LA JOTERÍA DE UCLA:
QUEER LATINA/O CHICANA/O STUDENT ACTIVISM

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Chicana and Chicano Studies

By

José Manuel Santillana

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The thesis of Jose Manuel Santillana is approved:

Dr. Anfta Tijerina Revilla

Dr. Yarma Velázquez Vargas

Dr. Mary S. Pardo, Chair
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to those of us who have found a home in the borderlands and who have continued to fight for social justice. We are queers, womyn, people of color, immigrants, gender non-conforming, trans, working class and other oppressed people.

Que Viva La Jotería!
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ABSTRACT

LA JOTERÍA DE UCLA: QUEER LATINA/O CHICANA/O STUDENT ACTIVISM

By

José Manuel Santillana

Master of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies

This qualitative study examines the lives of nine queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists who participated in the organizing of the 2006 UCLA Jotería conference. Using participant observations, one focus-group interview, documents, document examination, and surveys from 2006 to 2009, I have captured how race, class, gender, immigration, working class and sexuality were major topics within their lives and a driving force of their activism. Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory, Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory and Jotería Studies, this research investigates the ways they perceive and respond to the intersections of multiple forms of oppression and how these factors affect their commitment to social justice. In exploring and documenting Jotería activism, I have consciously played the role of the researcher and participant observer. The research indicates that the Jotería committee was able to construct a safe space through their activism that garnered critical consciousness about their multi-layered identities. As the Jotería committee succeeded in forming a new radicalized space that pushed forward their multidimensional vision of social justice, they formed a distinct Jotería identity and consciousness.
Chapter I

Introduction

Statement of the Problem & Its Significance

During my last year as an undergraduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I enrolled in a Chicana/o Studies course titled The Chicano Movement and its Political Legacies with Professor Maylei Blackwell. It was in this class that I began my research on Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos (GLLU), formally known as both Gay Latinos Unidos (GLU) and Latinos Unidos (LU). The organization was founded in 1976 in Los Angeles and was created in hopes of drawing people together on the basis of recognizing and being active on “Gay Latin/Heritage” issues. By 1982, they began publishing their first monthly newsletter Unidad that lasted for about 14 years. GLLU was one of the few organizations at the time that organized around gay and lesbian Latina/o issues in Southern California and eventually opened the doors for future LGBT Latina/o groups like Bienestar.\(^1\) GLLU advocated educating all communities about the multiple and simultaneous oppressions that gay and lesbian Latina/os face in everyday life. Co-founders of the organization included Rolando Palencia, José Ramirez, David Gonzales, Juan Villagomez, Ernesto Rojas, Ramon Márquez and Davis Milhauser.

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\(^1\) Bienestar is a non-profit social service organization dedicated to positively impacting the health and well-being of the Latino community and other underserved communities in Southern California.
Essentially, the organization successfully created a queer Latina/o network through their newsletter, community events and active role in the larger Los Angeles area.

My work on GLLU was the first time I had conducted any research on the queer Latina/o experience, so I was excited to begin reading the material that had been written about queer Latina/o and Chicana/o and activism. The paper became more than a research project; it was a way I could explore my own identity as a queer Chicano. At the time, I wanted to know about other people’s experiences growing up in a society where white supremacy, patriarchy and homophobia existed. I wanted to know how others overcame their struggles and fought against oppression. As I interviewed past members of GLLU, I began making connections with their experiences. Just as many of them felt their sexuality was silenced in the 1980’s in non-queer activist organizations, so did I, two decades later. Their stories as queer Latina/o activists inspired me to continue doing both my academic work and the work I was doing in the community. Hence, the research

The term “queer” is an umbrella term used to refer to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. It is a political term that has been claimed and redefined as a form of empowerment. I do not capitalize queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender to highlight the development of other sexual expressions such as Jotería.

I use the terms Latina/o to refer to people from Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Caribbean, South and Central American origins. I use the term Chicana/o to refer to people of Mexican descent living in the United States. The term Chicana/o has multiple meanings and implications. Although, the majority of the participants in this study are self-identified Chicana/os, I have used “Latina/o and Chicana/o” to inclusive of all the participants identities.
process essentially gave way and voice to my Jotoness, or Joteria, my experience as a young queer Chicano activist.

Although, I began consciously educating myself about social justice issues during my first years of college, in no other class did I feel comfortable enough to express my experiences as a young queer growing up in Central California. These personal experiences were key in igniting something in me to pursue my work in documenting Latina/o and Chicana/o queerstories. Class sessions provoked thoughts of what it meant to be Brown in the United States. One class specifically focused on the United Farmworkers of America (UFW) and brought forth images of my familia, my grandmother Tomasa and my aunt Lupe who took part in the Farmworker’s Movement in the late 1960s. This section of the class made me realize and affirm that my history as a Brown person mattered. I began to see the women in my familia as part of legacy that belonged to me and many other young Brown people, and just as the personal experiences of my familia mattered, so did my experiences as a queer person.

Growing up in Avenal, a small Mexican immigrant town located in the middle of California informed my work. Who I was and where I came from was vital to the understanding of why my research was more then an academic project and more of a tool for survival and resistance. I had to go through a process of remembering. As hard as it

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4 The term “Joteria” is also an umbrella term for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and other sexual expressions. It however refers to queer Latina/os and Chicana/os and gender non-conforming individuals. I provide a working definition in the following chapters.

5 I use the term “queerstories” or “queerstory” interchangeably to make note of the fact history continues to be male-dominate, patriarch-centered and heteronormative.

6 The term “Brown” is a political, racial and cultural classification that is based on human skin color like Black and White. I use the term to describe the racialized experience of Latina/os.
was, I had to challenge myself by visiting the not so distant past. Bittersweet memories of *Jem and the Holograms* Barbie doll expressed my struggle with gender and what it meant to want a Barbie doll as a little queer boy. For me it meant, humiliation and rejection from my *tías* and *tíos*. I remember my *tía* Angela storming into my cousin’s room and shouting at me as I played Barbies with my *primas*, “What are you doing? Barbies are for girls, not little boys! Go play outside with the boys!” As a young “boy,” I was prohibited from exploring my femininity. My gender was confined to other people’s definition of maleness. Every touch, every brush to Jem’s hair was a memory that challenged this maleness.

Other images came to mind, my grandmother and father working under the hot sun in the San Joaquin Valley fields, while White ranchers watched over them. These memories made me realize racism had something to do with that fact that my *familia* was taking up dirt and hot air as they picked crops. I remember my father taking me to the fields on one of his work days; I watched him for hours as he picked onions. By lunch time, the ranch owner drove up to the workers in his truck and stood over them to make sure they were working quickly. The rancher would often blurt out racist slurs. I may not have realized what racism was then but I knew that there was a difference between the White ranchers and us, Brown people. I also understood that my family’s encounters with racism (as well as mine) were important and often untold; they represented our communities’ struggles. Although, my experiences do not speak for the entire queer Chicana/o community, they are vital in providing an understanding of what many queer Chicana/os have endured growing up. Only through telling our stories can we open doors
to our movements and new possibilities. As marginalized people, we must actively remember how we have survived and resisted.

Early into my research, I realized that there were few books and articles on queer Latina/o activism. Little was written about the history on queer people within the Chicano Movement and Latina/os in the Gay Rights Movement. Instead, I found that most Chicano Movement literature documented stories that revolved around heterosexual identified Chicano men, perspectives that contributed in one way or another to the homophobia and patriarchy of the Chicano Movement. Figures such as Corky Gonzales, Cesar Chavez and Jose Angel Gutierrez were easy to find in textbooks (Rosales, 1997; Vigil, 1999; Navarro, 2000; Acuña, 2004). And while most queer Latino research addressed statistical factors of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in the gay Latino community, Queer Studies was dominated by White queer experiences and politics. The absence of queer Latina/os and Chicana/os and activism in textbooks made me question the written histories of various movements. Why had the efforts of Jotería gone unnoticed? Did the absence of queer Latina/os and Chicana/os in history books mean that queer Latina/os and Chicana/os did not take part in the important movements of the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s? These questions established a starting point from which I work.

I felt a great urgency for queer Latina/os and Chicana/os to continue documenting Jotería activism. Many members of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activist organizations such as GLLU were maturing and little was being done to document their experiences. At the same time, I felt it was necessary to take responsibility of uncovering my own

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7 I write “Chicano Movement” as opposed to Chicana/o Movement to indicate that what most people acknowledge as the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was male-dominated and patriarchal.
queerstory, so that I could continue working towards the liberation that our queer Latina/o and Chicana/o community ancestors/predecessors envisioned, a world free from oppression and domination. I say ancestors because as Jotería, our past is often erased and denied. Therefore, as Jota/os, we must acknowledge and celebrate that we, too, have lineages. Thus far, I have been documenting the queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activism in which I participated. One of goals of this research is to find multiple ways to bridge the gap between research and organizing, in particular the work that I do as a Joto activist.

Homophobia, patriarchy and white supremacy are deeply embedded in our communities; consequently, there is a lack of literature that speaks to the collective experiences of Jotería. On one hand, homophobia and sexism have been problems in the Chicano community, preventing the Chicano Movement from progressing. In the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement, there has been continued white supremacy, which has prevented them from fully including queer people of color. Too often, queer Latina/os, Chicanas/os and other queer communities of color are pushed aside into the margins of society. The Jotería struggle must be acknowledged in and outside of the Chicano Movement and Queer Movement. One way to begin this process is to talk about the queer Latina/o and Chicana/o experience; we must write about it and document it.

By documenting Jotería organizing, we can begin to uncover queerstories that have been systemically silenced and oppressed. In 2011, we have very few books on queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists' organizations. Many organizations are mentioned in books and articles but few document queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activisms. While scholars like Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, Juana Maria Rodriguez and Anita Tijerina Revilla have done great work, much more activist scholarship is needed. My research
addresses race/white supremacy, gender/patriarchy and sexuality/homophobia in the lives of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists. It is important to conduct this study because it allows us to directly see the ways in which queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists are resisting and organizing against oppressive systems.

This study documents the experiences of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists. It develops theoretical notions of Joteria activism and consciousness that addresses the challenges of being a queer Latina/o, Chicana/o activist. It is my desire to be able to look up Joteria and queer Latina/o and Chicana/o organizing and find an array of books addressing the complex realities of our struggles. The queer Latina/o and Chicana/o experience must be told and heard from all of our communities. It is necessary that I, as Joto graduate student, contribute and work towards storing our queer stories and experiences so the generations after us can reflect on our collective memory. Our community has always actively struggled against injustice; we must be able to understand, theorize and analyze this.

This research will examine the experiences of nine queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists who participated in the organizing of the 2006 Joteria conference hosted at UCLA. It explores the involvement of these students in social justice movements at the university and in their communities. This is a qualitative case study of a group of students (the Joteria conference committee) who eventually formed La Joteria de UCLA, a queer Latina/o Chicana/o student activist group that initialized in 2006. Race, class, gender, immigration and sexuality discrimination were major topics within their lives and proved to be the driving force of their activism. By exploring the lived experiences of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists, I examine the way they perceive and respond to
the intersections of multiple forms of oppression and how these factors affect their commitment to social justice. As a member of the Jotería committee myself, I have interchangeably played the role of the researcher and participant observer, meaning that I was fully invested in the organization. Using interviews, surveys, document examination and day-to-day observations, I have captured the participants insights about activism, injustice and liberation. The organizing of the 2006 UCLA Jotería conference played a significant role in the lives of the participants. It provided its membership with a specific queer Latina/o and Chicana/o space that fostered their activism.

This study has been divided into two underlying objectives: (1) to document the experiences of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activism, and (2) to explore the function of student activism and social justice movements in the experiences of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists. In the following chapter, I will further address the way that I have aligned my work with Critical Race Theory, Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory and Jotería Studies; and used research approaches that challenge Eurocentric Western-based research.

Research Questions

Specific questions that guided this study:

1. What are the experiences of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at UCLA from 2006 to 2009?
2. How do queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at UCLA perceive and respond to racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and gender discrimination?

3. What is Jotería identity?

4. How do queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists at UCLA work to achieve social justice?
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory, Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory and Jotería Studies, this body of literature provides a critical analysis of the lived experiences of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at UCLA. I have also included critical insights into the legacy of Chicana/o student activism that serves as a backdrop for my study. This study is additionally aligned with my personal commitment to end all forms of oppression including homophobia, gender discrimination, patriarchy, xenophobia and racism in the United States. Therefore, all of these theoretical frameworks work towards challenging “Western” based research by fundamentally rooting research in social justice. This literature review will provides an overview of these frameworks and frames the research questions, design and purpose of this study.

Theoretical Frameworks

The members of the Jotería committee have been actively engaged in creating and developing theory that speaks to their experiences. I have collected written and electronic documents, interviews, surveys and oral communication from members of the Jotería committee that provide critical perspectives about their racial, class, immigrant sexual and gender experiences. Thus, I begin documenting the lived experiences of various UCLA queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists dating back to the early 1990’s and contribute to a working definition for Jotería activism and consciousness. I will do so by
primarily using the works of Anita Tijerina Revilla’s Muxerista theory as it closely coincides with my work. I use other theoretical frameworks to further contextualize race, ethnicity, culture, Latina/o Chicana/o experience, queer experience, student experience and feminism.

This section provides an overview of the major theoretical frameworks that shape my research questions and purpose. By interweaving Critical Race Theory, Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory and Jotería Studies I have provided theories that actively seek to highlight the experiences and voices of queer students of color. The last section on student activism works to stress the importance that student activism has had on social change in both Latin America and the United States.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Theory has been selected for my study to focus attention on the ongoing efforts to challenge and define the way race and racism have affected Chicana/os in the United States. Several scholars within the field have looked at education through CRT in order to fully contest and give suggestions for how education in the United States can be a more inclusive system for all students.

In further discussing CRT, it is important that race and racism be defined. Some scholars argue that race is a socially constructed and fluid measure that is used by Whites to differentiate themselves with anyone who is not White, who is the so-called “other.” For example, race has been used to both include and exclude groups in our society from resources and opportunity in the United States (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). To define racism, the following authors use three underlying working premises of racism
that include “(1) one group believes itself to be superior, (2) the group that believes itself to be superior has power to carry out the racist behavior, and (3) racism affects multiple racial/ethnic groups” (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006). These working definitions give insight into the systematic, institutionalized and internalized oppression that historically defined the United States. For example, it is due to racism that we have an over representation of Latina/os and African-Americans in the prisons and under representation in the education system.

CRT originated in the schools of law in the late 1980’s because groups of scholars sought to challenge race and racism in the United States’ legal system and society. Scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman argued that without an analysis of race and racism, they were not able to offer strategies of transformation. At the same time, this argument was taking place in other areas such as Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies. Consequently, while acknowledging the history of Black people, scholars began to challenge the tendency of a Black and White binary by noting that other people of color inherit similar experiences shaped by intersections of race and racism (Yosso, 2006, p. 6). “Latina/o critical race (LatCrit) theory scholarship in particular brought a Chicana/o, Latina/o consciousness to CRT in examining radicalized layers of subordination based on immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent, and surname” (Yosso, 2006, p. 7). In this way, CRT was able to contribute to other fields by acknowledging different peoples experiences. Issues of intersectionality became an important contribution to the development of CRT, extending the race discourse.

