

The Latino/a Condition

A Critical Reader

EDITED BY

Richard Delgado

AND

Jean Stefancic

1998



New York University Press

a persuasive argument for freedom in naming is that the government has other means of identifying an individual—i.e., use of social security number and the date and place of birth, together with the use of the family name. Additionally, if the use of a complete family name causes fear of an administrative nightmare, then that argument can be countered with the upgrading of data through the use of computer rather than manual collection of journal entries in books.

Second, society as a whole will have to be more accommodating. An imperfect “melting pot,” society can do more to accommodate this form of diversity. Telephone books could regularly carry two last names. Newspapers could alter their conventions, and start referring to Latinos by two last names. All of us can be more aware of the Latino’s preference and more respectful of it. Finally, and most importantly, the Latina herself must take the lead in promoting use of both surnames. She must clearly indicate her name preference to the world at large, consistently adopting the full Latin tradition and requesting that others do so, too. This will require effort, patience, and persistence—and quite often she will have to educate others about the reasons for her choice.

NOTES

1. Sandra Maria Esteves, *It Is Raining Today, in TROPICAL RAINS: A BILINGUAL DOWNPOUR* 5 (1984).
2. 277 U.S. 438 (1928), overruled, *Katz v. United States*, 389 U.S. 347, 352–53 (1967).
3. Charles R. Lawrence, III, *The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism*, 39 *STAN. L. REV.* 317, 322 (1987).
4. Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* 3 (1989).

Chapter 74

A Chicana Perspective on Feminism

Beatriz M. Pesquera and Denise A. Segura

We asked Chicana informants to describe ways in which the American Women’s Movement has addressed or not addressed Chicana concerns. Ninety-five women answered this question; six women did not reply. Over half of the informants indicate that Chicana concerns have been somewhat addressed (53.5 percent) by the American Women’s Movement, whereas 38.6 percent feel these needs have not been addressed. Only two women feel that the American Women’s Movement has addressed Chicana concerns.

Eighty-two women provided in-depth, written responses in support of their answers. Their responses range from acknowledging the importance of the American Women’s Movement to forceful critiques of race-class biases. The latter sentiment prevails both among women who feel that the American Women’s Movement has somewhat addressed and those who feel that it has not addressed Chicana concerns. The major difference between these two groups of women is the tenor of the critique; that is, women who feel that the movement has not addressed Chicana concerns articulate more intense antagonism, harsher criticism, and less acknowledgment of benefits gained.

Chicanas tend to portray the American Women’s Movement as articulating the issues of relatively privileged, well-educated, middle- and upper-class white women. Informants argue that the social origins of movement activists hindered the development of issues relevant to women outside a narrow social milieu. For example, one respondent noted that “by its very historical origins, the movement has emphasized middle-class to upper-class concerns” (Chicana faculty member, 34 years old). This informant’s criticism of the lack of diversity within the movement echoes that of other women of color and many white feminist scholars.

Informants object to what they perceive as a marked tendency within the American Women’s Movement to present itself in global terms (i.e., The Women’s Movement). Chicanas in *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* (MALCS) feel that

From With Quill and Torch: A Chicana Perspective on the American Women’s Movement and Feminist Theories by Beatriz M. Pesquera and Denise A. Segura, in *CHICANAS/CHICANOS AT THE CROSSROADS: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CHANGE*, edited by David R. Mactel and Isidro D. Ortiz. Copyright © 1996 by the Arizona Board of Regents. Reprinted by permission of University of Arizona Press.

this attitude obscures important racial/ethnic and class differences among women: "The women's movement that stands out in my mind is the 'second wave,' which occurred during the 1960s. This movement was primarily a 'white, middle-class movement' that openly called for the liberation of women. Although the movement seemed to speak in universal liberation terms (for all women), it systematically excluded the concerns of non-white women, as it failed to consider issues of race, class, and cultural oppression" (Chicana faculty member, 40 years old).

Another informant stated that "the movement has failed to adequately address classism and racism and how it impacts on women as a class and in dealing with our areas of common concern [i.e., women and the family]. I think we have been used to present a collective voice on behalf of women but have not been extended the same degree of importance in areas that concern us differently, i.e., class and race issues. In other words, white women also have to overcome their own prejudices as they try to overcome prejudice altogether" (Chicana graduate student, 24 years old). Like other women who feel that the American Women's Movement has somewhat addressed Chicana concerns, this informant recognizes that the movement often articulates issues pertinent to many women (e.g., the family). What she and others object to is the movement's failure to "adequately address" how other forms of inequality, in particular, race/ethnicity and class, condition women's lives. She and the other informants take exception to the manner in which the Women's Movement postulates stances on behalf of all women without considering these differences. Ultimately, she challenges white women to confront their own race and class privileges side-by-side with the struggle to eradicate sexism.

