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This article is from an earlier iteration of Diálogo which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

This article is available in Diálogo: https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo/vol9/iss1/4
SOY A DYKE, ¿Y QUÉ?
A Quest for Identity and Sacred Space
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Chicago, Illinois

For many Latina lesbians their ethnic and sexual identities live simultaneously within their body. As products of a racist, patriarchal and heterosexist society, they are questioned, criticized, and sometimes ostracized when they choose to identify as Latina lesbians. Therefore, Latina lesbians are rejected from their Latina/o community for being lesbians and pushed aside from their queer community for being Latinas.

INTRODUCTION
My research addresses the challenged identity of Latina lesbians and how they incorporate both of these identities in their relationship with the queer and Latina/o community. On one hand, the queer community lacks diversity and is seen as predominately Anglo and gay. While, the Latina/o community has a legacy of heteronormitivity and homophobia. I am curious to learn how Latina lesbians live their life on the “borderlands” where “two cultures edge each other…” as is the case of the Latina/o and queer cultures (Anzaldúa 1987, Preface). Thus, I am interested to learn if there is a space where Latina lesbians can incorporate both identities—as one is integral to the other. This research is a case study of Latina lesbians in Chicago and how they negotiate their dual identities. My data includes a literature review of fictional and non-fictional work by Latina lesbians and extensive interviews with Latina lesbians from different generations. My initial hypothesis is that Latina lesbians create their own “sacred space” where all of their identities are accepted and welcomed through their own naturally formed support groups of family, friends and mentors as well as formal organization such as Amigas Latinas.2

I will address the following research questions throughout this essay: Does a place exist where Latina lesbians can live and integrate their diverse ethnicities, classes and sexualities? If so, where does such a place materialize? Where do Latina lesbians go to find support and normalization in their lives? In addition, I am curious to learn how Latina lesbians deal with homophobic and racist sentiments (and sometimes actions) within their communities.

Through this investigation I have found that Latina lesbians live a life on the borderlands3 where their “Latino-ness” and lesbianism coexists. In a longing to find a community that reflects their own interests and beliefs they have created “sacred spaces” where these two (and many more) identities can come together as one, without the oppression faced in white and heterosexist cultures.

METHODOLOGY
My methodology includes participant observation of the Chicago based, Latina lesbian community; I observed and worked with Amigas Latinas. I chose this organization because of its uniqueness to the Chicago land area as the only organization that serves the growing Latina lesbian community. Because their focus is Latina lesbians (as well as bisexual and questioning women), I worked with them in order to better understand the experiences of Latina lesbians and how they live their life in a heterosexist and white society.

I also conducted life histories with Latina lesbians in Chicago.4 These interviews consisted of in-depth conversations with women from diverse backgrounds and generations. The interviewees focused on the way Latina lesbians live out their identities in an Anglo and heterosexual society. The interviewees were selected through convenience sampling; however, the sample included Latina lesbians from different generations and in different stages of their coming out process.

The convenience sample was gathered by approaching women who I knew identified as Latina lesbians; these women were students, professors, and community organizers. After our conversation, I asked for a referral to other Latina lesbians they knew who would be interested in this study. Although I knew most of my participants, there were three women who were referred. Because most of the interviewees knew that I was a self-identified queer xicana, there was a sense of camaraderie between us; although we did not share the same experience of being Latina lesbians nor was our coming out process the same, our life histories were familiar.

Central to my analysis are these interviews. I anonymously interviewed eight women of various ethnic, socio-economic, and educational level. The women ranged in age of 18-44, lived in the suburbs of and the city of Chicago and all spoke English as their primary language and some spoke Spanish fluently. The interviewees ranged in their academic backgrounds—all had finished high school, some were enrolled in college in pursuit of a
baccalaureate degree, one interviewee was pursuing her law degree, and two were professors at private universities.

Almost all of my interviewees had been raised in Chicago and are very familiar with the city; however, some had lived in New York City and Miami and had immigrated to Chicago later in their life. This informed their experience as Latina lesbians as they often compared their experience as Latina lesbians in Chicago with that of their previous city.