Solórzano and Yosso (2001) provide five basic perspectives of critical race theory in education: 1) The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other
forms of subordination shifts the discussion of race and racism from a Black/White discourse to include multiple experiences; 2) The challenge to dominant ideology rejects claims of objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity within the education system and in other institutions 3) The commitment to social justice offers a liberatory response to oppression 4) The centrality of experiential knowledge recognizes the knowledge of students of color is legitimate, appropriate and critical in understanding racial subornation and 5) The transdisciplinary perspective challenges ahistoricism by placing race and racism in an historical and contemporary context (p. 472). These basic tenets are the focal points to my research analysis because they declare practices and perspectives that encourage social justice at the root. CRT works towards the “elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating other forms of subordination, such as gender, class, and sexual orientation” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 472). CRT provides a conceptual framework for the study.

As Edward Taylor (1998) states, “CRT challenges the experience of whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color” (p.122). By telling their stories, people of color are able to talk about their experiences with race and racism. CRT and LatCrit have challenged the status quo by allowing people of color to have a voice and extending the race/racism discussion to include issues of intersectionality and multiple identities. Many of the participants in this study have experienced different forms of oppression including racism, they have been able to voice their experiences in a way that they would not have if race/racism was not acknowledged. Similarly, CRT and LatCrit scholars have been able to extend the discourse to include gender/sexism, but have gender/sexuality has not necessarily been
the major focus. For a closer theoretical understanding of gender dynamics, I turn to Chicana/Latina feminism.

**Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory**

Throughout history, Chicana/Latina women have resisted patriarchy and challenged other oppressive systems of domination. From the *soldaderas* of the 1910 Mexican Revolution and the Watsonville cannery workers strike of 1985-87 to the Chicanas at the forefront of the Chicano Movement, *mujeres* have continued to change the political, economic and cultural landscape of our society (Alaniz & Cornish, 2008). They have been leaders of national and local movements, writers, poets and artist who have created a legacy that transcends generation after generation. For many queer Latina/os and Chicana/os, queer Chicana feminists, specifically, have been able to speak to our experiences. This is why I reiterate the words of Hames-García and Martínez (2011) that as gay Chicanos, many of us claim a lesbian feminist legacy of writing as ours, as many of us have not only found political company in such legacy but have found it to be life-sustaining (p. 2). In the same way, all of the participants of this study are self-identified feminist who actively work to address patriarchy in their activism.

During the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, many Chicanas within the Chicano Movement began to oppose the way that they were being treated. Although the Chicano Movement was consistent in challenging different societal inequalities in the United States, it failed to acknowledge the patriarchal structures that oppressed their Chicana counterparts (Garcia, 1997). “As they forged a feminist consciousness, Chicana feminists searched for an elusive room of their own within the socio-historical and political context.
of the Chicano movement” (Garcia, 1997, p.1). While Chicanas spoke out against patriarchy, they also began to envision a movement and to a larger extent, a society that treated all women as equals.

For many Chicana/Latina women earlier on in the Chicano Movement, identifying themselves as feminists meant they would be criticized for “selling out” Raza. Nieto-Gomez (1997) states:

It sounds like a contradictory statement, a “Malinche” statement—if you’re a Chicana your on one side, if you’re a feminist, you must be on the other side. They say you can’t stand on both sides—which is a bunch of bull. (p. 52)

Being a Chicana/Latina feminist meant that you would have to face some sort of opposition from the Chicano Movement as well as the predominantly White Women’s Movement. However, activists and scholars like Nieto-Gomez did not submit to the idea that her identities had to work separately.

At the same time, some White liberal feminists had also failed to be inclusive of women of color. Nieto-Gomez (1997) contends that the Anglo Women’s Movement failed to address issues that were important to Chicana women. While they took on some women’s issues, they did not bring up welfare rights, racism and bilingual education, for example. To a certain extent, much of those experiences ring true today. Although, these issues have been ignored by many in the White Liberal Feminist Movement, women of color created spaces in feminism that were inclusive of all women. Early Chicana feminists viewed oppression as a product of race, class and gender subordination, “Chicana feminists recognized that they faced triple oppression by virtue of race, sex and
class...they realized that all three oppressions reinforced and sustained the others, and that all must work together” (Alaniz & Cornish, 2008, p. 251).

As a result of their continued frustration within both movements, Chicanas started their own caucuses within Chicano Movement organizations that advocated a feminist agenda while advocating Chicana issues in the predominantly White Women’s Movement. These activities often led to a separatist politic. Consistently being caught between different types of subordination and ideological differences, Chicanas formed their own organizations. Drawing names from Mexican revolutionary heritage, Chicanas formed various organizations, such as Hijas de Cuauhtémoc and alternative publications that included Encuentro Femenil and Regeneración (Segura & Pesquera, 1988-1990). Despite the constant let downs, early Chicana groups generated a foundation for Chicana feminist discourse. It provided spaces for Chicanas to voice their opinions and frustrations about their struggle towards liberation.

In academia, Chicanas continued efforts to incorporate their struggle and feminism within Chicano Studies. In 1969, there was much excitement surrounding some of the first Chicano Studies classes. However, many Chicanas were quickly disillusioned to find out that very little to no material included the history and struggle of women. Instead, most literature narrowly depicted Chicanas holding their children or la adelita (Encuentro Femenil, 1997). Orozco (1997) states that while the attacks on feminism in the Chicano community were overt, in Chicano Studies Chicana feminism was undermined in different ways. From Chicano literature to the crafting of the Chicano Studies document El Plan de Santa Barbara, it was evident that women were being left out. She recalls the following:
They interpreted the condition of Mexican men and women to be synonymous; gender was irrelevant in determining life experience and power. Most intellectuals were unconscious of their exclusion of the category of gender, since male thought permeates our thinking and does not allow for the female perspective and opinion. (p. 266)

Since then, important changes within Chicano Studies have taken place. The National Association of Chicano Studies (NACS) has changed its name to be more gender inclusive to the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS). National organizations like Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) have established a specific academic space for Chicana scholars. Several conferences have focused on Chicana feminist issues and more than ever Chicana feminist scholarship has moved across disciplines.

In establishing Chicana feminist production, many Chicana scholars have explored the way that they have created and controlled their own discourse, a process that is essential to decolonization. Hurtado (2003) asserts that Chicana feminists have recuperated the wisdom of their foremothers by reconstituting what was considered valid discourse in the academy. Chicanas have claimed women’s discourse by validating the stories of women in their families. Hurtado (2003) further stresses that because Chicana feminists have pursued different ways of knowing, they have self-consciously fashioned a rhetoric that integrates different genres such as poetry, spoken word, teatro, short stories and artistic performances to explore the content and form of their feminisms. In the same way, the participants of my study have continued these traditions and discovered new ways to explore and explain their queerness.
In other fields, Chicana feminist have redefined women’s participation in the Chicano Movement by rethinking grassroots leadership positions. Chicanas have played an important part in the struggle for better education from the beginning of the Chicano Movement, specifically within the 1968 Chicano blowouts. However, many of women who were the leaders of these protests had gone unrecognized for their work and participation until Chicana scholars pursued a gender analysis of these major events. Chicana feminists provided an opportunity that centered the analysis on the women. Delgado Bernal (1998) argued that the reconceptualization of women grassroots leadership in the 1968 Chicano blowouts was necessary in identifying ways that women offered leadership. Instead of focusing the attention on who spoke at the rallies, which was most often men, Delgado Bernal (1998) offered a cooperative leadership paradigm that recognized diverse dimensions of leadership that consisted of attending meetings and developing other student consciousness.

In 1981, Moraga and Anzaldúa (2002) published the first edition of this bridge called my back: writings by radical women of color, a feminist anthology that focused on the experiences of women of color and/or third world feminists. A first anthology of its kind, this bridge challenged the predominantly White Women’s Movement and created pathway towards the inclusion of gender and sexuality across multiple disciplines. In the midst of publishing this bridge, Chicana lesbian scholars Moraga and Anzaldúa recall their motives for the book:

We want to express to all women – especially to white middle-class women – the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice, and denial of differences within the feminist movement.
We intend to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions.

We want to create a definition that expands what ‘feminist’ means to us. (p. iii)

While many earlier Chicana feminists of the 60’s contributed vital critiques of race and class, minimal writings discussed sexuality until this anthology. Moraga affirms this in calling for a theory of the flesh, “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 of necessity” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 21). In attempting to bridge the contradictions in the experiences of women of color, theory of the flesh creates spaces for women of different genders and sexualities. It establishes scholarship that informs us about the intersectionalities° that exist in all of our struggles. Moraga states:

In this country, lesbianism is poverty — as is being a brown, as is being a woman, as in being plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression. The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression purely from theoretical base. (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 26)

Many queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists have struggled with trying to link their identities together because of their specific experiences within multiple movements and communities that have silenced their voices. In looking for safe spaces, they have looked at Chicana feminist theory to guide them in building bridges and understanding

° “Intersectionality” is a feminist sociological theory first highlighted by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It is a methodology that examines various socially and culturally constructed categories such as race, class, gender and sexuality and how they intersect on multiple and often simultaneous levels (Crenshaw, 1991).
intersectionalities. For many Latina/o and Chicana/o queers, women, men and gender non-conforming individuals who have been marginalized, envisioning new possibilities as Chicana feminists have done is vital. Starting from this vantage point, a new area of study emerged called Jotería Studies.

**Jotería Studies**

In recent years, many activists and/or activist scholars have begun talking about the emerging discipline of Jotería Studies, that is, the study of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o men, women and gender non-conforming individuals' experiences. Although, already in existence before having a name, Jotería Studies creates a specific space for artists and writers to discuss issues pertaining the queer Latina/o and Chicana/o community and is important to any discussion on identity, resistance and liberation. This section will discuss the varied contributions of artists, activists and scholars to this up-and-coming field. It will also challenge White queer perspectives by addressing the continued racism in the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement and within the confines of Queer Studies. Equally as important, I will be addressing the heteronormativity, homophobia, patriarchy and gender discrimination in both the Chicana/o and queer community.

For many individuals and organizations in Latin America and the United States, making historical connections to pre-Columbian times has become necessary. Equally as important, is the history of Latina/o occupation in American land before and after the

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9 The term “gender non-conforming” is used for individuals whose gender expression is different from the societal expectations based on their assigned sex at birth.

10 “Heteronormativity” is a cultural bias in favor of opposite-sex relationships of a sexual nature, and against same-sex relationships of a sexual nature. It is a set of punitive rules (social, familial, and legal) that force us to conform to hegemonic, heterosexual standards for identity.
construction of the present day border. Many scholars are interested in rethinking the way
that sexuality was documented in pre-Columbian, colonial, post-revolutionary, and
postmodern periods. However, researchers hold conflicting views. While some scholars
posit that homophobia was common in pre-Columbian times, others have found that two­
spirit traditions have existed in the Americas to this day (Estrada, 2011).

Euro American gay historians Walter Williams, Stephen Murray, Will Roscoe, and
Geoffrey Kimball have all found evidence that homosexuality existed in several forms
throughout most of the Americas in pre-Columbian times. During the conquest, Spanish
Inquisition priests and conquistadors, such as Fray Sahagún and Pedro Cieza de León in
Peru have emphasized the history of genocide against homosexuals in Latin America
(Estrada, 2011). Although, many scholars have been able to document and analyze
historical materials on queer sexuality among the indigenous people of the America, very
few of them have been queer Latina/o scholars. I find this problematic because
traditionally White scholars have dominated the field and limited the perspectives in
which people view sexuality. This is not to say that White heterosexual or White gay
scholars should not research queer Latina/o issues but that we should consider what
Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) refers to as cultural intuition in the process. Cultural
intuition acknowledges Chicana researchers as having a unique viewpoint that takes into
account personal experience, existing literature, professional experience, and analytical
research process that serves to resist dominant epistemologies.

In studying the history of Mexican male homosexuality, other scholars have
focused their attention on the famous 41. On November 17, 1901 Mexico City police
raided a private party and arrested the forty-one men in attendance, half of them dressed
as women. Due to all the uproar by residents and journalists, the number 41 itself became a symbol of Mexican male homosexuality and the scandal of the year, inspiring various news articles as well as poems, corridos and famous artwork by José Guadalupe Posada (Irwin, 2000). “The event initiated the first significant discussion of same-sex sexual relations in Mexico since colonial times and raised questions about sexuality, masculinity, and Mexicanness itself that are still debated nearly a century later (Irwin, 2000, p. 353).” Essentially, the famous 41 became an event many scholars could research and explore to gain a better perception of the way gender difference and homosexuality was perceived in the 1900’s. Although, many news articles were written, no actual documented statements exist from the 41. These accounts are important to the understanding of queerness as it relates to Latina/o and Chicana/os in the United States and give us insights about homophobia in Mexico.

While it is imperative to acknowledge the different histories of queer people in Latin America, it is also important to point out that not every country carries parallel experiences. Similarly, the experiences of queer Latina/os in the United States differ depending who we are talking about. Difference in populations, nationality, economic status, citizenship, migration, and generations should be considered. For example, while many earlier immigrants do not have a direct account of a queer culture in their country of origin, many recent immigrants from Argentina, Brazil and Mexico might have some knowledge about gay culture and politics (Roque Ramírez, 2005). Thus, in speaking about Jotería it is vital to understand that multiple queer Latina/o and Chicana/o identities exist in the fabric.

In the United States, queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists have publicly played
important roles in political and social organizing since at least the 1950s. Early activists include San Francisco’s drag performer José Sarria in the 1950’s and 1960’s, New York’s Sylvia Rivera from the 1960’s through the 1990’s, and Philadelphia’s Ada Bello in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Most activism on both race and sexuality began around the early 1970’s. In 1972, New York’s COHLA (*Comité Homosexual Latinoamericano*) attempted to march in the city’s annual Puerto Rican Day Parade. They were denied participation but succeeded in bringing attention to gay issues in the Puerto Rican and broader Latino community, and the struggle of people of color to the mainstream predominantly White Gay Movement. In 1975, queer Chicana/os founded the GALA (Gay Latino Alliance) in San Francisco. GALA attempted to disrupt the notion that all gay people were White and all Latinos were heterosexual. By 1979, queer Latina/os announced their presence nationally at the historic March on Washington (Roque Ramírez, 2005).