In general, the women who feel that the Women's Movement has somewhat addressed and those who feel that it has not addressed Chicana concerns object to an analysis of oppression that grants primacy to gender. They argue that overreliance on a gender critique inhibits the development of a more inclusive perspective sensitive to the ways in which race/ethnicity and class, as well as gender, shape the Chicana experience. As another Chicana observed, "The Anglo-American women's movement addresses the dominant culture's sexist practices but many times failed to address the development of our present economic system and how that brought about the division of labor, the social class differences, and the racist institutions" (Chicana graduate student, 32 years old). This woman acknowledges the need to eradicate sexism, but argues for the incorporation in the discussion of class and race/ethnicity as well.

Many women also voice disapproval of the "liberal-reformist" tendencies they feel predominate within the movement. They argued that the American Women's Movement should be less dedicated to finding ways to integrate women into a male-dominated world and more devoted to developing strategies to end structures of inequality and exploitation produced by American capitalism. These perceptions are captured in the response of one Chicana: "The reluctance of the dominant NOW-type feminism in the United States to face up to the reality of racism and class-based problems facing Chicanas has been the main obstacle to feminist concerns for Chicana issues. At the root of this problem is the narrow definition of feminism that is based on sex differences and not a problem of domination" (Chicana graduate stu-

dent, 29 years old). This woman, like many of the informants, did not distinguish between the various segments within the American Women's Movement. While this overgeneralization may have contributed to the harsh tone of the critique, it is important to note that women who made this distinction tended to voice similar criticisms; for example, "The Women's Movement addressed the specific concerns that affect us as a race and/or class only when we demanded it, but only temporarily. There were few changes in white middle-class women's ideology and practice among the women's rights groups and women liberationists" (Chicana graduate student, 30 years old). This woman, like other informants, combines the different branches of the American Women's Movement in her critique to emphasize how the omission of Chicana concerns cuts across political and ideological alignments of feminists within the American Women's Movement.

Despite their criticism of the American Women's Movement, nearly all the informants endorse the key maxim: eradicating female subordination is essential. Many women credit the movement's critique of patriarchy with influencing their own development as Chicana feminists. They acknowledge that Chicanas benefit from the struggle against patriarchy. Despite this view, a majority feel that the gains netted from this particular struggle are inadequate and largely incidental: "All women of all races are helped when a woman, or any group of women, defies stereotypes and promotes a progressive agenda or idea. But Chicana-specific concerns are not usually what 'the larger agenda' of the Women's Movement is about" (Chicana faculty member, 39 years old). In words reminiscent of Chicana feminists in the 1960s and 1970s this woman contends that the American Women's Movement has not placed a high priority on Chicana concerns. According to this view, Chicana concerns are implicit rather than explicit within feminist agendas. Moreover, because white middle-class women tend to define the direction of this struggle, they will likely garner the greatest benefits. "The Women's Movement addresses the problems of women in general (i.e., white women because they're the leaders of the women's movement) and not those of minority women specifically. Though all women should gain from the movement, statistics show that it is white women who have gained" (Chicana graduate student, 47 years old).

Not only is the previous informant critical of the direction taken by the Women's Movement, she also questions its effectiveness to advocate for women outside the social mainstream. She, like most of the women in this study, contends that social policies to redress gender inequality have not significantly improved the life chances of most Chicanas. In general, Chicanas are poorer, less educated, and employed in the lowest-paying jobs vis-à-vis white women, as well as men. Sex discrimination in training and job access is but one barrier Chicanas face. They also experience discrimination based on their race/ethnicity and culture.

A few informants acknowledge that in recent years, the concerns of working-class and racial/ethnic women have been moving from "margin to center," to quote Hooks. Many women feel this change has resulted from the critiques and demands of women of color. As one informant states, "Over the past decade, there appears to be increased concern to address working-women's issues *and* [respondent's emphasis] to incorporate women of color into ongoing organizational efforts. Thus, incor-

poration in terms of issues and individuals sought out for membership in women's caucuses, organizations, etc., appears to be evolving. Mostly, there appears to be a heightened consciousness (perhaps out of guilt) among white women to address more directly the concerns of women of color" (Chicana faculty member, 37 years old).