By conducting interviews I access the first-hand experience of Lesbians vis-à-vis their narrative. While the focus of the project is the identity of Latina lesbians, the backdrop of Chicago as the site of this study must also be taken into account. Chicago ranks fifth in the number of foreign-born persons; nearly half of all Latina/os in the Chicago Metropolitan area are foreign-born. During the 1990's, Chicago witnessed a 61% increase in the number of immigrants; of the 537,000 new immigrants in Chicago during this time, 582,028 are Mexican. With the growth of the Mexican population during the 1990's, Chicago has a Latino population that has recently emigrated from their country of origin and thus, they bring with them the cultural norms of their home country.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH PROJECT**

Although there is much scholarship about Latina lesbians, specifically after the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* in 1981, most of this work is in the form of autobiographies and creative non-fiction. Hence, my research project is significant, as it will focus on the dual identities of Latina lesbians in Chicago and looks at the space that they create in order to live a life without borders. Moreover, this project provides testimony of the lived realities of Latinas in Chicago—a geographical location that is often times pushed into the shadows in favor of the Southwest, specifically in Chicoano Studies.

It is important to acknowledge the oral histories of Latina lesbians and incorporate a variety of generations and experiences in the analysis. However, since most work by Latina lesbians is literary, their writing is not accepted in social science departments as scholarly. Emma Pérez, in her keynote address at the National Association of Chicano Studies conference in 1995, discusses the passion of Chicana lesbian scholars who attempt to write beyond static academic standards, “…how is our [Chicana lesbian scholars] desire for Chican/o studies wrung out of us in the university, with the rationality of its ‘academic standards,’ and what happens to the passions that stems from our activism as scholars?” (Yabro-Bejarano 1999, 336). My research consists of an interdisciplinary investigation, that employs literary analysis and life histories of Latina lesbian identity and their creation of sacred spaces.

**THEORIES AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

The term “sacred space,” used by religious scholar Mircea Eliade, is defined as a break from the “chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space” (Eliade 1972, 22). For Latina lesbians the profane space is evident in the homophobia, racism, and heterosexism of the gay and Latina/o community. Eliade discusses how the profane and sacred spaces prompt one another; whereas a sacred space cannot be created without a profane space existing, each of these spaces become dependent on the other. For Latina lesbians, the discrimination faced in the chaos of the profane space leads them to form a sacred space from scratch where they can be accepted and thus, make a sacred/safe space “the only real and real-ly existing space” (Eliade 1972, 20). My investigation considers how such a space, where Latina lesbians live and celebrate their sexuality in and outside of lesbian and Latino culture is created.

By incorporating Cherríe Moraga’s concept of “theory of the flesh”, where theory is integrated into the lived reality of personal histories, I will be able to understand how Latina lesbians live a life that is constantly at the border and continuously challenged. The space created for Latinas is essential to their identities and self-confidence, which allows both the Latina and lesbian identity to coexist without repercussions.

Moraga’s focus on the lived experience as a form of theory is central to this project. I propose that qualitative research needs to include theory that includes text of various forms such as interviews, fiction, creative writing, and storytelling. Since this project is focused on the identity of women of color, it is important for me to understand the different forms of communication in our communities. “For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western forms of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking.” (Christian 1990, 336). Therefore, it is vital to this project to capture the essence of the lived reality of Latina lesbians in their own words in whatever genre it may come in.

The body of work produced by Chicana lesbians has grown substantially and has been integrated in various disciplines. The writings of Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Emma Pérez, and Carla Trujillo have intimately examined the multi-layered identity of Chicana and Latina lesbians both in and outside of academia. In this essay I analyze the specific experience of eight women in Chicago while incorporating the writings of authors who promote the visibility of Latina and Chicana lesbians through their text. Some of the works that I have chosen to highlight are examples from various genres that were reviewed for this project and are from fiction, creative writing, interviews, and academic articles.