During the 1980’s several Latina/o organization formed throughout the United States often as a response to the AIDS crisis. In Los Angeles, GLLU formed in 1981, as did a subcommittee, LU (Lesbianas Unidas) in 1983. In Denver, organizations like Ambiente Latino and Las Mujeres Alegres developed, while Texas hosted a Gay Hispanic Caucus. In the late 1980’s and 1990’s, many transnational queer Latina/o organizations began connecting with Puerto Rico, Venezuela and other Latin American countries. Other important organizations that continued addressing queer Latina/o issues include Washington D.C. based LLEGO (National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Organization), Chicago’s ALMA (the Association of Latino Men for Action), Texas’s ALLGO (Austin Latino/Latina Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Organization) and California’s Tongues and Proyecto ContraSIDA Por Vida (Roque
Ramírez, 2005). The United States has a rich history of queer Latina/o social and political organizing, and these groups represent only some of the activist efforts at the time. Also important to consider are the queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists in other historical organizations whose stories are yet to be told due to repression of their gender and sexuality in the specific timeframe.

For many queer Latina/os and Chicana/os individuals, growing up meant many things, often that they had to deal with different forms of patriarchy, assigned gender roles and homophobia. “Lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender Chicana/os, who are targets of homophobic violence and religious bigotry by society at large, also have to cope with...their own macho-infected families and ethnic communities” (Alaniz & Cornish, 2008, p. 251). In the anthology Compañeras: Latina Lesbians Lorenza (1994) recalls:

¿A cuántas de nosotras nos han rechazado nuestras familias por ser lesbianas? ¿Cuántas de nosotras hemos escuchado de nuestras madres aquel dicho: “Mejor puta que pata?” El rechazo, el desprecio y las maldiciones duelen, y en nuestra vida como lesbianas hemos sufrido mucho. (p. 232)\textsuperscript{11}

This experience rings true for many who have been silenced by their own families and communities. Feelings of confusion and repression manifest in their lives growing up. Their gender and sexuality is at constant battle with patriarchy and heteronormativity.

\textsuperscript{11} English translation reads: How many of us have been rejected by our families for being lesbians? How many of us have heard the saying of our mothers: “Better whore then queer. The rejection, contempt and curses hurt, and in our lives as lesbians, we have suffered much.”
label these traits as specifically Latina/o.

In searching for alternative spaces that queer Latina/os and Chicana/os can find comfort in, many move from their homes to bigger cities that have established queer cultures. In doing so, they are amazed at the sexual freedom that is allowed. Roque Ramírez’s (2003) study on San Francisco’s GALA discusses the experiences of members’ lives from the mid-1970’s to the early 1980’s. The author describes how butch Chicana lesbian Diane Felix leaves her home at the age of 22 from Stockton to San Francisco “where the social movements and visions of the counterculture of the late 1960s still generated excitement” (p. 224). While they meet the city with enthusiasm, they soon realize that although they now have queer spaces to go to, many of them feel disconnected to the White gay culture of San Francisco. Rodrigo, a member of GALA recalls:

There were also some racist discriminatory practices on the bars in that sometimes they would ask for an inordinate amount of IDs from people of color... They would ask for two, three picture IDs. So it wasn’t a very happy time for Latino gays. (Roque Ramírez, 2003, p.232)

As a result of their experiences, GALA focused on fighting multiple struggles that affected them, challenging racism and homophobia simultaneously. Like many queer Latina/o organizations from the 70s and 80s, GALA was able to offer their members a specific queer Latina/o space. Nevertheless, GALA in part failed to address many issues concerning Latina lesbians.

Creating inclusive spaces in our movements have been challenging, in large part
due to gender discrimination, classism, patriarchy and racism. While the larger gay and lesbian community often failed to address issues of racism, many queer Latino organizations failed to address patriarchy and gender discrimination. Perhaps one of the greatest examples of all these practices is the marginalization of transgender Latina/os. Although, transgender people of color have been at the forefront of the LGBT Movement, they have often been pushed to the sidelines of history. Sylvia Rivera, a Latina transgender activist who took part in the 1969 Stonewall riots has often been rejected by White gay scholars and activists. At times both her transgender and Latina identity are left absent in history; scholars like Eric Marcus refers to Sylvia as Rey Rivera who dresses in drag. While other scholars like David Carter refuse to acknowledge her presence at the Stonewall riots because there is no reliable witnesses that can prove she was there but her friends (Retzloff, 2007). In organizing spaces, Martin Duberman recalls “how the White, largely middle-class activists who used the Stonewall uprising to mobilize a mass political movement in ensuing years rejected the Latino/o transvestites like Rivera who played a pivotal role in the melee” (Retzloff, 2007, p. 146). Rivera’s exclusion from the LGBT Movement draws on gender discrimination and racism. It provides important details of how we view and challenge hate towards transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. More importantly, Rivera represents the fight for transgender people of color inclusion in history. As our movements move forward, we must celebrate the contributions of our transgender and gender non-conforming counterparts.

Whereas many queer scholars of color have sought to address racism in queerstory, other scholars of color like Michael Hames-García & Ernesto Javier Martínez (2011)
“have sought to work against the whitewashing tendencies of queer academic theorizing and against the deep suspicion of identity categories that too often serve as a crutch for white academic racism” (p. 11). Several queer theorists have used anti-identity politics to validate their erasure of race when speaking about sexuality. Ignoring the contributions of several scholars of color.

In explaining his discontent with queer theory, Hames-García’s (2011) *Queer Theory Revisited* separates the birth of 1990’s queer theory genealogies into two dominant narratives: separatist, those who attempt to separate sexuality from race and gender, and integrationist, those who advocate for queer theory as a way to address the multiple relations among race, class, gender and sexuality better than other movements and theories. Integrationists often view identity as oppressive and dangerous (p. 24). The author further argues that both separatists and integrationists frequently disregarded the writing of queer people of color by simply not including queer people of colors works, limiting them to footnotes, introducing them after White scholars contributions and assuming that we all make the same critiques. While queer scholars praised early writings like Michel Focault’s *History of Sexuality* (1976), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men* (1985), Michael Warner’s collection *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993) and Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter* (1993), they failed to consider and incorporate James Baldwin’s *Another Country* (1962), Barbara Smith’s *Towards a Black Feminist Criticism* (1977) and Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981).

Although, some scholars like Sandra K. Soto (2010) still find queer theory useful, she too acknowledges its limitations. Soto highlights that many queer theorist have been slow to learn from scholars like Yvonne Yarbo-Berjarano and others in the way they have
“staged imaginative interventions over the past dozen or so years against the heteronormativity of Latin@ studies and the radicalized blind spots of queer theory” (p. 4). Similar to Hames-Garcia, Soto recognizes that queer theory tends to rarely engage itself with racial formation and other queers of color by confining race into tiny footnotes. Moreover, White queer theorists have yet to actively engage and integrate race/racism as an important subject matter.

In response, queer theory can be viewed along the lines of what Walter Mignolo names “the colonial difference.” On one hand, queer theorists tend to understand and articulate the history of modern sexuality from within a Eurocentric frame therefore drawing from industrial capitalism, liberalism and the nation-state. By contrast, scholars who study race and modern sexuality coincide and consider the violence of colonialism, indigenous resistance, slave trade and the expansion of Europe (Hames-Garcia, 2011, p. 40). Thus, the study of queer sexuality can be extremely different depending on the approach, and as more queer Latina/o scholars like José Esteban Muñoz, José Quiroga and Jose María Rodríguez emerge in the field, queer theory is racially complicated. In pursuing my research I, too, acknowledged the work of queer theorists but have drawn my approach and inspiration from Chicana Feminism, Ethnic Studies and Jotería Studies.

Early 1980’s Chicana lesbian scholars Anzaldúa and Moraga began conceptualizing queer Chicana/o identity in a way that combined theory, personal experience and poetry. Their contribution to Feminism and Ethnic Studies have profoundly shaped and defined Jotería Studies. Works like This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (1981) co-edited by Moraga and Anzaldúa, Loving in the war years: Lo que Nunca Pasó por sus Labios (1983) by Moraga, Borderlands/La Frontera: The new Mestiza

Often inspired by spirituality, This Bridge provided a venue for third world women to speak about their experiences with race, class, gender and sexuality. A space in which they can express their internal and external struggles as well as their vision for transformation:

The vision of radical Third World Feminism necessitates our willingness to work with the people who would feel at home in El Mundo Zurdo, the left-handed world: the colored, the queer, the poor, the female, the physically challenged... We recognize the right and necessity of colonized people throughout the world, including Third World women in the US, forming independent movements toward self-government. But ultimately, we must struggle together.

(Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 218)

El Mundo Zurdo is a world in which we can exist in all our identities. It symbolizes a homeland in which queer people of color could love and be loved.

Moraga’s Loving in the War Years explores family history and political theory. First published in 1983, the book highlights the way that Moraga’s Chicana lesbian identity formed. She further contends that her lesbianism allowed a profound connection to be awakened between her and her mother. “It wasn’t until I acknowledged and confronted my lesbianism in the flesh that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother’s oppression—due to being poor, uneducated and Chicana—was realized” (Moraga, 2000, p.44). In articulating her emotions, she argues that we must not solely
deal with oppression on a theoretical base but rather our naming and dealing with our oppressions must come from within.

In both groundbreaking works, *The Last Generation* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Moraga and Anzaldúa continue challenging the way we think about identity. In interweaving Chicana/o history, theory and personal narrative, Anzaldúa introduces border concepts like *nepantla, the coalticue state* and *mestizaje*. At the same time, Moraga introduces us to the political movements that have inspired her writing and activism. The authors essentially complicate history by providing a rich Chicana lesbian perspective. In doing so, they validate and celebrate the contributions of queer people of color. Anzaldúa (2007) writes:

> Colored homosexuals have more knowledge of other cultures: have always been at the forefront (although sometimes in the closet) of all liberations in this country; have suffered more injustices and have survived them despite all odds. Chicanos need to acknowledge the political and artistic contributions of their queer. People, listen to what your jotería is saying. (p. 107)

When expressing her discontent with the racism in the Women’s Movement and the homophobia and sexism in the Chicano Movement, Moraga (1993) too calls for the inclusion of queer Chicana/os:

> “Queer Aztlán” had been forming in my mind for over three years and began to take concrete shape a year ago in a conversation with poet Ricardo Bracho. We discussed the limitations of a “Queer Nation”...to most lesbian and gay men of color. We also spoke of Chicano Nationalism, which never accepted openly gay
men and lesbians among its ranks. Ricardo half-jokingly concluded, “what we need Cherrie, is a ‘Queer Aztlán.’ ” Of course. A Chicano homeland that could embrace all its people, including its jotería. (p. 147)

Moraga and Anzaldúa introduce us to Jotería and Queer Aztlán, both of these terms have since been used by several queer Chicana/o activist and scholars to articulate their identity and spaces.

In recent years, scholar Anita Tijerina Revilla has published works like *Muxerista pedagogy: Raza Womyn teaching social justice through student activism* (2004) and *Are all Raza Womyn Queer? An exploration of sexual identities in a Chicana/Latina Student organization* (2009). Both works utilize Chicana/Latina/Queer Feminist Thought and Raza Womyn grounded theory as theoretical frameworks to explore the contributions of Chicana/Latina student activists to social justice education and sexual identity. The studies focus on the members of a UCLA undergraduate student organization called Raza Womyn and highlights the way Chicanas/Latinas struggle against racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia as activist educators employing a distinct kind of education called *Muxerista* pedagogy. Revilla (2009) contends that as womyn12 employing Muxerista theory, they were able to create a space for Chicanas and Latinas to explore their sexual identity that may have never arisen otherwise (p. 46). Revilla's social justice works is aligned with my study because we both seek to understand the way in which student activists have formed critical spaces and defined their identities.

12 The term “womyn” is used as oppose to “women” by some to make a feminist statement that reinforces woman-centered ideologies. The “e” is removed and replaced by “y” to take the word “men” out of “women.”
Jotería Studies has generated more than academic works, residing in the borderlands, it has provided artists and activists a venue to create and change systems of oppression. It acknowledges and validates a history that is often marginalized by White mainstream academics and Ethnic Studies scholars. Jotería Studies is a legacy, in the sense that it carries with it, a queer Latina/o and Chicana/o ancestral past. As an activist Joto scholar, I intend to continue shaping its existence. My study seeks to further develop a working definition for the term Jotería and document the activist work of other queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists.

**Student Activism**

Student activism is the organizing effort by students to affect political, environmental, economic, or social change. Historically, students have paved the way for different political movements seeking to challenge different forms of oppression. Throughout the world students have been able to disrupt power by taking over classrooms, having demonstrations on campus, marching in city streets, carrying out economic boycotts and even engaged in armed defiance. With the Internet, student activists have more than ever been able to communicate regionally, nationally and even internationally to create change. We have realized that student resistance evolves continually. “Empowered through collective action, unruly students can challenge their institutions, societies and governments; they can be tremendous catalysts for change” (Boren, 2001, p. 249)

During the early decades of the twentieth century, Latin America became the hotbed of student activism and resistance paving way to numerous radical movements.
Although these movements differed culturally, linguistically, politically and socially, they were able to cross national boundaries. In 1906, Ecuadorian student protesters at the University of Chile angered at their lack of local standing and power triggered future demonstrations and publications. In March of 1918, Argentinean students went on strike to demand that student have more power and participation in the university government. By 1931, students from all over Latin America met in Mexico to form the first Latin American student congress that allowed the students to experience a stronger sense of solidarity. Students were able to successfully share strategies for holding demonstrations and strikes as well as disseminating revolutionary information. As students continued seeking revolutionary change, they were often times met with resistance. In October of 1968, thousands of students and supporters peacefully continued protesting the government’s zero tolerance policy and police brutality at the Plaza of the Three Cultures. Protesters and bystanders soon found themselves surrounded by fully armed military troops, hundreds were killed and injured (Boren, 2001). This massacre of student activists is a reminder of how Latin American students have resisted even in the most corrupt governments. It is a legacy that has consequently influenced Chicana/o activism in the United States.

In the United States, Chicana/o students were experiencing an uprising of their own, although it differed from Latin America’s, many of them began to express their discontent with the education system. In March 1968, nearly 10,000 Chicana/o students walked out of six Los Angeles schools including a predominantly Black school. Although high school students were at the core, Chicana/o college students also provided leadership for the movement. Among their demands were reduced class sizes, the firing
of racist teachers and the building of better classrooms. The walkouts proved to be effective in calling national attention to the quality of education for Chicana/os encouraging walkouts in places like Denver, Colorado. Chicana/o militant groups like the Brown Berets gained momentum and spread across the Southwest. While the National Chicano Moratorium further joined the people in the United States in protesting the Vietnam War (Acuna, 2011; Rosales, 1997). As student activism evolved, so did the pertinent issues at hand. While it is important to consider the historiography and contributions of both Latin American and Chicana/o activism, we must also consider their limitations.

The Chicano Movement of the 1960’s provided a platform for the Chicana/o community to address the embedded racism that existed in education. However, it was mainly male centric and homophobic frequently excluding women and gay and lesbian Latina/os and Chicana/os. To a greater extent, Chicana lesbians remained marginalized and perceived as a greater threat to the Chicano community because they disrupted and challenged patriarchy (Trujillo, 1997). Thus, at the time not many spaces were present that included and catered to queer Latina/os within the Chicano Movement. As I have addressed previously, many organization struggled to include gender and sexuality in their respective organizations and movements. While others have moved forward in addressing issues pertinent to all queer students of color.