While many women indicate that the American Women's Movement had been moving toward a more inclusive agenda, others feel that Chicana feminist efforts have been almost completely ignored. Their view is typified by the sentiment expressed by one respondent, who wrote that "women of color, particularly Chicanas themselves, have struggled as a group since the late 1960s and early 1970s to raise their/our own issues as women from an oppressed nationality group in the United States. Our fight within the predominantly white, middle-class 'women's movement' has been to address the issues of class and race, as *inextricable* [respondent's emphasis] to our gender issues" (Chicana graduate student, 27 years old). This informant articulates the widespread feeling that white feminists need to acknowledge that Chicanas have been actively challenging patriarchy and racial/ethnic and class oppression. The complexity of Chicanas' struggle requires a multidimensional approach. The term "Chicana" embraces political activism, ethnicity, and gender; therefore, Chicanas do not order their oppression hierarchically. Hence, their articulation of a triple-oppression approach that considers race/ethnicity and class, as well as gender.

Many informants assert that the American Women's Movement neglects the cultural heterogeneity of the American landscape. About one-third of the informants who feel that the movement has not addressed Chicana concerns refer to feminism's lack of cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness. "In general the WM [Women's Movement] has been an Anglo movement, not one considering the cultural heterogeneity of women" (Chicana faculty member, 65 years old).

Chicanas' critiques of the American Women's Movement led them to conclude that they should articulate their own issues: "We need to do this—as Chicanas. We can't expect the white women to understand us in a cultural sense—though they may be able to understand us sociologically in a larger sense" (Chicana faculty member, 43 years old). This woman voices a sentiment heard throughout this group—that neither white women nor Chicano men know how to liberate Chicanas. Moreover, there is no compelling reason for them to do so, inasmuch as they derive privileges from the continued subordination of Chicanas.

Feminist Theory and Chicana Concerns

In this study, many women feel that feminist theories are less relevant to Chicanas than to the American Women's Movement. Forty-eight women (47.5 percent) indicate that feminist theory/scholarship has not incorporated the particular circumstances of Chicanas, while forty-two women (41.6 percent) feel it has somewhat incorporated them. Only two women contend that feminist theory has incorporated

the particular circumstances of Chicanas. Nine women did not provide information on this issue.

The women who assert that feminist theory has not incorporated and those who assert that it has somewhat incorporated the particular circumstances of Chicanas describe it as grounded in a narrow range of experiences without a global vision. Echoing the voices of early Chicana feminists, the informants also discuss a range of exclusionary practices within feminist scholarship that limits Chicana voices: "Basically, I know of no major feminist theoretical piece which dismisses Chicanas. I think there is discussion now . . . of women of color, but that is not the same as a discussion of Chicanas" (Chicana graduate student, 30 years old). While this woman acknowledges recent efforts to include women of color, she, like the majority of the informants, asserts that these discussions typically overlook Chicanas. One result of this omission is Chicanas' alienation from American feminism and antagonism toward "white" feminists, who often act as "gatekeepers," limiting access to research and publication outlets necessary to the development of Chicana feminist discourse.

Even more objectionable to Chicana feminists than their exclusion is their inclusion as an "externalized other," whose experiences are appended to theory rather than centered at its heart. As one informant states, "Feminist scholars (excluding Chicanas) rarely talk about Chicanas or care to do any research on us. When we are included in any feminist theory we are used to substantiate a theory on white women. Generally theories are designed to explain the power relations between white males and females and then the experiences of Chicanas are forced into these theoretical frameworks" (Chicana faculty member, 31 years old). This woman, like a majority of the informants, questions the validity of feminist theories that cast Chicanas' experiences into preexisting analytic frameworks. They feel that feminist scholars need to develop an integrative perspective rather than the more obvious additive approach: "Chicanas are seldom represented in feminist theory courses or feminist colloquia unless of course in a marginal sense. As an afterthought many feminist seminars offer a single session which will touch on 'women of color' in general. We have, however, reached a point in history where feminist theorists are a bit self-conscious about failing to consider the particular circumstances of Chicanas, and as a result, the latest publications, etc., have in a limited way begun to solicit Chicana feminist scholarship" (Chicana faculty member, 40 years old). This respondent, like most of the other women surveyed, speaks from personal experiences with Women's Studies courses (e.g., as student, faculty or staff member). Her words display frustration with the misrepresentation of Chicanas and their token inclusion in feminist writings.