Although fiction is invented in the author’s imagination, Terrie de la Pena’s *Margins*, provides a vivid and realistic experience of a Chicana lesbian as she acknowledges her identity and endures the struggle of coming out. This novel provides an example of how Chicana lesbians accept their identities, come out to their family, and learn to accept their identity regardless of familial and societal beliefs. Although the text is fictional, it examines a very realistic aspect of Latina lesbianism as Veronica, the main character, allows herself to examine the spaces within her life that let her live all of her identities simultaneously.

Along with Veronica’s coming out experience, Marisa Alicea’s interview with Evette Cardona, in *Diálogo*, is an intimate testimony of the struggles of Latina lesbians in Chicago. Alicea’s interview provides the personal history of a Puerto Rican lesbian’s coming out story and her political activism thereafter, as Cardona discusses how she came to term with her lesbianism and then created Amigas Latinas.

Gloria Anzaldúa incorporates fiction, essay, and historical data in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* to discuss the status of Chicanas and Mestizas in the United States. She introduced the theory of “mestiza consciousness” and defines the various types of borders that Chicanas have. It is the concept of borderlands that I use to explain the culture clash that emerges
from connecting Latina and lesbian identities. Anzaldúa’s analysis of the interconnectedness of ethnicity, race, gender, and language informs the sexuality of Latina, specifically Chicana, lesbians.

Cherríe Moraga, like Anzaldúa, poetically interweaves various literary genres to analyze the mestiza/Chicana lesbian from connecting Latina and lesbian identities. Anzaldúa’s analysis they influence the Chicana queer community. A s a radical and frameworks in Loving in the War Y ears: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios. Moraga critiques Anglo, Chicana/o, and queer cultures as they influence the Chicana queer community. As a radical and progressive xicanadyke, she confronts the homophobia and racism of the Chicana/o and academic cultures.

Emma Pérez’ essay, “Sexuality and Discourse: Notes From a Chicana Survivor,” theoretically interprets “beyond the antiquated Marxist-feminist debate” sociosexual relationships in an academic context. Perez’ connects the theories of Irigaray, Freud and Lacan to those of Anzaldúa and Moraga as their lived experience help shape the “notes” that Perez discusses. Throughout her essay, Pérez introduces the sitios y lenguas that women of color create and inhabit, “…our work emerges from un sitio y una lengua (a space and language) that rejects colonial ideology and the by-products of colonialism and capitalist patriarchy…” (Perez 1991, 161). The need for a different discourse and space that Pérez claims for Chicanas is similar to Elidae’s sacred space that Latina lesbians inhabit as analyzed in this paper. The location of these sites and discourses vary greatly however, what does not change is the importance of having a place and language that Chicanas can use to verbalize their experience as women of color in a racist and sexist society.

“Talkin’ Sex: Chicanas and Mexicanas Theorize about Silences and Sexual Pleasures” discusses, from a cultural opposition framework, the role of sex, silence, and pleasure in Chicanas and Mexicanas in California. Patricia Zavella’s analysis stems directly from the life histories she creates with her interviewees in order to obtain first-hand accounts of Chicana and Mexicanas understanding of their own sexuality, “the Chicana feminist project related to sexuality becomes breaking the silence…and understanding the myriad ways in which women construe pleasure” (Arrendondo, Hurtado, Khlan, Najera-Ramirez and Zavella 2003, 248). Zavella’s analysis of Chicana sexuality, although positioned in a specific geographic location, is a parallel to study this project as both analyze the complexities of Latina sexuality.

All of the authors that I reviewed are an insightful source of information on the lives of Latina lesbians as they provide narratives of how women come to terms with their lesbianism. All are activists since they insure that the visibility of Latina lesbians is acknowledged. They all are fighting their heterosexist and homophobic communities. By combining fiction, creative non-fiction, and academic text, the authors provide a different glimpse into the lives of Latina lesbians. The space that the authors create to explore the identities of Latina lesbian are different, yet they all use writing as a form of testimony against the oppression Latina lesbians face. Thus, they create their own sacred space where they can live out their identities in the safety of their writing where no one can discriminate against pen touching paper.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