In seeking to understand the experience of queer students of color and activism in schools, scholars like Kevin K. Kumashiro (2001) have examined the paradoxes in the troubling intersections of race and sexuality within the context of education. Kumashiro argues that educators must acknowledge and work thorough paradoxes to address queer
students of color, racism, homophobia and heterosexism in schools. Educators then must engage in antiracist and antiherterosexist education in schools that include concepts of multiple oppressions and embracing multiple differences, which are necessary paradoxical processes. Kumashiro takes these issues on by having queer people of color write about the changes they seek to make. Many participants of my study have experienced oppression in school due to their sexuality and gender. For queer youth of color just attending school can be dreadful because of the constant harassment they face outside their home. As a result, queer Latina/o and Chicana/o students have been able to challenge these injustices through various organizations and student alliance groups.

Student activism has been at the forefront of many movements, yet their efforts have sometimes gone unnoticed. They have paved the way for future generations to have a voice and challenge systems of oppression. In particular, the contributions of student activists from Latin America have in one way or another informed the struggles of Latina/o and Chicana/o students in the United States. Although, the Chicano Movement had been able to address issues of racism embedded in the community, they failed to include their women and queer counterparts. Consequently, Latina/o and Chicana/o women and queers began to forge their own spaces in and outside the academia. Raza Womyn de UCLA and La Familia de UCLA are two student activist organizations that formed out of a necessity to have Latina/o and Chicana/o queer and feminist spaces. They are examples of a new direction many student activists are taking to be more inclusive of different peoples struggles and identities.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research examines the lives of nine queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists who participated in the organizing of the 2006 UCLA Jotería conference. Using participant observations, surveys, documents, document examination, and one focus-group interview, I will explore social justice practices and the perceptions of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at the university and in their community. I participated and conducted participant observations over the span of four years from 2005 to 2009, as well as one focus group interview in 2007 with six participants. The organizing of the 2006 UCLA Jotería conference proved to play a significant role in the lives of the participants. It was able to provide its members with a specific queer Latina/o and Chicana/o space that developed their activism. It was also the first time that such a conference was co-hosted and co-sponsored by a large coalition of Latina/o and Chicana/o organizations.

Access into Fieldsite

In 2004 I transferred from community college to UCLA. During my first semester I joined the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán de UCLA (MEChA of UCLA) and La Gente Newsmagazine. These two organizations played a big part in the development of my critical consciousness. It was also in these activist spaces that I built
strong bonds with other queer Latina/o activists who took part in the organizing of the 2006 Jotería conference.

As a member of the Jotería conference committee, I had access and insight that most researchers do not regularly have. Since I was part of the organizing process, I was able to intimately dialogue with most of the organizers and experience the many emotions that came with the activism. It was not until one year later that I contacted the organizers and expressed my interest in organizing an archival project. Another member and I began to archive the conference flyers, photos, articles and other documents at the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA. Shortly thereafter, I emailed all the organizers again asking for their participation in a focus group interview for my research. All of the members welcomed the study with excitement and agreed to participate.

Since then, I have continued to maintain contact with the activists as well as dialoguing with them about our continued struggles into the present. Most of the members have expressed the same urgency as I to document our experiences. Our shared personal, academic and emotional experiences with one another have created a safe space where we can continue an activist-based research approach.

**Research Methodology**

My study uses qualitative research methodology that takes into account and gives voice to the lived experiences of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists. I have done so by providing an array of data collection. No chronological order was used to collect the data; instead it was collected simultaneously. Throughout the four years, I have collected
videos, audio recordings, documents and photographs. I conducted one focus group interview. During the focus group interview, I asked participants to complete a survey as well. I conducted participant observation throughout the length of the study.

To conduct this research, I drew upon participatory action research (PAR) to counter traditional western research approaches. In doing so, I have committed to further distancing myself from linear approaches that divide the researcher and researched. PAR is a blend of various research approaches and epistemologies that include but are not limited to participatory research, action research, feminist praxis, critical ethnography and transformative education (Jordan, 2009). Although, it is difficult to point out the specific origins of PAR because its development is complex, I have provided a brief historical overview of some trends. During the early 1960s scholars like Paulo Freire, Orlando Fals-Borda, Mohammad Anisur Rahman and Gramsci began transforming social science research by integrating anticolonial and democratic thought into the process (Jordan, 2009; Krumer-Nevo, 2009). In this way, social research continued to transform from abstract and objective into an emancipatory process that centered the oppressed as agents of social change (Whyte, 1990; Jordan, 2009). Too often, oppressed people have been the victims of positivistic research. By centering the power with the oppressed, scholars were able to shift the power dynamic to ensure their voices were being heard.

According to Steven Jordan (2009), two other key features that have influenced the development of PAR is the emergence of popular education and action research. The independence from colonial powers eventually led to different forms of popular education that encouraged communitarian practices. Some examples of these practices were led by Fidel Castro in Cuba and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Equally as important
is the action component of PAR, which encouraged the collective problem solving of the research. Previously, many academic researchers have used this component to focus on the improvement of professional practices. Although, many researchers now have radicalized the way in which the action is carried out by incorporating popular education (p. 17), it is not enough to say that action will be carried out as an integral part of the research. Therefore, researchers must be willing to push themselves to constantly reflect on the ways they might be silencing participants.

PAR attempts to avoid the traditional extractive research carried out by universities and governments where so-called "experts" go into a community, study their subjects, and take away their data to write their papers, reports and theses. Mora and Diaz (2004) indicate that PAR is based on social science methods of systematic inquiry and data collection, but it diverges from traditional research by including education and action. Research conducted from this perspective values the knowledge, voice and future of the community as I value the knowledge, voice and future of the queer Latina/o and Chicana/o community. Green (2008) states, "Participatory action research methodology attempts to give voice to the people, to make visible their lives, and their experiences" (p. 84).

According to Mora and Davis (2004), "Participatory research includes communities in significant aspects of research, from the planning stages to the dissemination and utilization" (p. 7). They further provide several examples that are applicable to my study. For example, my research is a collaborative project with the other activists. I have worked directly with the participants to co-create definitions, questions and the purpose of the study. Additionally, I have relied heavily on the advice and
discussions with my activist counterparts before and after the focus group interview, which focused mostly on social justice issues. These discussions allowed for the participants to contribute to the development of the study.

My research on the 2006 Jotería conference committee is more than research; it is a social justice based effort to transform the lived experiences of queers of color for society and ourselves. It is about the process in which we create our own people's history. Similarly, Tuhiwai Smith (1999) proposes a radical indigenous research agenda that promotes healing, survival, decolonization, transformation and mobilization among the Maori people. For example, many see research as just another piece of writing instead of a tool for survival. For others, like the Maori people this type of research is vital to the survival of their peoples' traditions and culture. In this same way, my research is a tool for the survival of queer Chicana/o culture, traditions and language—a documented process where Jota/os become the voices of transformation.

Participants

The target population for this study consisted of the 2006 UCLA Jotería conference organizers. The sample of participants was appropriate for my study because of the groups' commitment to end all systems of oppression. The participants were contacted through a series of emails letting them know the goals and intent of the research. The organizers were informed that there was a possibility of follow-up interviews and surveys. A total of twelve participants agreed to be interviewed but half of them were not able to make it for a variety of reasons. Some of them had prior comments
with friends and family while others lived too far away to make the trip. However, many of them expressed how much they wanted to be there the day of the interview. I have included some of the organizers emailed responses that were not able to participate in the interview in North Hollywood. A total of six participants were present at the focus group interview and three submitted online surveys and responses.

The interview took place on October 28, 2007 at my apartment in North Hollywood. The participants and I agreed that my apartment would create a comfortable and relaxed environment. Everyone decided to bring food and drinks so we could eat and socialize before the interview. The focus group interview lasted approximately two and half-hours and was conducted in English and Spanish. One of the organizers took notes back to the newly founded organization, La Jotería de UCLA.

The participants were asked open-ended questions to encourage meaningful responses that drew from their own knowledge and feelings. The interview began with asking core questions regarding the term Jotería. They consisted of the following: do you identify with Jotería? Why or why not? And how do you define Jotería? These questions set the tone for the entire interview because they made the participants reflect on their identities and the role they play in their activism. Other questions asked were, What was your experience in collectively organizing the conference? What type of space did the Jotería provide you with? And what were the outcomes of the conference?
When surveyed about their ethnicity, eight identified as Chicana/o, one Xicanista, one Latina/Central American/Guatemalan, one Joto and one Xicano. All but one of the participants were attending UCLA as students during the planning of the conference. They ranged in age from 20-27 years old. Two of the participants were born in Mexico, six in California and one in New York. When asked about religion/spirituality, one identified as Catholic, one as atheist, one was unsure, two as spiritual, two as recovering Catholics, one not spiritual and one seeker/mystic/neo-pagan.

**Participant Survey**

A survey was used the day of the focus group interview to gather additional information about the participants’ personal lives. However, those who did not attend the interview had the option of turning in the survey online. It included basic information such as name and age, but also consisted of questions regarding gender, ethnicity, spirituality and sexual expression. Some of the participants identified with more than one gender, ethnicity, spiritual and sexual expression. All but one of the participants identified with the term Jotería. When surveyed about their gender expression four identified as female, four as male, one as gender queer, one as Joto-bio-boy-femme and one as mostly male. When surveyed about sexual expression four identified as gay, one as lesbian, one as Xoto, two as Joto, one as fluid/explorative, one as queer, one as two-spirit and one as ally/”straight” but not narrow. All of the participants identified with

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13 “Xicano” is the term Chicano with an X in the beginning of the word. The “X” signifies an indigenous ancestry. In the Nahautl language the sound ‘ch’ is spelled with an X.

14 “Xoto” is the term Joto with an X in the beginning of the word. The “X” signifies an indigenous ancestry. In the Nahautl language the sound ‘ch’ is spelled with an X.
non-heterosexual expressions. The term sexual expression was used on the survey as opposed to sexual orientation to provide the participants with more fluidity and options to express their sexuality. Often times, the term sexual orientation is traditionally limited and linked to the following three categories, heterosexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality. In using sexual expression, the participants were able to think about their sexuality in a broader sense, as something they express daily in various ways. Gay, bi, lesbian, two-spirited\textsuperscript{15}, downe\textsuperscript{16}, down low\textsuperscript{17} and questioning were some of the options listed on the survey.

At the time of the conference the combined participants were involved in multiple organizations, groups and movements. The following list is an extension of the participants personal political, spiritual and cultural beliefs and helps us further grasp the diverse and common backgrounds of each individual: Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), Conciencia Libre, Academic Advancement Program (AAP), La Gente de Aztlán, Teatro Revolver, Movimento Bolivariano, Grupo Folklorico de UCLA, Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS), La Familia de UCLA, Queer Alliance, Queer Bi Girl, Improving Dreams Equality Access and Success (IDEAS) and Raza Womyn.

\textsuperscript{15} The term “two-spirit” is Native American and refers to a person that has been blessed with housing both the female and male gender spirit or multiple genders spirits.
\textsuperscript{16} The term “downe” refers to those who identify as homosexual, gay, bisexual, or queer. The term “downe” is derived from “down low” is frequently used within Filipino American and Asian American GLBT communities. However, there is multiple definitions.
\textsuperscript{17} Down low is an African-American slang term that refers to a subculture of men who usually identify as heterosexuals but who have sex with other men.
As previously mentioned, my role in the study has been both a researcher and a queer Chicano activist. As an active member of the Jotería committee, much of my time was spent working towards social justice. I organized countless events on campus, including going to weekly meetings, organizing socials and planning of the conference. Living my research enabled me to feel an urgency for my community, a type of urgency that pushed for love at the forefront instead of an end result. When I speak of an end result, I speak of those researchers who detach themselves from the work they are doing to obtain so called objectivity within their research work. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) describes the way in which Maori indigenous people have approached outside researchers working in their community. The Maori people contend that the first beneficiaries of indigenous knowledge must be direct indigenous people themselves. The creation of their own knowledge and the way that knowledge is controlled should come from the Maori people (Smith, 1999, p. 119). The fact that I am part of the very community that I am researching challenges the status quo. The telling of the queer and Latina/o and Chicana/o story is by someone in the community. In this way, we are co-creators of our own histories and we are contributing to transformative knowledge as opposed to oppressive knowledge.

Recognizing my potential subjectivities as a researcher, I work to accurately represent the lives of the participants in this study. Using the in-depth focus group interview, I have used their own words to talk about their specific experiences. I have also used surveys to accurately represent their cultural, gender, sexual and political
identity at the time. I have also weaved in my own personal experiences to add depth to the events that took place throughout the years. I do so only because I think that my experiences have brought about a deeper analysis of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o organizing. I use ethnographic and personal journals and notes taken during weekly meetings throughout the organizing of different events.

There are always ethical dilemmas that arise in conducting research. Most of the dangers come from the fact that the researchers essentially have power, the power to interpret the study that can sometimes be misleading. As a result, “Many groups who have been subjects of research now refuse to allow access to outside researchers” (Stringer, 1999, p. 177). In my case, I do not see myself as an outsider rather as someone within the community. I committed myself to being a full participant of the Jotería committee as a queer Chicano activist. My relationship with the participants enabled me to build family and take responsibility for my community-based research approach. I have constantly been informing participants of my progress and invited them to take part in the development of the study as well as the analysis of it.

**Data Management & Analysis**

I conducted this ethnographic study by participating in the organization, taking field notes during some meeting and events. I have them stored in my personal files. I have typed them out and stored them in my personal laptop in a folder entitled La Jotería de UCLA 2006 and Queer Chicano Organizing 2006-2009. For my focus group interview, I used a small MP3 digital recorder that I was able to plug in directly into my
laptop to store the interview. Another participant brought his own tape recorder which everyone including myself agreed to have. After the 2006 conference, I emailed everyone asking them to send me any pictures or video recordings that they had. As a result, I obtained a variety of photos taken the day of the conference, the historical March 25th and May 1st Immigrant Rights Marches, the meetings and La Noche de Jotería. Additionally, I had drafts, memos and flyers, which I kept for myself. I have also included articles from La Gente de Aztlán Newsmagazine as primary sources.

In making sense of the data, I first transcribed the focus group interview and read all of my written data including fieldnotes and personal journals. As I read the transcriptions, I began to write down different themes; this process allowed me to identify the following areas of discussion: activism, homophobia, gender, safe space, familia, sexism, community, Chicana/os, multiple identities, student activism, reclaiming terms, sexuality, struggle and empowerment. These themes allowed me to begin the coding process by directing me to general ideas. I repeated the process about two or three times until I felt comfortable that I was able to fully comprehend the complexity of the interviews.
CHAPTER IV

LATINA/O CHICANA/O QUEERSTORIAS

My thesis is a reflection of the conversation with the Jotería committee and attempt to document and conceptualize the organizing of the 2006 UCLA Jotería Conference. Modeled after Revilla’s (2004) Mujerstorías, the following is a collection of queer Chicana/o stories, to which I refer Latina/o and Chicana/o Queerstorías. They are personal narratives, collective narratives, and interviews, written, oral, formal and informal. I will also be using programs, flyers, photos and La Gente de Aztlan Newsmagazines articles to explore the Queerstorías of La Familia. As an organizer and participant observer, I will also intertwine my personal experiences as I feel it is important in fully understanding the different incidents.