Other informants focused attention on recent attempts by women of color to bring the theoretical and political issues to the forefront. One, for example, declared that "unfortunately, it seems that true change in the intellectual debate as well as the political territory comes about only when spearheaded by Chicanas themselves. Chicanas and U.S. Third-World women (i.e., other 'minority' women) have shifted the debate and political agendas through political action, scholarship, cultural/artistic activity, and journalism. . . . There remains, of course, all the work to do which will end only when racism and sexism (and class oppression) are obsolete" (Chicana

graduate student, 27 years old). This informant emphasizes that, by and large, inclusion of women of color in feminist theory has been by women of color themselves. Their goal is a praxis addressing multidimensional forms of Chicana oppression.

Chicanas who discussed the incorporation of Chicana concerns into feminist theories voiced considerable cynicism regarding possible underlying motivations. Their view is captured in the response of one MALCS member, who observed, "I predict that it will become more 'fashionable' to hype the 'Hispanic' presence in the United States and the white feminist academics will give lip service to Chicana issues. Their appropriation of our concerns, however, will only serve their interests and diffuse our own voices" (Chicana graduate student, 36 years old). The respondent notes that research on Chicanas is becoming more popular. Yet, she and most of the informants harbor deep misgivings that research on Chicanas will be expropriated by white feminists and to a lesser extent by other non-Chicana scholars who are employed in significantly greater numbers in the academy than are Chicanas, as is noted by several scholars. Study informants fear that non-Chicana scholars will secure recognition more readily for Chicana studies research than the Chicanas who initiated this line of inquiry. This is a particularly sensitive issue for Chicanas who feel they have spent years developing research on their communities.

Consistent with this apprehension, Chicanas in this study and others report that their research is often treated with skepticism in academic departments and denied publication in established research outlets. This experience is not unique to Chicanas, but forms the backdrop for much discussion on the discourse of privilege and power currently underway among many feminist scholars of color. One consequence of this limitation is the establishment of alternative outlets (e.g., *Kitchen Table Press*, *Third Woman Press*). To advance Chicana studies, Chicana faculty and graduate students have formed groups such as MALCS and collaborative research/ writing projects to advance Chicana studies. These groups and activities are one way to empower Chicanas, as well as to provide forums wherein Chicanas struggle to navigate their academic paths.

Study informants' critiques of feminist theories reveal a myriad of ideological and political contradictions. Chicanas are caught in the contradiction of seeking a feminist praxis while experiencing alienation from feminists' theories and feminist theoreticians. They are torn between criticizing feminism's lack of theoretical synthesis while denying the ability of white feminists to capture the essence of Chicana subjectivity. Chicana feminism, then, is struggling to wrestle free of these contradictory locations to create a discourse that speaks to their multifaceted reality.

Despite their apprehensions and criticisms, most Chicanas view feminist theories as useful building blocks to develop their scholarship. As two informants noted, "I believe feminist theory addresses the circumstances of women in general and addresses some of the circumstances of Chicanas (e.g., scholarship that deals with sexism, patriarchy, male dominance and control over women, economic and legal oppression of women)" (Chicana faculty member, 26 years old); and, "It is true that a close reading of feminist theory gives us a base from which we can develop our own theories and scholarship reflecting the Chicana/Latina reality" (Chicana graduate student, no age given). Informants value approaches analyzing the social construc-

tion/reproduction of gender, but they tend to favor broader analytic frameworks grounded on women of color outside the U.S. context: "More recent feminist scholarship, most specifically Marxist feminist scholarship, on women in Latin America, addresses some of the issues of race and sex/gender both historically and contemporaneously, and this scholarship is useful for Chicana research" (Chicana graduate student, 46 years old).

While the informants feel that Chicanas should be actively engaged in formulating theories of oppression that integrate race/ethnicity, class, and gender, they intimate that this scholarship will develop slowly. As one woman said, "Chicanas who have become participating members of institutions are barely beginning to become part of the written canon which is the only way that the particular circumstances of the Chicana reality can be incorporated into any theory/scholarship" (Chicana faculty member, 44 years old). Informants point out that there are few Chicanas in academic settings where they can develop scholarship. Their observation is supported by the available data: out of more than 57,000 tenured academics in the United States, only 255 are Hispanic women.

Given the paucity of Chicanas in the academic world, many informants express their desire to help make academic institutions more responsive to the needs of Chicanas. It is within this context that informants evaluate the effectiveness of Women's Studies programs and centers to meet the needs of Chicanas.

Women's Studies, Women's Centers, and Chicana Needs

An important facet of American feminism is the institutionalization of Women's Studies programs and women's centers at colleges and universities. These programs are typically designed to provide support for women, offer courses on women, and support research on women. The extent to which these programs and centers meet Chicana needs is largely unknown. This is important to examine, because it provides another indicator of American feminism's sensitivity to Chicanas.