I conducted participant observation with Amigas Latinas in February during a focus group meeting and in May when they held their Spring Baile with ALMA (Association of Latino Men in Action). The Spring Baile in annual event for ALMA and Amigas Latinas as they create a space for the LGBT community outside of the clichéd bars and clubs in Chicago. This Baile is held in the epicenter of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago at the Casa Puertorriqueña in Humboldt Park. Because of the collaboration of ALMA and Amigas Latinas, the Baile draws a large crowd from the Latina/o LGBT community and their allies. The Baile, although socially focused, also was purposeful in bringing together the growing Latina/o queer community in an ambience free of discrimination. Lorna discussed the tranquility she felt at the Baile, “…when I am with other lesbians…I feel like I am in my element…I can be myself” (Lorna® 2002).

The focus meeting came about because Amigas Latinas had obtained two grants of $5,000 to continue their programming for LBGT Latinas. They wanted to have a meeting where they could survey their members to learn what programming they wanted and thus, better utilize their grant money. The meeting was open to all members however, a reservation was needed and the limit of attendees was fifteen. Only fifteen women could participate in this meeting because Amigas Latinas wanted to obtain specific answers to their inquiries about programming. Most women agreed that Amigas Latinas is a safe space where they feel comfortable and at home. Discussants found that their space provides, “[a] chosen family” where members can be both Latina and lesbian, without having to choose or explain either identity. Amigas Latinas allows women to be true to themselves and facilitates their ability to live an integrated life versus the duality of not being out in certain settings and being out in others.

One of the participants, who I later interviewed, had mistakenly attended the focus group meeting instead of the new member orientation. However, she commented on feeling comfortable at the meeting even though this was her first time attending an Amigas Latinas event. “Since living in Chicago and attending law school my group of friends has been bleached and straightened. Coming to the Amigas meeting was like a breath of fresh air that I don’t have every day…it was just nice” (Celia 2002).

This was the general response from the participants in regards to Amigas Latinas. Most reinforced the notion of familial space and comfort with Amigas Latinas, “when I come to an Amigas Latinas meeting…it’s like coming home again, coming to my family.” (Juana 2002). This feeling is created by the sense of comfort with the organization, but more importantly because the organizations gives them a space to express themselves as Latina lesbians. According to Carmen, “being a lesbian is not easy…society as a whole will give us a hard time” (Carmen 2002). Therefore, by attending an event with other lesbians who understand this feeling of discrimination by society’s heteronormitvity, provides great comfort for the women I interviewed. Dolores, a self-identified lesbian who has yet to come out of the closet to her closest friends, comments “I feel comfortable when I go to their [Amigas Latinas] events. They make you feel comfortable…in a setting with all Latina lesbians” (Dolores 2002).

For Celia coming to an Amigas Latinas meeting is “like taking a breath of fresh air” (Celia 2002). This “revelation of sacred space makes it possible to obtain a fixed point and hence to acquire orientation [sanity] in the chaos of homogeneity…and to live in a real sense” (Elidae 23). Due to Celia’s constant moves and the “bleaching” that has occurred in her groups of friends, her realization of such a sacred space occurred when Celia became aware of a group that existed for Latina lesbians.

Although many may think that the coming together of groups of people with similar characteristics, such as in Amigas, causes segregation within the queer and Latina/o community, this is certainly not the case. In coming together with those that we know, we are able to gain strength and face the profane world full of chaos. In the hopes of claiming a space for Latina lesbians, a
sacred space is formed. In order to integrate the Latina lesbian into the queer and Latina/o community, both the Latina and the lesbian need to not only be tolerated, but also accepted and respected. "I am a lesbian. And I am a Chicana...These are two inseparable facts of my life. I can't talk or write about one without the other" (Moraga 2001, 132).

"When the sacred manifest itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse" (Eliade 1972, 21). Thus, by creating a sacred space Latina lesbians have broken the heteronormativity of the Latino culture and therefore, created a new space that allows for a new world to form which would accept them as Latina lesbians, without the negation of either identity. This break in the static norms of society, and specifically in the Latina/o culture, leads members of the community to become aware of different aspects of their community and to envision the evolution of their community. This is the hope of María, who felt that one of the main reasons why the Latina/o culture is so homophobic is "because of the lack of education" that is received in communities regarding sexuality (María 2002).

