post their questions and quotes/passages with page numbers to the course website before or after their presentation as a resource for the class. Review and practice different ways of posing discussion questions that are grounded in the text. Essentially, this is a great way to conduct research and gather a lot of perspectives over the course of the class. If they all write about the same topic, fine, they still have to write their own keyword essay. They are teaching their point of view.

Preparation:

Review the main books and films on the first day of class. Form book groups on the second day and reserve time for students to meet and exchange emails in class.

Close Reading and Analysis

Needless to say, this class relies on close readings of both images and texts. This will need reinforcing throughout the course with several opportunities built in particularly when shifting genres. How do you read a poem, a passage, a scene, an image, a sound or a song? Pool together student knowledge, emphasize observation and details, read out loud, resist summary and quick interpretations. Practice!

Preparation:

Class activity: Read the poem “Of Althea and Flaxie” and one of the images from the book *Narratives*. They are both representations of butch-femme “worlds”—but how? Slowly move the discussion from observations to interpretations.

Final Project: A Butch-Femme Zine

“I like dictionaries. I am also suspicious of them. I am politically discriminate, critical, active, as I ‘look up’ words. I am particularly attracted to dictionaries of the linguistically improper.”

– Maria Lugones, “Wicked Caló”

“The archive is not just a place for study, but must be itself an object of it. What is in the archive, and how did it get there? What are the criteria for assembling, organizing and presenting materials? Who selects and collects, shapes and donates their stories to an archive? What is not there? How do these materials and absences produce knowledges, including norms and teleologies?”

– Mimi Nguyen, “My Fales Library Donation Statement”

Taking a cue from María Lugones's appreciation of "linguistically improper" dictionaries and the work of zinester-scholars such as Mimi Nguyen, your final project is to produce a zine on the topic of **butch-femme** or any iteration of this couplet. You may engage the readings and films we have explored this quarter if you wish and/or you may approach and recast your questions about butch-femme in new contexts. You can be compiler, chronicler, journalist, and writer-artist all in one. You do not need sophisticated skills, you just need the spark of an idea and some materials you are comfortable working with.

What is a zine?

A zine, short for magazine or fanzine, is typically a DIY publication made on a very low budget (often "free"), copied in black and white, stapled, focused on a single topic, with hand made, drawn, or found illustrations and graphics, circulated in small batches. A quick Google search will lead you to many online archives and tutorials on how to make a zine. Zines are "unofficial" sites of knowledge and labor and often provide important stories and counter-discourses missing in "official" archival sites. Zines are meant to be easily accessible and readable and passed on by hand. Imagine a younger member of your family encountering your zine and the valuable information it contains. What do you want to tell them about "femme" or "butch"? How will you show them?

Ingredients in the mix:

- Your definition of butch-femme; femme-but; butch; femme; etc.
- A creative-critical elaboration of your definition
- A name – if your zine were a punk band what would you call it?
- A short statement on the purpose of the zine. Who is it for? Why did you make it?
- Aesthetics – the art work/graphics or its "look" are important to consider. How do the written and visual components go together?
- If you cite authors, lyrics/music, or reproduce other people's work in general, be sure to include a list of your sources somewhere so your readers can find them.

How many pages or word count?

There is no max or minimum, you decide what is the "right" amount—when it's "done."

Alternative formats:

A webzine, a podcast or audio zine, a video zine or game—keep in mind that these require more time and it helps to have experience in these formats already. You're not sure what to make, pitch me an idea!

I highly encourage you to work collaboratively in small groups of 2-3. You can pool your knowledge and divvy up the work—research, writing, layout, artwork, printing and binding—there's lots to do!

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José M. Aguilar-Hernández is an associate professor in the College of Education and Integrative Studies at Cal Poly Pomona. Aguilar-Hernández is a first-generation college student who transferred from Moorpark Community College to UCLA where he received his B.A. in History and Chicana/o Studies, M.A. in Latin American Studies, and Ph.D. in Education. As an interdisciplinary scholar, his research publications and teaching interests include social movements, higher education, pedagogy, critical race theory, and gender and sexuality. Aguilar-Hernández has taught in ethnic studies and education departments at UCLA, California State University Northridge, and California State University Los Angeles.