In 2004, I had recently transferred from West Hills Community College to UCLA. It was around this time that I began to “come out”\(^\text{18}\) as gay. Although, I was out to some of my friends back at home, I was not fully comfortable with my identity and often refused to come out to other students at UCLA. Looking for academic and emotional support, I joined various Latina/o organizations that included MEChA de UCLA and La Gente de Aztlan Newsmagazine. It was in these spaces within the ivory towers that my political consciousness continued to flourish. Early into joining the organizations, I realized the multiple struggles that students and student activists were facing. My first fall

\(^{18}\) To “come out” indicates that a person is openly claiming a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer identity. It derives from the phrase “to come out of the closet,” which signifies an end to hiding one’s sexual identity or a move to make one’s sexual identity public as oppose to private.
semester, I attended a few meetings that called for all students who were interested in joining La Gente. I remember one meeting in particular, we talked about the history of La Gente and how we wanted to change it in the future. The turnout was better then expected, so the editor was forced to move everyone to another room. Once the meeting was in session, a group of graduate students, mostly men, came into the room wanting to address why the current female editor had allowed a Latina Republican to join the newsmagazine. In the midst of the conflict, the men shouted and overpowered the *mujeres*. With anger in their faces, they began telling the editor that the newsmagazine had been taking wrong directions. One of the members criticized past editors, many of which included members of *Raza Womyn* and claimed that, “La Gente was becoming too queer.” Since several of the students in the meeting were incoming freshmen and transfers, the meeting became intimidating. This was my introduction to Latina/o and Chicana/o student organizations at UCLA.

Ultimately, I joined La Gente and decided that I was going to continue the tradition of making the newsmagazine queer and feminist. Of course this required me to be fully out on campus, so I slowly came out. It was within La Gente that I met “Pilar,” a member of Conciencia Libre, La Familia de UCLA and a participant of this study. As months went by Pilar and I became good friends and often talked about queer politics and revolution. In one of our conversations, Pilar mentioned that he used to be one of organizers of the annual Queer Latina/o Youth Conference that La Familia established. Coming from a small town in the Central Valley, I had never heard of such conferences, so I was excited that it existed. I asked him if the conference had been planned for that

19 “Pilar” is a pseudonym. I have made a conscious effort to give some of the participants of my study androgynous names to reflect their varied sexual and gender identities.
year and he told me that he did not think La familia was doing it. I quickly replied that if they were not going to organize it, we should take it upon ourselves to make the conference happen. He agreed and began to talk to other activists who were interested and felt the same need for the conference. Needless to say, we began to organize ourselves and made the conference a reality. After the conference, many of the members began to express the need for us to write our own histories.

La Familia de UCLA

Although it is uncertain what year La Familia actually started, we do have some proof that it has existed for over 20 years. In a La Gente article titled, *La familia: A support group for an invisible race*, Salvador Duran (1990) states the organization started in the fall semester of 1990 with only eight members, gaining popularity with twenty-five members by the end of the year. La Familia at the time was “a new organization at UCLA for Chicano/Latino gay, lesbian, and bisexuals” (p. 5). President at the time, Eric Rincon adds that La Familia was an invisible race with a culture, history and strong future. Important to note, is the language being used to describe the organization. While Chicano/Latino is being used in 1990, it is later changed to include mujeres, Latina/o. The change took place to acknowledge that even in our languages, patriarchy is embedded. Also critical to point out is the exclusion of transgender individuals in the mission statement. While the description in 1990 did not include transgender, it slowly changed in the years to come.
La Familia was a part of the Gay and Lesbian Association (GALA) but had their own leadership because they felt that GALA was unable to meet their needs as Chicanos/Latinos. Still, La Familia was in good standing and supported by GALA. Their main objectives were to provide self-accepting support that reflected *familia*, respect “out” and not “out” individuals and work to become visible and resourceful (Duran, 1990, p. 5). In its early stages, La Familia was met with much optimism by some the Latina/o community on campus. Karla Salazar, a representative from MEChA stated, “It is about time this group was formed. MEChA looks forward to see this group educate our community on homosexuality” (Duran, 1990, p. 5). La Familia also worked with community organizations like CARA A CARA and VIVA to help develop the organization as well as host writers, poets and performances (Duran, 1990, p. 22).

In *Racism is Queer: Homophobia Among People of Color* early La Familia member Eric Rincon (1991) discusses the contradiction that exists when people of color as an oppressed group continue to oppress other groups, like gay people. He states, “It is time that we begin to become more conscious and accountable for our homophobia...By accepting or even tolerating homophobia we are practicing hatred based on ignorance” (para. 2). He continues by asking why racism among people of color is seen as a social crime while homophobia is seen as an individual’s personal problem. Seeking to make a connection with Chicana/os and disrupt the stereotype that all queers are White, he stresses, “Homosexuality is not a white, upper-class, male circumstance” (para. 5). For this reason, organizations like La Familia and GLLU united to address the impact of

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20 The term “*familia*” literally translates into “family” in the English language. It however carries a double meaning in this study. The term “*familia*” also refers to families created and united on the basis of being queer and Latina/o.
being both queer and Raza. Rincon states, “I must fight social ignorance and inequality on two counts: the color of my skin and the person that I love” (para. 7).

Seeking to write the Queerstoria for La Familia, Juan Ramon Menchaca’s (2001) piece, Reclaiming Home; Familia for us all, tells us about some of the organizations development. He references Cherríe Moraga’s Loving in the war Years in speaking about how the concept of La Familia came to be. “It is finding familia among friends where blood ties are through suffering and celebration shared,” he cites Moraga. He claims that although the term of La Familia had existed among queers in Latin America, Moraga had came back to this concept to remind them about the realities of so many queers. Speaking about the intense process of coming out, Menchaca acknowledges the harsh realities that many queer Latina/o students have to face. “Sadly, many of our familias prefer not to hear or acknowledge our queer sexualities, or worse, sometimes we are disowned. It is out of this common sense of alienation that our relationships transcend tradition and take on a new meaning” (p.16). He states. For many queer Latina/os, coming out is a difficult process and more so with little support. When he speaks about the rejection of queer Latina/o people by their blood familias, he is speaking about a collective struggle that can also unite them. Therefore, the formation of La Familia came out of these ideas.

A past member of La Familia, Richard Villegas states that initially he did not know about La Familia but was later told that it had existed a couple of years ago before him, fading out in the years to come. Villegas remembers how La Familia had restarted back up by himself and Veronica Obregon in 1993. According to Villegas, the organization began as more of a “rap group” that discussed social topics and soon changed with the surfacing of anti-immigrant proposition 187 and anti-affirmative action
proposition 209. Villegas states: “These anti-Latina/o and anti-people of color propositions injunction with the continued struggle regarding the state of Chicana/o Studies at UCLA politicized La Familia as an organization.” It was at this time that La Familia, like many other Latina/o organizations participated in anti-187 and anti-209 rallies. However, in partaking in the rallies, they soon realized that that their presence was not welcomed. Some of the members of La Familia remember feeling animosity and hostility towards them (Menchaca, 2001). Claudia Rodriguez, a former La Familia chair stated:

They couldn’t understand how we as queers were being affected by affirmative action and immigration policy. They felt that we should stick to issues such as same sex marriages and domestic partnership issues because those were the issues that affected us directly, according to them. (Menchaca, 2001, p. 16)

Although many of the members began to politicize themselves and took part in the larger collective resistance, many members of their community rejected them. The protest and rallies were indicators that homophobia was still a big issue even among other conscious activists.

In Chicano, Queer, & Anti-209: ¿Tienes Algun Problema Conmigo?, Alex Ortega (1996) recalls the anti-209 rally in Los Angles on Wednesday, October 23, 1996. On this day La Familia joined the larger Latina/o community in opposing the “racist/sexist” proposition 209. Ortega states that they were energetically chanting things like “Hey hey Jotos, Vote No on 209!,” “Lesbianas/Jotos vote No on 209!” and “Get out of the closet and into the March” (p. 17). In the middle of all this, two of La Familia members were
arrested for civil disobedience for shutting down Wilshire Boulevard. It was at this point that many of the participants in the rally started shouting “culero, culero” which translates into “faggot” in Spanish. Deeply insulted, Ortega runs to the person with the microphone to tell them to stop. He then tells them “Look its very simple: two of us culeros are getting arrested in this demonstration. We’re doing this for our gente, we’re doing this for you!” After explaining to crowd that this was discriminatory, Ortega further tells them to stop saying “puto” when referring to Pete Wilson. The term “puto” is a derogatory word and translates into faggot or male prostitute in English. In acknowledging the homophobia in the crowd, Ortega challenged the Chicana/o community to stop using both sexist and homophobic language:

I’ll never forget the day of October when I was arrested by the police and attacked by my own Raza. I will use this memory to educate my gente. If someone makes homophobic or sexist remarks, they must be corrected – because women and queer Raza have an equal right to be respected members of the Chicana/o community. (p. 17)

In 1996 Villegas wrote an article in La Gente titled “Orgullo de Mestijoto,” which was an indirect call to all queer Latina/o students to come out of the closet. Insensitively criticizing closeted Chicana/o activists, he called out all individuals who were willing to go to MEChA meetings but who would never be caught attending a meeting for La Familia. He continued, “At protest you give life to everyone ‘Viva el Chicano,’ ‘Viva la mujer,’ ‘Viva las vacas,’ …‘Viva this’ and ‘Viva that,’ but you never give life to yourself or other Maricônes and Marimachas in the crowd fighting along side you” (p. 19). While Villegas’ frustrations over the lack of out queer Chicana/os is important to acknowledge,
it undermines the coming out process for each individual. For many who have struggled in expressing their sexuality growing up, coming out is a lengthy process and cannot be rushed.

Still, his message is one that is critical and reflects a call for self-love. In challenging the homophobia in the Latina/o community, he stated “As Chicana/os we know hostility, we recognize animosity, we have felt hate. Yet even with such realizations we hypocritically manifest the same hostility, animosity and hate on our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters” (Villegas, 1996, p.19). On these terms, Villegas found it important other queer Chicana/os come out. He lastly protested:

Stand up as a Maricón and a Chicano – equally. Be proud as a lesbian and a Chicana – simultaneously. The Mexican family has survived the revolution, depression, hard labor, immigration, many journeys, tragedy and its going to survive you coming out of the closet. (Villegas, 1996, p.19).

In an article published by La Gente, “Do you know what the “H” stands for in MECHA de UCLA? Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano Heterosexual de Aztlán,” Villegas (1997) discusses the history of MEChA as it relates to La Familia. He claims that MEChA’s leadership and members have excluded and silenced La Familia for several years. One of the most obvious issues, Villegas adds, is that MEChA had no out queer members because it was an unsafe space for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Chicana/os. Conflicts had existed between both organizations due to the relentless homophobia ingrained in the organizations’ past. Whether it had been a debate on students’ voices in UCLA’s Cesar Chavez Center or conflicts with La Familia and the
Raza Youth Conference (RYC), the annual conference that was dedicated to offering Latina/o youth information, education and resources that had previously been denied to them, MEChA had not taken responsibilities for their actions.

The exclusion of La familia from the 1996-1997 RYC is a reflection of the homophobia at the time. The conflict all started when La Familia had criticized MEChA for their homophobia. MEChA did not respond well and decided that they wanted to disassociate themselves with La Familia. In return, they did not allow La Familia to present their workshop titled "Queer Aztlan" at RYC (Villegas, 1997). According to Revilla’s re-telling, Nena and Cristina, both members of MEChA and Raza Womyn, were the co-chairs for that year’s RYC and remembered having conflict when presenting the idea of the workshop to La Mesa Directiva, the governing body of the organization. Nena recalls MEChA not wanting La Familia to do the workshop because they spoke negatively about MEChA, calling them homophobic, when MEChA thought they were not. In the midst of the conflict, Nena believed that MEChA was tokenizing the small number of queer people they had and using them as evidence that they were not homophobic (Revilla, 2004).

La Familia could not believe that they were being blacklisted for speaking out. As creators of the queer workshop, they insisted that MEChA was exercising their privileges to marginalize them:

The heterosexism, homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation are evident not only in the absence of out queer members in the MEChA organization, but also by the appropriation of queer space (the workshop) by the
organization and exercising of heterosexual power and privilege in determining who would lead the homosexual workshop. (Villegas, 1996, p. 6)

MEChA’s response was that they had the right to refuse the workshop to them. Nena and Cristina also felt that they were being blacklisted for challenging MEChA’s decision. Both mujeres acknowledged that La Familia’s critique about MEChA was valid and necessary. Still they knew that anyone who spoke critically about MEChA would be outcasts, either “your with them or against them.” Ultimately, MEChA excluded Nena and Cristina and La familia from taking part in finalizing the “Queer Aztlán” workshop. MEChA had decided that California State University, Northridge’s (CSUN) MEChA gender and sexuality component would do the workshop (Revilla, 2004).

The day of the conference La Familia showed up in protest, carrying all their flags and workshop supplies. They continued by going to the Queer Aztlán workshop and letting all the participants know about the incident, videotaping most of it. La Familia was then asked to leave the premises but refused. Eventually, security intervened and escorted them out of the conference. Ironically, one of the co-founders of RYC was Gina, a queer mujer who was part of MEChA and Raza Womyn. As La Familia had experienced discrimination from MECHA, so did Gina and other women. Gina often struggled with the sexist politics of the organization when being outspoken and assertive about women’s issues. In coming out to MEChA, many of the members devalued her work and did not recognize her contributions (Revilla, 2004).

In their organizing efforts, La Familia was eventually invited to take part in the coalition that planned Semana de la Raza, an annual Latina/o cultural event on campus.
Although the gesture was seen as a huge step towards including La Familia, it did not mean full acceptance. During one of the planning meetings, La familia offered to host a drag show, which sparked up much debate about the appropriateness of it. The hostility alluded to comments and comparisons to bestiality. Their homophobic attitudes time and again limited them in their activism. Many of the Latina/o organizations on campus failed to understand the interconnectedness of including gender and sexuality into any discussion of revolution (Menchaca, 2001, p. 17). Still, with the backlash throughout the years, La Familia and other queer Latina/o activists has been able to create spaces for the Jotería.

Fortunately, La Familia refused to be pushed out of their communities and instead continued to show visibility as queer Latina/os. Villegas stated, “The gay and lesbian members of La familia became surrogate family members. Through a variety of acts of love and conflict they helped us through our struggles at UCLA. They acted as protectors and counselors” (Menchaca, 2001, p. 17). The organization then served for more then just a meeting place where they could talk about sexuality; it was a tool for survival in navigating the university system. Its members acting as guidance for one another challenges the way we view activist spaces. The familia they had created within UCLA was a site of transformational resistance (Covarrubias & Revilla, 2003).