Latina lesbians' coming-out process is difficult because they must find a sacred space to be re-born, away from the profane, in order to be true to themselves. If they cannot find a space away from the chaos, far removed from a homophobic and racist society, they inevitably will not be re-born; "...and no world can come to birth in the chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space" (Eliade 1972, 22). This is evident in the anecdotes of many women who began their coming-out process in their late 30s, such as Carmen. Although Carmen previously had a relationship with a woman before "officially" coming-out, she never considered herself a lesbian until recently. Likewise, María and Dolores have been in a relationship for three years however, they both are not out to everyone. María has yet to come out to her family, although she feels that they know that she is a lesbian, she cannot yet verbalize her sexuality to them. Dolores, on the other hand, is still closeted even to her close friends and has only come-out to her gay brother; however, she finds support in Amigas Latinas and feels comfortable in a Latina lesbian space.

Hence, if women cannot find a space to verbalize their sexuality, the chaotic world will engulf them, and in this case, lead them to live a double life where in the privacy of their home they can be lesbians, but in the outside world they live a heterosexual life. Carmen is slowly beginning to break the homogeneity of the profane space in order to create her sacred space and thus, has slowly begun to come-out. "So I guess my coming-out process has been for about eighteen years. I was aware that I was interested in a women but I wasn't pursuing this in a public way" (Carmen 2002). In regards to coming out to her family Carmen mentions, "our families know...there is just things along the way...clues...but I haven't come out to my parents...I'm not there yet. I can't envision telling them. And I'm okay with that—I wish I had the courage to tell them but I don't want to be hard on myself" (Carmen 2002). Coming out varies person to person, however, each process is unique to that individual; there are no two coming out experiences that are the same.

THE CHALLENGE OF COMING AND STAYING OUT
The interviews provided an intimate view of the life of Latina lesbians from various backgrounds, ethnicities, and generations. Although the women interviewed were all different from one another, their stories speak to the effects of discrimination on the lives of Latina lesbians. They were genuine in sharing the hurt, fear, and rejection that can be felt by being verbalizing their lesbianism in the heteronormative Latina/o community. The interviewees shared many personal anecdotes that ranged from how Carmen became a "card-carrying member of Amigas Latinas" to Marta's loss of her best friend when she came-out.

"When I told my best friend it broke my heart...she said that that [being a lesbian] was disgusting and it made her sick...it was sad but not because I felt bad about being a lesbian but because she was not able to leave her very unconventional way of thinking and traditional upbringing" (Marta 2002).

The younger generation of Latina lesbians talked about their friends as their community of support, but they never clearly defined a space that they belonged to or formal spaces that they participated in regularly. Some, who participated in university sponsored organizations, counted on these communities for support. Due to their age, many of the younger Latina lesbians still feel a deep connection and obligation to their family and familial events where they must portray a closeted lifestyle. This negation of identity occurs because of the fear of rejection, "I have not come out to my extended family because I think they might reject my family and blame my being bi (bisexual) on my mom" (Juana 2002).

The older generation of lesbians identified various communities in which they found support such as co-workers, academic settings, and formal organization. Their self-identified communities are both formal and informal; the interviewees categorized their friends and Amigas Latinas as support networks. It is evident through their anecdotes that as one get older it becomes harder to come-out. All but one of the younger lesbians are out to their families. However, the older lesbians who have not yet verbalized their sexuality have found it difficult to tell their family members. Dolores feels that "they (her family) know...they know I live with María—they talk about me behind my back—but it's not something that is talked about—they and I don't want to talk about it" (Dolores 2002). However, some have talked to their parents only to find incredibly homophobic and hurtful reactions. Marta, who told her parents in her late thirties, said, "my parents ignored me...I told them you know I'm lesbian and they said, "is the microwave sticking out?" They couldn't talk about it...that is the Latino way of dealing with homosexuality...a don't ask/don't tell policy...they'll tolerate you but they don't want to talk about it" (Marta 2002).