We asked informants whether or not Women's Studies programs and women's centers existed on their campus and the extent to which they feel they meet the needs of Chicanas. Over three-fourths of the informants (76.2 percent) indicate that there is a Women's Studies program on the campus (10.9 percent of the informants indicated that their campus did not have a Women's Studies program; 12.9 did not reply). More than half of these women (56.4 percent) feel these programs do not meet Chicanas' needs. Only 3 percent feel Women's Studies programs meet Chicanas' needs while 16.8 percent feel these programs somewhat meet these needs. A little less than one-fourth of the women (23.8 percent) did not answer the question.

Over two-thirds of the women (69.3 percent) said their campus has a women's center (19.8 percent of the informants indicated that their campus did not have a women's center; 10.9 did not reply). Of these women, 47.5 percent feel it does not meet Chicanas' needs. Five percent of the informants said the women's center meets Chicanas' needs, 22.8 percent indicate these needs are somewhat met, and 24.8 percent did not answer the question.

The answers regarding the relevancy of Women's Studies programs and women's centers to Chicanas' needs raise serious considerations for institutionalized feminism. Only a minute proportion of the informants, 5 percent or less, feel that Women's Studies and women's centers meet their needs. If we consider the proportion of women who feel Women's Studies programs and centers somewhat meet Chicanas' needs, women's centers are more favorably evaluated.

Almost one-fourth of the informants did not answer questions on Women's Studies programs or women's centers. This implies that either they have little or no knowledge of these programs/centers, or they are not involved in either. The low number of women who feel Women's Studies programs or women's centers meet or somewhat meet Chicanas' needs corresponds with the high number of women who voice forceful criticisms of their marginality to the American Women's Movement and feminist theories.

Conclusion

Women in this study overwhelmingly criticize American feminism for failing to incorporate their concerns adequately within feminist theories, political agendas, and institutionalized programs. They oppose American feminism's tendency to "universalize" the experience of white middle-class women and to either ignore or subsume racial/ethnic, culture, and class differences among women to a general theory of women's common oppression. Many of these women acknowledge the importance of the struggle against patriarchy, but feel this addresses only one dimension of Chicana oppression.

Chicanas contend that the class privilege and racial advantage shared by white middle-class feminists often blind them to Chicana concerns. They advocate "deconstructing" American feminism, to account for ways the tripartite axes of stratification shape women's experiences and demarcate relations of power and privilege in American society.

To reiterate, Chicanas interpret reality through a "triple-oppression lens" rooted in their experiences as Chicanas in the United States. By a triple-oppression lens, we mean that Chicanas simultaneously experience reality as members of a historically oppressed group, with a culture distinct from that of the dominant culture. Furthermore, their location in the class structure is mediated by their racial/ethnic status. The social construction of a Chicana perspective, or worldview, is filtered through their racial/ethnic/class status. As a result, Chicanas' interests as women are distinct from and at times contradictory to those articulated within American feminism.

A general theory of the common oppression of women proposed by American feminism unravels as we consider class, race/ethnicity, and culture, as well as gender interests. A Chicana perspective is fueled by the combined effects of class, race/ethnicity, and gender on Chicanas' life chances.

Chapter 75

Three Perspectives on Workplace Harassment of Women of Color

Maria L. Ontiveros

For women of color, sexual harassment is rarely, if ever, about sex or sexism alone; it is also about race. For us, racial epithets are spoken in sexist terms, and sexual or sexist comments involve our race and/or our culture. Marcia Gillespie, speaking for African-American women, but with words applicable for many other women of color, wrote,

We say, I am a Black Woman, I cannot separate my race from my sex, cannot separate racism from sexism. They are rarely separate, never indivisible. So don't ask me to choose, I cannot; I am myself, I am not you. No, will I let you choose for me. And I will not let you pretend that racism and sexism are not inseparable issues in all of our lives.¹

This indivisibility was noted by early victims of workplace harassment who, when they were asked if they were filing racial or sexual harassment claims, responded that they could not tell. While everyone agrees that sexual harassment is about sexism and power, for us it is also about race and culture. From the viewpoint of the harasser, women of color appear/less powerful, less likely to complain, and the embodiment of particular notions of sexuality. From the perspective of the women, attitudes in their community and lessons learned in their culture may make it more difficult for them to respond/forcefully to discrimination. Finally, the judicial system's perspective on both women of color and relationships between men and women of color often influences the outcome of such cases.

The Harasser

Since workplace harassment is a power dynamic, women of color serve as likely targets because they are the least powerful participants in the workplace. Unlike white women, they are not privileged by their race. Unlike men of color, they are not priv-