In November 1997, La Familia hosted the first Latina/o Queer Youth Conference held on campus. The conference was titled “Reflections of Leaderships: We are the one’s We’ve Been Waiting for.” It drew over 300 participants from various surrounding communities and hosted workshops on safe sex, masculinity, and political activism as well as other entertainment. The conference was able to reach out to the larger queer
Latina/o community and help facilitate the growth of La Familia (Menchaca, 2001, p. 17). The event continued to further develop in the following years. La Familia’s commitment to their surrounding communities displayed success as the Latina/o Queer Youth Conference, a traveling conference at the time showed visibility on other campuses like Stanford and Berkeley (Ortega, 2004).

By December 2001, they hosted their 5th annual conference titled Rompiendo Barreras y Unidos en Fuerza: Reclaiming the Health & Dignity of ours bodies & communities, which commemorated the 20th anniversary of the AIDS crisis. They specifically addressed how queer communities of color had been affected. Besides AIDS, they explored issues about racism, homophobia, heterosexism and culture denial. The conference keynotes consisted of Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano, an HIV+ queer Chicano from California, and Aubrie Palacios, a biracial Jota activist from Southern California. That same year La Familia and the LGBT Studies Program organized “Otro Corazón: Queering the art of Aztlán: A symposium of Queer Chicana/Chicana Artisit, Writers, Performers, and Critics” that presented a variety of artistic contributions to the Latina/o community. The artists, writers and performers included Alma López, Francisco Alarcón, Emma Pérez, Cecilia Herrera Rodríguez, Ricardo Bracho, Adelina Anthony, and Luis Alfaro.

In May 2003, the 6th Annual queer Latina/o youth conference was also hosted at UCLA and titled “Drama, Love, & Fierce Pride: El Orgullo de un Movimiento.” The program summarized the following:
What this represents is the affirmation of our struggles and the potency of who we are as a group; a mass collated by colors tinged with experiences that entail challenges, grief, happiness, and the inevitable triumph over oppressions. With each revolution of drama, love, and pride, the catalyst of empowerment within our minds, bodies and spirits. We are the essence of “El Movimiento!”

Entertainment consisted of a teatro group called the Rebelde Colectiva, a progressive straight and queer theater group fighting against ignorance, hate and discrimination. Workshops discussed issues such as religion, bisexuality and two-spirited identities, queer communism, homophobia and racism, and domestic violence.

On April 10th 2004, the 7th annual Queer Latino Youth Conference was titled Jotería Pride: ‘Orgullo en La Familia. The conference was dedicated to the unity of queer Latina/os, la Jotería, in midst of conservative attacks on people of color. Thus, La Familia member at the time, Ramón Ortega explained:

The title of the conference signifies the need for inclusion of all members of society, including the queer, into the mainstream perception of what comprises a family. For too long, we have been taught that family is comprised of a father and/or mother, yet, we must also acknowledge and accept that queers are also parents, and thus, families. (Ortega, 2004, p. 7)

The organization’s description of the conference is a continued attempt to redefine what familia is and is not. The event drew hundreds of participants from throughout California that included students, activists and community organizations. The keynote was Chicana Lesbian writer Cherrie Moraga and workshops included issues on queer immigrants, safe
sex, revolution, sexual identity, gay marriage and coming out. The conferences provided a space for queer youth, student activists, community members and academics to network and create safe spaces.

The 2006 Jotería Committee

Having already experienced homophobia as a member of La Gente, I remember how difficult it was to come out. Part of the reason that I did not come out at first was because I did not feel that both La Gente and MEChA provided a safe space for me. Although, one openly gay member from MEChA found out I was queer, it was not enough pressure for me to come out of the closet. It happened slowly and with the help of multiple people. In one of my Chicano Studies introduction classes, I remember one presentation in particular titled, “Where my girls at?” A femme Joto who discussed the role of queer Chicana/os in Chicano Studies and the Chicano Movement presented it. Intrigued by what he had to say, it made me question why I was still closeted. Besides that, I also remember having the help of other radical student activists who eventually shaped my political views. It was among this backdrop that I became heavily involved in the discussion of needing a queer Chicana/o space.

The Development of the committee

The organizing of the 2006 Jotería conference began because different members of the queer Latina/o community at UCLA found out that La Familia was not going to host its annual conference. As side discussions between different leaders of the UCLA
Jotería community started to flourish, more and more individuals started to express their concerns. “Lupe,”\(^{21}\) a 3rd year student at the time recalled the following:

I don’t remember how we got word that La Familia was going to drop the annual Queer Latina/o Youth Conference and instead organize for the Queer Western Regional Conference, that um, didn’t even happen. But when we heard the chisme we ended up picking up the Queer Latina/o Youth Conference and making it into the 1st annual Jotería Conference.

In an article titled, “UCLA Jotería Movement Under Pressure,” Guadalupe No (2006) describes the shift of the Queer Latina/o Youth Conference. He states that upon hearing that La Familia would not host the conference, many individuals discussed the possibility of doing it themselves. The first and hardest thing was getting everyone together. A few people from different organizations ended up meeting and making a list of people who were both out and closeted. Out of these small meetings, came the first general body meeting that hosted over 20 people including La Familia alumni. Pilar, a 4th year student discussed how one of the first meetings came to be:

The first time we met I called together a meeting with some of my friends, “sol”\(^{22}\), Lupe, “Angel”\(^{23}\), “Alex”\(^{24}\), and we made a list of all the people we were going to rile up and organize including those that were in the closet and we succeeded because we were so organized it made “straight” people come out of the closet. I never thought an organization like this could exist and for the first

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\(^{21}\) “Lupe” is a pseudonym.
\(^{22}\) “Sol” is a pseudonym.
\(^{23}\) “Angel” is a pseudonym.
\(^{24}\) “Alex” is a pseudonym.
time in my life I saw it exist even if it was only for a year but most importantly, I helped create it.

Disillusioned with activism on campus, many queer Latina/o and Chicana/o students felt that there was a lack of radical queer Latina/o and Chicana/o politics on campus. While La Familia had provided a unique space for queer Latina/os in the past, it had failed in maintaining its appeal to many radical Jota/os. Much of La Familia’s active work dealt with mainstream queer politics. It was not talking about issues that concerned them as being queer and Brown. Lupe described his disappointment:

First and foremost, La Familia de UCLA was really apolitical because of the leadership, or lack there of. A mission of the committee was to create a political and social space for queer Chicanas/os; a balance that La Familia de UCLA couldn’t accomplish. The old Lafa members were more focused on emulating the mainstream white gay community and used meeting times to plan their next WeHo outing.

Although La Familia was first established to create a specific space for queer Latina/os. Lupe felt that they were going backwards by not being critical about queer White spaces. West Hollywood (WeHo) to him was a symbol of White gay spaces.

After the first meetings, the activists established an official Jotería committee. Although the purpose of this committee was to organize the 2006 Jotería conference, it became a queer Latina/o force to be reckoned with that year. The committee was made up of the following organizations: Raza Womyn, MEChA, La Gente, IDEAS, Queer Bi Girl, AAP, MALCS and Conciencia Libre. In building the coalition many of the members
discussed the possibility of their respective organizations tokenizing the event for the purpose of not calling themselves homophobic. It was at this moment that they realized, more action was needed then just the conference. The Jotería committee was seeking serious commitment from all Raza organizations so that they could all continue addressing queer issues in the years to come. While some Raza organizations already had a queer component, like MEChA, others had yet to include queers. No stated:

Different organizations from campus such as Raza Womyn. MEChA de UCLA and La Gente Newsmagazine include in their mission statement a resolution to fight against homophobia and support LGBT rights. As the internal outreach coordinator, I met with other campus orgs so they could jump on board and establish concrete queer component in their constitution. Conciencia Libre, Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social de UCLA (MALCS), and Immigration Rights Coalition are in the process. (2006, p. 8)

Maria, a member of MALCS, was one of the first to mention the idea of Raza organizations changing their mission statement to include queer people. The discussion had circulated, but once Xiomara, another member of MALCS, pressed for the change everyone was able to understand the importance. Xiomara admitted that if it had not been for the Jotería committee, they would have not felt comfortable enough to bring up and push queer issues within the MALCS organization (No, 2006, p. 8).

While many organizations welcomed the change, others remained skeptical of changing their mission statement. For those who continued being cynical and were not part of the newly founded coalition, meetings were set-up to address their future support.
The Raza Graduate Student Association (RGSA) was one of the few organizations that refused to add queer issues to their mission statement. In response, many members of the Jotería committee decided to schedule a meeting to address their stance. During the meeting, many RGSA members argued that they did not believe it was their responsibility to address homophobia because it had not been a problem in the organization. They instead suggested that it was up to groups like the Jotería committee to take these issue up. In the middle of the meeting, many of them started making homophobic remarks. No stated:

It is hard to reach out to organizations that compare being queer with “being a vegetarian and that what you do is your business and we don’t need to talk about it.” I met with representatives from RGSA but they failed to commit themselves to anything and instead responded by saying that it was my responsibility to make sure that they always include queer issues at their events. They also mentioned a concern with focusing solely on identity issues since they work on anti-white supremacy and immigration, I guess those are not identities. (2006, p. 8)

It is ironic and all too common to hear student organizations say that homophobia is not a problem in their group. Yet, when the issue of sexuality comes to the forefront of the discussion, groups like RGSA continue to marginalize the Latina/o queer community with their homophobic remarks. The change of mission statements to include gender and sexuality was a response to these types of issues. Although RGSA was not successful in complying with these demands, the Jotería committee was successful in challenging them and establishing the importance of gender and sexuality issues. Most of the Raza
organizations that were approached did change their mission statement to include gender and sexuality.

Besides the mission statement, the Jotería committee did offer student organization workshops that addressed homophobia and heterosexism. The workshops were conducted by different members of the coalition and were welcomed by organizations like MEChA and La Gente. As part of the workshop, participants were given small packages that included information about how to be an ally to the queer community, a heterosexual questionnaire and a small pamphlet titled, “So you think you might be straight: A common-sense guide to heterosexual lifestyle.” All of the materials were supposed to question their heterosexuality and heterosexual privilege.25 It provided them with a different perspective on gender and sexuality that they could use in working within the community.

25 “Heterosexual Privilege” refers to the benefits derived automatically by being or being perceived as heterosexual that are denied to homosexuals, bisexuals, and queers.
By April, the Jotería committee began to focus its attention on obtaining funding for the conference. Many fundraisers were brought up, carne asada sales, pupusa sales, advertisement sales, but the most successful idea was to host a queer cultural night. The event was titled the “1st Annual Noche de Jotería” and took place at one of the committee members’ apartment in Westwood. Most of the committee members were active in making this event happen; while half of them outreached for the event, the other half practiced for their performances. The day of the event everyone one was busy finalizing the last touches, buying drinks, cleaning and making sure people knew about it. All the attendees were encouraged to dress in drag and make a donation at the door. Besides that, drinks were also being sold inside in a mini queer bar that was created. A list of drink
names was posted on the side of the wall and drew lots of attention from attendees. The turnout was great and brought in over one thousand dollars.

The night’s performances included queer and feminist singers, poets, and artists. The first to come up stage was the host of the night, Angel, who was dressed in drag as Lila Downs. Angel wore a bright yellow Mexican *folklorico* dress and sang and danced all night. His performances set the mood for other drag performers who impersonated artists like Ivy Queen. “Alma”²⁶ and “Carla,”²⁷ members of *La Gente*, performed a piece from the Vagina Monologues titled “The Woman Who Liked to Make Vaginas Happy.” The Noche de Jotería created a queer, feminist and safe sex space that all attendees could enjoy. It provided a break from the walls of university where people could explore and partake in queer Latina/o culture. Alex remembered how the space made him feel comfortable to express his queer love:

> I volunteered to play the guitar and sing a few songs during the show. I was really nervous. I had only performed in family reunions before. Once there, I decided to sing two songs: *Sueña* by Intocable and *Tragos de Amargo Licor*. When I went up to perform, I realized that the song *Sueña* was a song that reminded me of my husband (at that time we were in our first year of dating). Before singing the song I decided to dedicate the song to him. That was amazing for me. When I used to sing songs with my parents and siblings at family reunions I always thought of how cool it would be if one day I could sing this song to someone. And I would get a little sad because I wasn’t sure if I’d be able

²⁶ “Alma” is a pseudonym.
²⁷ “Carla” is a pseudonym.
to sing to a man...especially a song in Spanish. So being able to sing to him in a Jotería space, where it was safe to sing to a man *en mi lenguaje*, was amazing. Everyone in there understood that moment.

Alex’s participation in the Noche de Jotería event gave him the opportunity to share his love for another man publicly. It was also important for him to do it in a Jotería space where he was able to connect with other Jota/os. He felt safe in a queer space where people understood the songs and his language.

*Immigrant Rights Marches of 2006*

In 2006, millions of people participated in protests nationwide over a proposed change to United States immigration policy. The protests began in response to H.R. 4437, a bill titled the border protection, anti-terrorism, and illegal immigration control act of 2005; the bill attempted to raise penalties for undocumented immigrants and classify immigrants as felons as well as anyone who aided them. The bills continued effort to criminalize undocumented immigrants sparked national debate and motivated millions of people to stand up to xenophobia and racism. On March 10, 2006, an estimated 100,000 individuals stood in protest in Chicago while on March 25th over 500,000 people marched for immigrant rights in downtown Los Angeles. By May 1st 2006, the national boycott *El Gran Paro Estadounidense* (the Great American Strike) was organized. People were encouraged to boycott United States schools and businesses to demonstrate that immigrants were a powerful force.

A large number of the Jotería committee along with MEChA helped do security for the May 1st protest while many more attended the March 25th protest of 2006. Over 20 jota/os from UCLA took part in the actual March 25th protest and queer contingent. As members of the coalition, we felt that it was important to take part in the national efforts to support immigrant rights. Since many of them came from immigrant families or were immigrants themselves, they recognized that these issues affected them as queer people of color. In one of the regular scheduled meetings, members organized a sign making party to make protest signs that reflected their politics and concerns as queer Latina/os. The hand painted rainbow signs included slogans that read “Queers are Immigrants Too,”

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28 I consciously use the term “undocumented” instead of “illegal” to stay away from oppressive language. The term “illegal” is both misleading and dehumanizing when speaking immigrant and migrant populations.
“Joteria Unida,” “Joteria Presente,” “We’re Queer & We’re Here,” and “Queer Rights are Worker’s Rights.” When the day came, everyone was prepared and ready to take action.

During the historic march, over a hundred people marched with the queer Latina/o contingent, which included Bienestar’s Transgéneros Unidas29 and queer Latina/o students from UCLA and CSUN. The Jotería committee brought their signs as well as Mexican and United Farm Workers flags. While Transgéneros Unidas led chants like “No somos criminals, somos transexuales!” (We are not criminals, we are transsexuals), others chanted, “Que viva la Jotería, que viva los immigrantes,” (Power to the queers, power to immigrants). Pilar recalled:

I remember Transgéneros Unidas having a huge white banner identifying themselves among the crowd. Although, they had traded their high heels for sneakers, all the glamour and fierce pride the transgender community was known for was still present. There was mix responses from the crowd around them, some marchers would smile, others would stare but the majority of the participants kept on marching along with them, side-by-side.