The revolutionary act of verbalizing one's sexuality can have various effects. The courage to speak out on one's identity is a risk that the women I interviewed embark on every day as they continuously come out in their families, with their friends, and at work. "It's hard because what it does is specifically names you as a woman and as a queer women...lesbian...there is no way you can get around it—it's sexual, I find it really challenging...it's very hard to come out and say I'm a lesbian" (Marta 2002).

The concept of sacred space is not only limited to organizations, or formally formed sacred spaces. Many of the interviewees concurred that their community, their sacred space, was in their intimate relationships with friends. This informal coming together has led many Latina lesbians to find a space that wholly accepts them in spite of the chaos of the homogenous, heterosexist, and racist non-sacred world.

Lourdes Torres' article, "The Construction of the Self in the U.S. Latina Autobiographies," discusses the need for a space where Latina lesbians can integrate their various identities. "They [Cherrie Moraga, Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales, and Gloria Anzaldúa] subvert Anglo and Latino patriarchal
definitions of culture...They [Moraga and Anzaldúa] describe feeling great self-hatred, being marginalized, and without a center to grasp onto because each center asks them to or makes them feel that they must choose” (Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991, 277). This quote exemplifies the complexities of being a Latina lesbian in a homophobic and racist society where she must choose to be either Latina or lesbian, but can live out both identities simultaneously. Furthermore, the article deals with the dual identities and the discrimination that has been integrated into Latina lesbian’s lives. Moreover, by attending an Amigas Latinas meeting, many Latina lesbians participate in a formal scared space where it is safe for them to come-out and live their life without fear of prejudices. Dolores, who is in a lesbian relationship, participates in dominant culture’s enforced heterosexuality, but also attends Amigas Latinas meeting where her true identity can be expressed.

These research findings connect literary analysis, life histories, and participant observation to create a better understanding of the challenge of being a Latina lesbian in a homophobic Latina/o culture and racist queer culture. Ultimately Latina lesbians live in a world with homophobic and heterosexist ideas that are prevalent in various settings. To verbalize their sexuality to their family members they must risk the fear of being rejected and lack of discussion that can be a potential reaction from their relatives; “Family is the place where for better or worse we first learn to love” (Moraga 2000, 87). However, in contrast to the chaotic space that encompasses the “real” world, Latina lesbians have created their own sacred spaces, their own families from scratch, as a source of support, courage, and normality in their lives.

**CONCLUSION**

According to José Estaban Muñoz, in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, “If there is any acceptable place for “queers” in the homophobic national imaginary, it certainly is onstage—being “funny” for a straight audience” (Muñoz 1999,187). Thus, according to Muñoz the only place for queers to critique the patriarchy and homophobia of both the Latina/o and U.S. cultures is onstage. Therefore, the space where our dual identities (and many more) can be expressed completely is as an act of fiction that does not threaten the homogeneity of the chaotic and profane world of homophobia and racism. Furthermore, the performance of one’s life is only allowed during these stage performances. Therefore, we negate any existence before or after these performances as our lifestyle is not accepted by society outside the theatrical act, “...the subject needs to focus solely on the present, it can never afford the luxury of thinking about the future” (189). Hence, this situation forces queers to take a revolutionary step forward and find scared spaces off the stage where they no longer have to perform.

“The female subject who is both racialized and queer is triply susceptible to the “burden of liveliness.” Elin Diamond has suggested that “women, especially lesbians and women of color, have struggled (and continue to struggle) to appear, to speak, to be heard, be seen” (188). By disrupting the heteronormitvity of Latino culture Latina lesbians, and organizations such as Amigas Latinas, create a space where many themes are discussed. However, this interruption does not come easy. Evidently we are faced with more than one form of unjust discriminations as Latinas and lesbians. Torres also cites Audre Lorde to explain the fear, expressed as homophobia, in the Latina/o community that Latina lesbian are the subject of; “...the fear of recognizing difference, naming it, and understanding that we have been programmed to respond to difference with fear and loathing. Lorde suggests that radical change is possible only when we analyze difference and incorporate it into our lives” (Mohanty, Russo, Torres 1991, 283). This fear that Torres’ quotes from Audre Lorde is the reason for homophobic and racist ideas in the Latina/o and queer communities. No progressive changes can be made to either community unless they both are ready to combat their own ignorance. As Maria said, “the reason why homophobia exists in our [Latino communities] is because there is a lack of education about us [Latina lesbians]” however, not only is our community lacking in education and recognition of Latina lesbians but of queers overall.