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I am an Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Arizona. I received my Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies with a Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality from UC Berkeley. My research examines ways of listening to a field of multiple resistant sounds that signal the enduring presence of Mexican and Latinx communities in the U.S. audible in the soundscape of América. In particular, I focus on Chicana literature, popular music, U.S. third world feminisms, and decolonial feminist listening practices.

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Jack Caraves (he/him/they/them) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences and teaches in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at San José State University. Using qualitative methods, Caraves' work documents Trans Latinxs in Los Angeles and how gender variance, racism, xenophobia and classism work as axis of power to discipline and police Trans Latinx and Gender Non-Conforming bodies. Caraves' research contributes to the dearth of empirical research on Trans Latinxs, primarily to understand how their social location shapes their relationship to themselves, families, communities, and the state while centering their resilience.

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Arturo Cortez is an Assistant Professor of Teacher Learning, Research & Practice and Learning Sciences & Human Development at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Broadly, Dr. Cortez's work explores how teachers learn to collectively design environments that leverage the everyday cultural practices of nondominant youth. In his work with teachers, he intentionally designs for equity to understand the learning processes that emerge as teachers learn how to break away from dominant forms of schooling, opening up opportunities for new relationships

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Cindy Cruz is an associate professor in the Teaching, Learning and Sociocultural Studies Department at the University of Arizona. She received her BA in Literature from Scripps College and a Ph.D. in Urban Schooling from UCLA in 2006. Her research centers youth resistance and homeless queer and trans*youth praxis in Los Angeles, California. Her theoretical foundations center the work of decolonial and U.S. feminists of color theory. In a previous life, she was a high school English teacher and HIV counselor and this experience greatly influences her research and pedagogy. Dr. Cruz has been honored with several academic prizes, including the Antonia I. Castañeda Prize, the Golden Apple for Teaching Excellence, and AERA's Queer Studies SIG Article of the Year.

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Antonio Duran (he/him/el) is an assistant professor in the Administration of Higher Education program at Auburn University. Informed by his identities as a queer cisgender Latino man, Antonio is particularly passionate about centering the experiences and knowledge of queer and trans people of color in higher education. Related to this fervor, Antonio's research agenda involves using critical and poststructural frameworks to complicate understandings of student development, experiences, and success for minoritized individuals—including queer and trans Latinx/a/o people.

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Sergio A. Gonzalez is a doctoral student in the School of Educational Studies Department and Dual Master of Arts student in the Applied Gender Studies Program at Claremont Graduate University. Sergio earned his M.Ed. in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs from the University of Southern California (USC) and his B.A. in Communication Studies from

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José Ramón Lizárraga is Assistant Professor of Learning Sciences and Human Development at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Dr. Lizárraga uses ethnographic, video, and multimodal research methods to investigate the role of social networks, television, and other digital new media in the learning of teachers and youth. They are a designer and instructor of hybrid/blended (online/in-person) and online teacher education courses. Lizárraga holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Distinction from the California College of the Arts, a Master of Arts in Education from Stanford University, and a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley.

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Roberto C. Orozco is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the Higher Education Program at Rutgers University–New Brunswick. His scholarship centers the experiences of queer Latinx/a/o college students with a focus on student activism and identity development through a Chicana Feminist and Jotería Studies lens. Roberto utilizes critical theories that seek to illuminate the ways queer Latinx/a/o people engage and develop spaces of agency, resistance, and transformation. Furthermore, his scholarship adds to the production of knowledge and practices that account for queer Latinx/a/o narratives.

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Omi Salas-SantaCruz is a doctoral candidate at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education in the Critical Studies of Race, Class, and Gender program. Their research interests include queer and trans* Latinx/e literacies, decolonial resistance research in higher education, and queer of color pedagogies. Omi is the Graduate Initiatives Program Director at the UC Berkeley Multicultural Community Center and served as the Chancellor's Advisory Committee on LGBTQI Communities at Cal. They hold two master's degrees in sociology and education from Columbia University and UC Berkeley and is the UC Berkeley Chancellor's, Tillery Foundation, and Center for Race and Gender Fellow.

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I'm a first-generation, queer Black Latina from South Central Los Angeles. My work is grounded in the Anthropology of Education and Feminist theorizing, and maps the topographies of schooling and youth resistance across axes of race, place, and gender, at a high school in an agricultural community on the central coast of California. In particular, my ethnography

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