The unity and pride amongst the Jotería community that day brought feelings of accomplishments and challenged the larger Los Angeles community in viewing immigration as a heterosexual issue. It provided queer Latina/os visibility in the Immigrant Right’s Movement, which often excludes queer issues.

29 Transgéneros Unidas was established in 1996 to provide services to the Latina Transgender community. The group caters specifically to the needs of Latina immigrant transgender women.
The Queer Aztlán Workshops

By the end of May 2006, the Jotería committee had decided to participate in the 13th Annual Raza Youth Conference. The committee was to host a Queer Aztlán workshop geared towards talking about queer sexuality to the youth. Although, La Familia typically hosted the workshop, their involvement was absent. In discussion with members of MEChA, the Jotería committee brought up the possibility of not only hosting the Queer Aztlán workshop for the youth but also including it in the parent plenary. Both organizations agreed that such a workshop would be a positive attribute to include in the parent conference. When the day came, the Jotería committee showed a large presence at RYC. The first workshop hosted by the committee was for the parents. A total of four members conducted the workshop, which served as a coming out panel to parents. As committee members stood in front of the room nervously, a group of about 20 parents started to enter. The Jotería committee talked about their experiences and struggles coming out to their families. Towards the end of the workshop, parents were allowed to ask questions and make comments. Most of the parents thanked the panel for sharing their experiences, but there was one parent, in particular, who remained closed minded.

The second workshop came and the room filled up with young Latina/o high school students. The participants were given a list of rules of respect to create a safe space for their fellow students. The same process was taken as the parent’s workshop. The panelist talked about the difficulties in dealing with their sexualities. While some students listened carefully, others laughed and made side comments. At this time, the rules of respect were readdressed. By the end of the workshop, many of the students had questions and comments. This was exciting because the space was successful in opening
up the dialogue to students. One student, in particular, stood up and thanked everyone for sharing his or her experiences. He then continued to talk about his experiences in Honduras with his best friend. The student told us that because his friend was very feminine, his parents disliked him and did not allow them to hang out. The day came when the father threw dirt in his friend's face and told him to never come around his home again. Eventually, the student started to cry and revealed that he had received recent news that his friend committed suicide. The room became silent and members of the Jotería committee offered him comfort. Both Queer Aztlán workshops were successful in educating parents and students about the realities being queer and Brown. It also allowed them to voice their experiences with sexuality and homophobia. It provided them with resources they could use for queer people they know.
The 2006 Jotería Conference

The day came that everyone was waiting for, June 3rd 2006. It was the 1st Annual Jotería Conference: Communities in Resistance ~ Cruzando Fronteras, what was supposed to be the 9th Annual Queer Latina/o Youth Conference. While some thought changing the name failed to recognize its initial development, the majority felt the change reflected the Jotería committee’s renewed radicalization and politicization process. The conference was dedicated to both the Jotería and the immigrant communities. The program read:

We dedicate this conference to undocumented immigrants for their work and dedication to this country. We also honor all the womyn and men who lose their lives on the border. We demand immigration reform and respect for our immigrant brothers and sisters. And to all of us, la Jotería, our allies, Chicana/os,
Latina/os, mujeres, hombres, and other marginalized peoples...who battle with the contradictions of living in the borderlands – the space between two cultures and two worlds.

The conference attracted over 200 hundred participants which included university students, activists, youth, and community organizations from across California. They were welcomed to a brightly decorated conference, with rainbow balloons and hanging rainbow flags. At the registration table, attendees were given programs and bags filled with condoms, resources and queer and feminist articles. They were then directed to the auditorium to have juice and pan dulce. The auditorium was beautifully decorated with colorful sarapes, rainbow flags, Jotería cards that filled the walls, papel picado that hung from the ceiling, rainbow piñatas and an altar to honor the dead. Some of the “men” and “women’s” restrooms were changed to serve as gender-neutral restrooms. The efforts for this came from acknowledging the violence, harassment, and intimidation that is directed at some people routinely, transgender people especially, when entering public facilities.

Childcare was also provided for those who brought their children and wanted to enjoy the keynote and activities throughout the day. The participants had the option to choose from over fifteen workshops that addressed homophobia, safe sex, being an ally, sexual abuse, immigrant rights, womyn empowerment and higher education.

During lunch, Latino music was played and people were greeted with a taquiza, an outside grill that offered a variety of Mexican tacos. Taking place at the same time was a resource fair, where participants could find out more information about community and student organizations that offered services to both the Latina/o and queer community. After lunch, UCSB professor Horacio Roque-Ramírez gave a keynote and Reel Ghetto
*Queer 2005*, a film produced by queer youth of REACH LA, was screened. REACH LA is a non-profit youth arts and action center located in downtown Los Angeles. To make sure that none of the conference participants were harassed, a security team was organized. Pilar recounted his roles in the Jotería committee:

I had two roles in the Committee; one was as the organizer of the security front and the other was as a main speaker for our org. I was interested in having a strong Jotería militant security team so that we would give a Black Panther feel to the conference. I made those that participated in the security team wear rainbow and brown ribbons around their arms in order to demonstrate our complete pride.

Other additions to the conference were the Jotería caucuses, which served as a safe space to address issues concerning la Jotería. The first caucus was titled "*Cruzando Frontera*" and focused on challenging homophobia, sexism and anti-immigrant attitudes as well as understanding the interconnected relationship between la Jotería, feminism and immigrant rights. The second caucus was titled "*Communities in Resistance*" and assessed the issues that Jotería faced in all sectors of the community, at the same time creating a list of recommendations/demands for schools, institutions, non-profit organizations and community members to be more inclusive of Jotería issues. At the end of the conference, all participants came together for a resolution circle. Individuals submitted their list of recommendations/demands and discussed future actions.

La Familia was founded on the need for queer Latina/o students to create a safe space on campus. While, it started more as a rap group where students could discuss sexuality, it flourished into much more than that. It provided many with a chance to
create *familia*, a sisterhood and brotherhood based on being Brown and queer. Along the way, it challenged the embedded homophobia and sexism that existed among many Latina/o organizations especially MEChA. Experiencing many setbacks, La Familia continued to develop different outlets to explore and preserve their sexual identities. It founded the Queer Raza Youth Conference, which drew hundreds of students, activists, academics and community organizations throughout California.

The organizing of the Jotería conference provided an exciting space for many individuals who were seeking a radical queer Latina/o space. Although, it happened in response to La Familia’s failure to organize the 9th annual Queer Raza Youth Conference, it facilitated a queer feminist space where *familia* was also built. The Jotería committee created a unity that generated a large coalition of student organizations in support of queer Latina/o and Chicana/o issues whose not too distant homophobic past marginalized them. The committee was also successful in collectivity pressuring their respective organizations as well as those who were not part of the coalition to co-sponsor the Jotería conference in more then one concrete way. They managed to have different organizations change their mission statement to include issues of gender and sexuality while offering others queer workshops. In other cases, they demanded homophobic groups to challenge their sexist and homophobic attitudes. The different sponsored events, such as La Noche de Jotería, provided the committee and larger student body at UCLA a chance to partake in queer Latina/o culture.
“It’s about catching those stones which have been thrown at us and making something beautiful with them and holding them close to our heart.”

-Adelina Anthony

“Que viva la Jotería!” screamed a friend of mine as we walked next to thousands of people during one of the biggest immigration marches in United States history. “Sí, que viva la Jotería,” people replied enthusiastically. On March 25, 2006, the Jotería conference committee decided that they needed to show their presence at the immigration march in downtown Los Angeles. The Jotería committee along with other queer Latina/o organizations gathered together at the march to show that queer people were part of the struggle too. Rainbow banners streamed the streets with slogans supporting immigration rights. It was a powerful day for all of the organizers of the Jotería conference and one of the driving forces to create a specific Jotería space.
The Jotería committee’s vision for social justice and revolution came from the need to define who they were. The following is the mission statement that was written by the committee and serves as a manifesto for their queer Chicana/o and Latina/o identity. While the mission statement is rather long, I include the entire text to show the full spectrum of its significance and interrelatedness to this study.

We are Jotería. We are lesbian, gay, bisexual, homosexual, transgender, intersex, sexually defiant, fluid, downe, queer and many other sexual expressions. We are womyn, men, transgender and people who defy gender categories. We are Raza of the Americas, de Nuestra America, Latina/os and Chicana/os. For the time being we are students although historically we are of working class and lower middle class. We are a community from different nations and our existence defies both the physical and social borders that have been imposed. Our community is also
made up of those that still cannot publicly join us in the struggle because they are going through their own internal struggle. We fight so that one day they have the opportunity to join us.

Despite the range of categories within the community, all of these identities are consolidated into a single word: Jotería. Although the word “Joto” initially emerged as an insult, we have appropriated this word because our identity is not shameful. Jotería is the plural form of Joto and also includes Jotas, or queer mujeres. When we are criticized as different we reply: Y que?

The contradiction of our struggle is that it is very complex yet at the same time it is very clear. The object of our liberation is to end all forms of oppression and exploitation: social, ideological and economic. We must be clear that we are actively fighting a capitalist empire that continues to globalize not only its capital and free market trade agreements but also its institutionalized forms of sexism, homophobia, racism, xenophobia, heterosexism, and gender discrimination.

The constant attacks on our communities demand that we become organized, obtain collective demands and continue with the struggle. We are committed to bringing awareness about Jotería issues to our communities and our allies because this affects everyone.
We are fighting because we have witnessed the continual marginalization of our Jotería from our community and political/social organizations. As Jotería, we feel it is necessary for us to have safe spaces where harassment due to one’s race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and culture is nonexistence.

The varied gender and sexual expressions represented in the mission statement is a shift in some activist organizations to have more inclusive politics. In its initial development, the Jotería committee considered the multiplicity and range of its members’ identities. They wanted to make sure that people were being represented in the best way possible. Therefore, they used terms with both gender and sexual fluidity.

My research has found that the Jotería committee was dedicated to exploring the complexity of their identities. When speaking about queer Latina/o and Chicana/o gender and sexualities, we must be able to consider the various identities that exist in the fabric. Similarly, other scholars have found value in understanding the complexity and fluidity of gender and sexual identities (Revilla, 2004). Luz Calvo and Catrióna Rueda Esquibel (2010) argue that “research should be attuned to the diversity of identities claimed by queer Latinas and the specific terms and words that this populations uses” (p.229).

By choosing to identify with varied but specific identities, the Jotería committee began to carve out a specific space for themselves and define what Jotería meant to them. They sought to include everyone within Latin America, as well as Latina/os, and Chicana/os living in the United States. They also situated themselves as both students and working-class. It was important for them to vocalize that although some members were “out” about their queer sexuality, others who remained in the closet were part of the
larger struggle. As queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists, they claimed an anti-capitalist agenda that actively sought to work against homophobia, patriarchy, classism, xenophobia, racism and gender discrimination. The Joteria committee vision in this way coincided with the vision of Raza Womyn muxeristas at UCLA (Revilla, 2009).

In the following section I will discuss 1) How the Joteria committee members developed a distinct collective Joteria identity/consciousness 2) How they created a new radicalized space for their social justice vision 3) How their activism created familia, visibility and change in both on and off campus and 4) How their identities/consciousness informed their vision of movement building.

**Joteria: The Formation of a Collective Identity**

The usage of derogatory words has long existed in our society. People have not only used them to lessen the merit of individuals but also groups of people. Specifically, but not limited to the United States, there has been a long history of homophobic terms that have targeted anyone who does not identify or conform with society’s gender and sexuality norms. If one does not submit to their assigned gender role as “woman” or “man,” they are viewed as outcasts. Similarly, if they defy the heterosexual standard, they are often marginalized as the other (Pharr, 2007). Words such as faggot, dyke, sissy, queer, and tomboy have been used to dehumanize individuals on the basis of sexuality and gender expression. They continue to manifest themselves harshly in schools, religious institutions, work environments, and homes. Although these words have affected people across racial lines, every community has distinct experiences with such
insults. For many queer Chicana/os and Latina/os living in the United States, other words have been used to dehumanize their existence. Terms such as maricón, marica, marimacha, joto, puta and puto have also been used to oppress individuals. These terms are believed to have originated in Latin America. There are a few theories surrounding the meaning and roots of these words, which I will discuss further.

The term Joto has a strong presence among many Mexicans and Chicana/os in the Southwest. In Domination and Desire: Male Homosexuality and the Construction of Masculinity in Mexico, Annick Prieur (1996) contends that the possible meaning of Joto is that it is derived from the Spanish dance where men move in ways that are perceived as feminine. He also claims that the root of the word is connected to the Mexico City federal penitentiary where prison authorities at one point attempted to isolate overtly homosexual inmates in cell block “J” (pronounced jota in Spanish); while maricón is believed to be the male-gendered version of María, a common female name in Mexico and Latin America. Most, if not all of these words continue to be used to marginalize and silence people. However, many individuals who have been harmed by these words have time and again reclaimed them as words of empowerment. The participants of this study are part of that group who has challenged oppressive language by using it as a tool for resistance and liberation. They have redefined what it means to be Jota/o by choosing to identify them selves as such.

Queer communities have used Jota/o and Jotería across Latin America in multiple ways. My research focused on how queer Latina/o and Chicana/o writers/student activists have used and defined these terms. In 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa makes references to “Jotería” in Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, and in 1993 Cherrie Moraga’s
The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry refers to Joteria as a Chicano term for “queer” folk. Since then, other artists and activists have been embracing the term. UCLA’s La Familia has been using the term interchangeably since the early 1990s to refer to the queer Chicana/o community.

Alex, a member of the Jotería committee, recalled when he first heard the term Joteria and the reason that he embraced it:

The first time I heard it being mentioned was in Cherrie Moraga's book. I remember her starting to talk about Aztlán and how Aztlán was a homeland for Chicano/as. She talked about the need for Queer Aztlán, a need for a homeland that included Jotería. A homeland for us. To me that was cool because it embraced Jotería. And I embrace it because I see myself as part of my community, a community that I come from being queer, working-class, Chicano and immigrant parents. Like many other Jotas y Jotos, queers, I know it’s not that easy to separate our identity from our queerness and our Jotería.

As student activists at UCLA, many of the Jotería committee members were exposed to Chicana lesbian literature through Chicana/o Studies courses, Women’s Studies courses and by recommending the books to one another. This literature played a pivotal part in the forming of their identity because Chicana lesbians like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga were talking about their experiences in dealing with sexism, racism and homophobia in all sectors of their life. Alex identifies with Moraga’s struggle and usage of Queer Aztlán and Jotería because these terms were able to reflect his multiple identities. The concept of Queer Aztlán, a Chicano homeland for all its people, including
its Jotería, was an attempt to name and envision a movement free from all oppression (Moraga, 1993). This was critical because he felt that separating his identities limited his being. To him Jotería was an identity that encompassed being queer, working-class, Chicano and immigrant. This was powerful because Alex was contributing to the definition of Jotería; not only was he coming out as queer, he was coming out as an activist, Chicano, queer, immigrant, and working-class person. He was making a political statement with his identity and had agency in building language that essentially unifies being Brown and queer.