In 1992, Kadi wrote about the simple truths about lesbians of colour. Over a decade later, these realities are still not being recognized. “Here are some simple facts about lesbians of colour generally. Lesbians of colour exist. Lesbians of colour have always existed, and we will always exist. By virtue of our existence, we make a radical political statement against racism, sexism, and heterosexism...We exist broadly, as women whose primary emotional, psychological, spiritual, sexual and political connections are with women” (Kadi 1992, 100-101).

Latina lesbians deconstruct the homogeneity that categorize women, specifically Latinas, simply as breeders, wives, and mothers/nurtures. Along with these fixed roles, women are identified under the polar characteristics of saintly Virgin or whore. In the queer community, we, Latina lesbians, disrupt the definition of “gay” as a preset image of the ‘gay, white, male’. With the visibility of more lesbians of colour, these traditional ideas of women, Latina/o culture, and queer communities must be restructured to fit Latina lesbians.

Not only must we take the burden of recognizing and removing heterosexist and homophobic ideas from our society, but we must also bridge our personal and political lives. Part of the responsibility is ours, as Latina lesbians, to challenge the homogeneity of our society and thus, bring awareness to our community; “And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable...is also the source of our greatest strength” and that visibility can occur in various ways either through fictional, autobiographical, and academic writing as well as by physical activism (Audre Lorde Project).
Notes

1 Queer will include the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning community as an inclusive term. Although this label has been pejoratively in the past, it has taken on a tone of self-affirmation within the emerging political “gay” community, referred to in this paper as queer.

2 Amigas Latinas is a Chicago-based bilingual/bicultural organization that focuses on lesbian, bisexual or questioning Latinas. For more information, visit their website at www.amigaslatinas.org

3 “Borderlands” was first introduced in Gloria Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking Borderlands/La Frontera (1987).

4 Life histories are defined as “a conversational format where questions seem like the talk women have with those they trust.” Patricia Zavella, “Talkin’ Sex,” 30.

5 In this paper, I use foreign-born and immigrant interchangeably. The Chicago metropolitan area refers to the six counties of Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will. For more information, see Rob Paral and Michael Norkewicz, The Metro Chicago Immigration Fact Book (Chicago: Institute for Metropolitan Affairs/Roosevelt University, 2003) and Martha Zurita, “Leadership, Involvement, & Change: An Evaluation of CCT Grantmaking” (lecture, University of Notre Dame, January 27, 2005).

6 Cherrie Moraga introduced the concept of “familia from scratch” in Loving in the War Years to define the family that people create outside of one’s blood relatives.


8 All names in this paper are pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of the interviewees.

9 Source needed.

10 The term “this bridge” is borrowed from the revolutionary book This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (2001).

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Rosa Yadira currently works at the Institute for Latino Studies of the University of Notre Dame in Berwyn. Her future plans have graduate school in the fall with a focus on identity politics for queer Chicanas in Chicago. She graduated from DePaul University with a double major in Spanish and Latin American and Latina/o Studies and was honored as Outstanding Senior of the program. She has presented her research at various conferences including the National McNair Scholars Conference at Penn State University 2002, University of California at Berkeley Summer Research Opportunities Program 2001, and the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies 2002, 2003, 2004. She has been featured on Homofrecuencia, the only Spanish-speaking radio show for gay teens and part of Radio Arte, a youth-run radio station in Pilsen. Rosa Yadira continues to do work in academic and community settings alike that intersect her personal and political views. Contact her at rosayadira@gmail.com.