Lupe explained why he felt empowered by the usage of Jotería during a planning meeting for the conference:

I remember Gloria Anzaldúa saying “Listen to your Jotería.” To me, that empowered me because someone was validating my existence. Someone was carving a space out for me in the Chicana/o movement to say it's okay for you to be queer. More importantly now I could be Raza and queer and many other things. It’s hard because even when we created the space lots of people were resistance because not many people were trying to fight class, race, gender, sexuality, and issues of globalization. The power of Jotería is that you can be queer and also retain all other identities and all other movements that you are following.

In search of finding himself, Lupe was looking for a place that could speak to all of his experiences. As we have learned from the various movements of the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s many movements failed to address issues of intersectionality (Alaniz & Cornish, 2008;
Garcia, 1997). Still today, this is one of our greatest challenges. Lupe felt that Anzaldúa was able to address this in her vision; she was calling for the inclusion of queer Chicana/os and other queer people of color. This vision motivated him to continue developing the concept of Jotería. Just as Anzaldúa carved a space for him, Lupe was also continuing the legacy of creating this vision.

“Cruz”\textsuperscript{30} asserted why Jotería suited her best and included both of her identities as a Chicana and a lesbian:

The first time I heard it was by Cherrie Moraga. It’s not just Joto, it’s not gendered. When I first came out I would go to West Hollywood a lot, which was all middle class white folk. I didn’t really feel that I belonged to that group. So I didn’t just see it as let’s queer up our community but rather let’s show the queer community that we are here too. Let’s show them that were here as Chicana/os and Latina/os and that there is other queer people too. It seemed to me that the Jotería embraced themselves that way too.

For many queer Latina/os living in the Los Angeles area, West Hollywood (Weho) was one place that they could go to be themselves, to be queer. However, Cruz’s experience with West Hollywood was that she did not identify with the White queer culture. She was not able to connect with White middle class queers because her culture was different. The power of Jotería was then that it included her culture coming from a working-class family as well as her queerness. In that way she was able to feel at home.

\textsuperscript{30} “Cruz” is a pseudonym.
As Cruz explains, Jotería has the advantage of not coinciding with one specific gender but rather embracing multiple genders. Unlike the term Joto, which only referred to males. Angel further explained why it was important for him to make that connection:

The first time I heard it, it was being used in Cherríe Moraga’s Queer Azltán. I didn’t understand it at first but slowly understood it as an array of queerness. At the same time using the word Joto and taking it away from being gendered, as a gender connotation. Also, taking it away from being derogatory. It’s hard to take it away from the word Joto, being gendered. But at the time, the people that were using it were lesbian Chicanas.

Angel felt it was important to have a queer Latina/o Chicana/o term that connected multiple genders. Although, he felt that the term Jotería was often too associated with Joto, he believed Chicana lesbians were redefining the term to include mujeres. The way that Chicana lesbians were embracing Jotería empowered him to use it. Pilar echoed similar experiences as Angel:

The first time that I heard this term was my first year at UCLA and that is also the first quarter that I started to go to La Familia. The first time I heard it was from Delia, a Raza Womyn at a student fair...I remember Raza Womyn would use Jota with an X. Delia would say, “Yeah, I’m a Xota.” I remember thinking that it was weird because I had only heard it as a male term. So that to me opened up my mind to use the term.
Queer Chicana mujeres have been at the forefront of embracing Jotería as an identity in the United States. While Angel first heard the term being used in Cherré’s Queer Aztlán, Pilar heard Jota for the first time from a queer Raza Womyn.

In seeking to define Jotería “Trinidad”31 stated the following in a survey:

Jotería is a political identification among queer Raza. An understanding that gay culture ignores our unique struggles, and thus cannot be used as a way to identify ourselves. Jotería presents the diverse struggles of Raza who not only struggle for acceptance and to end homophobia within our families and communities, but also fight to end racism in Amerikka and the gay-rights movement.

The Jotería committee has been unable to be part of gay culture and gay and lesbian movements because of the deep embedded racism that exists in them. Similarly, other Chicana scholars have not felt welcomed within mainstream gay cultures and movements (Anzaldúa, 2007; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; Moraga 1993; Moraga, 2000). Trinidad further illustrates his critique of racism with his usage of the term Amerikkkka, which is a combination of the United States and the white supremacist group Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

The term Jotería has also provided a space for allies to explore their own sexuality and define what it really means to be a partner in the struggle. “Norma”32 a self-identified ally/straight but not narrow” individual shared why she chooses to identify with the term:

I first heard the term in college, from my friends and roommates. I identify with the term because Jotería, to me, means it is encompassing of things that are gay

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31 “Trinidad” is a pseudonym.
32 “Norma” is a pseudonym.
and are related to being gay. Although I do not identify as gay, I am very close and comfortable with my gay friends who are Mexican and of Mexican descent. Maybe it’s the openness and the consciousness that my gay friends and I share that brings us together. I also identify with the term because I have an uncle who was gay, and who was probably one of the first Latino gay men to die of AIDS. I also had gay and transsexual babysitters growing up. Being gay, and I use the term broadly, is not outside of what my perception of the norm is. I have been encompassed by Jotería for as long as I can remember. I sometimes wonder if a part of me is a gay man.

Norma explains that her identification with Jotería is rooted in her experience with her family and surrounding community. She has been around so many jota/os from an early age that she has come to understand that being Jotería is part of who she is. Maybe not in a sexual way, but in a political way it has shaped her way of thinking and viewing the world. Her uncle, babysitters and friends are symbols and gateways into that politicization.

Still, not all participants fully embraced the term. While, some were not out, others were in the process of exploring their sexuality. Alma, a self-identified “Fluid/Explorative” Centro Americana explained how she has yet to embrace the term:

I don’t identify with Jotería because I don’t like the word, but because I have yet to embrace it. I like the word, I like its playfulness and feel it is very inclusive of many sexualities and also has a cultural, ethnic aspect, for lack of a better word, but I felt my understanding of my own sexuality came after this word was
introduced to me. I, somehow, still related it more to gay males of color, even though it has not been exclusively portrayed as so. I think I have a difficult time with identifying myself with a strong ‘queer’ term because my sexuality has often been contested by others, and so I’ve been unable to define it for myself—partly because it is so fluid, and partly because others tend to want to define it for me and even disempower my sense of agency over it, partly because a strong identity is intimidating and scary in a sense, and partly because I don’t necessarily want to adhere to a particular identification.

Although, Alma does not identify with the term Jotería, she leaves an open space for its embracement. She believes that the term is inclusive. However, as a woman, she feels that it is still too connected with maleness. Many often connect Jotería solely with the masculine/Joto aspect of it, without considering the feminine/Jota counterpart. This can possibly be because the term Joto is more commonly used then Jota in the Latina/o community. Alma also expresses that any queer term confines her sexuality. For many across the queer spectrum, identifying with any one term boxes them into one category.

The interviews and surveys suggested that a collective identity/consciousness—Jotería—was formed because it was inclusive of their multiple identities and consciousness as queers, feminists, Latina/os and Chicana/os, working-class, men, women, non-conforming genders and immigrants. The Jotería committee felt that the term embraced them in ways that queer and Latina/o and Chicana/o did not. Chicana lesbian scholars/activists like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrié Moraga also played a large role in the participants' perception about Jotería because many of the organizers felt
empowered and validated by their writings. Still, one of the organizers remained skeptical of the term because she felt it was more male-oriented then female-oriented.

The participants of my study were able construct a safe space through their activism that garnered critical consciousness about their multiple identities as queers, feminists, Latina/os and Chicana/os, working-class, men, women, non-conforming genders and immigrants. Similarly, other scholars have found that student activists engage in meaningful acts of pedagogy through their collective action and conversations (Berta-Ávila, Revilla, & López Figuera, 2011; Covarrubias & Revilla, 2003; Revilla, 2004). While some of my findings may coincide with other scholars, there are distinct experiences and lessons to be learned from their involvement and thought process as queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists at UCLA.

**Discontent with Campus Organizations**

The majority of the participants expressed that the reason for the unity of all the organizers came out of their disillusionment with on-campus organizations at the time. Many of them felt that Raza organizations and queer organization did not represent them and the type of activism they wanted to do. While queer student organizations solely focused on queer issues, Raza student organizations did not create a safe enough space for Jotería. Pilar remembered feeling frustrated with all the organizations he was part of:

I remember thinking that La Familia wasn’t for me. In La Familia there was some WeHo (West Hollywood) boys and some political people, but every meeting we were fighting about what to do... I could have stayed but it was too attached to
the queer alliance. Other queer people of color groups were being shut down. La Familia was using money to go to TJ to party. They were wasting money on useless events, which had not much of a purpose. It was disappointing. I can also relate to that. I went through being disillusioned with La Familia and then being disillusioned with Conciencia Libre. That same year I was pushed out of the directing track from theater. I was too radical for many organizations.

In college, many students engage themselves in self-discovery and building a political consciousness. For some of the participants in the study, this process was a result of learning about their radicalized, gendered, classed, and sexualized identities (Revilla, 2004). The majority of the participants were women’s Studies, Chicana/o Studies, political science and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Studies majors. However, many of them also engaged in the same process through their participation with activist student organizations. So it was important that they felt comfortable in respective organizations. While Pilar joined La Familia, he did not stay for long because he felt that part of its membership represented “Weho boys,” which he connected to “white superficial” culture to which he felt no connection. Perhaps Pilar’s dissatisfaction with La Familia’s spending money on trips to Tijuana reflected his varied identities as a working class gay Chicano. His deep concerns were focused on his communities and the fact that money was not being spent to advance queer Latina/os. At the same time, he realized that Conciencia Libre failed to include sexuality in their work and vision for justice. He further explained:

I have experienced many forms of discriminations for being part of the Jotería community such as people judging me wrong and excluding me from political
processes because of who I am. I have been asked such as when I was in Conciencia Libre and one of the leaders asked me to choose between the Chicano and gay community because I couldn’t successfully do both.

For Pilar, both La Familia and Conciencia Libre were pushing him out. They were forcing him to choose what identity mattered to him the most. Important to note is that Pilar’s experiences are age-old dilemmas, many Chicanas within the Chicano Movement felt that they had to choose between being a women and being a Chicana (Garcia, 1997). It is essential to understand how new and age-old issues are being dealt with among queer Latina/o Chicana/o student activists. Pilar’s conflict with both organizations affected his political consciousness because those spaces were not able to provide safe environments that garnered critical consciousness and development. Dealing with these issues also affected his schoolwork. Pilar felt he did not have a good support system and instead was further marginalized within groups who were supposed to cater to him.

For Lupe, it was his previous experiences with student organizations that pushed him away from wanting to even organize before the Jotería conference:

The organizing of the conference was very important to me because I was extremely traumatized about what had happened to me my second year, because the space that I was able to belong to pushed me out, it was La Familia.... I was really disillusioned with UCLA and student coming together with certain spaces. I felt that one, I was pushed out of La Familia, and two, I felt how difficult it was to advocate for LGBT issues and Raza issues. And being questioned on the type of work I did over and over again. I wanted to talk about trans issues as well as
academia, I felt very much silenced and disillusioned, traumatized with everything that was going on.

Lupe was able to find a space among the Jotería committee where he did not have to compromise his identity. Many underestimate the power of creating safe environments. For queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists who have often been silenced both at home and in community spaces, being able to create such spaces contributes to their survival in academia. Additionally, student activism has historically been a tool of resistance and transformation for many students across higher education that are discontent with a particular aspect of society and their educational institutions (Revilla, 2004). Lupe’s frustrations with UCLA student organizations were connected to his struggle to try to advocate for multiple issues within one organization. Lupe felt limited in the development of his consciousness because he felt he was being silenced; therefore, he was not able to advocate issues that were important to him such as trans issues. “Trans” has been used as a more inclusive and encompassing term for those who would be included under the umbrella term “transgender” but do not necessarily fully identify with the term. The term is being used more frequently among trans communities in an explicit effort to acknowledge that there is a multitude of trans identities (Galarte, 2011).

For others Jotería committee members, La Familia’s male-dominated membership discouraged them from joining the only queer Latina/o group on campus. Cruz recalls her years as an undergrad, “Personally I got involved because I was not involved as an undergrad. I didn’t join La Familia because it was boys planning on what they were going to do in WeHo that weekend.” While La Familia was supposed to provide a space for both women and men, Cruz felt that the organization was geared more towards men and a
socializing agenda. Although La Familia was originally created to bring together queer Latina/os Chicana/os at UCLA, it failed to maintain its appeal to many student activists that wanted to discuss multiple issues, at least during the period in which this research was conducted. The disappointments with student activist organizations on campus ended up being one of the driving forces to create a new space among Jotería. The Jotería committee ultimately succeeded in forming a new radicalized space that nourished its membership and allowed for many of them to put forward their multidimensional vision of social justice.

Creating Familia, Creating Visibility, Creating Change

For the organizers of the Jotería conference, it was much more than a project. Although they had first come together to make the conference a reality, many participants expressed that the process created *familia*, visibility and change for queer Latina/os Chicana/os at UCLA. “Rosario”33, a second year transfer student discussed what motivated her to seek social change:

Well before the conference, I had never been apart of a group such as La Jotería. It was my opportunity, joining the group helped me in my own coming out process, it allowed me to be able to have the courage to speak to my small siblings and familia. I already know some of them are [queer]. I had a couple of people, who have come out in my family and they didn’t accept them and so then I seen how they struggled with that. I had an uncle that was gay and had AIDS

33 “Rosario” is a pseudonym.
and no one talked about it and now I have another uncle that has AIDS. It really
affected me to see my uncle not have support and die alone. I mean yes we were
there but no one was supportive with him having AIDS and him being gay. I am
always hearing my aunts and uncles say derogatory things about my uncles. It
needs to be addressed. So I am apart of the aids walk and I try to take and teach
my siblings about different issues. So now I am creating those safe spaces, so now
I am here.

Rosario’s primary reason for joining the Jotería committee had to do with her experiences
at home. Her uncles having AIDS affected her deeply, and in return she wanted to make
sure her siblings had a safe space to talk about different issues including sexuality.
Building support systems was vital to her understanding of survival. Her activism
therefore took place on two fronts, at home and in the community. Ultimately, being part
of the Jotería committee provided a space for her coming out process (Revilla, 2009).

For Cruz, that change meant the inclusion of women as equal partners in the
organizing of the conference:

The dynamic that was created in la Jotería group was that different people from
different orgs came with different mindsets. One of the most important things was
that everyone listened to each other and that is something that I didn’t experience
before. People were actually listening to each other and supported each other and
there [were] a lot of women. And the men were listening to the women and to me
that was huge because I was use[d] to men talking and the women were doing
things and ‘yay we had a conference.’ It’s what motivated me to organize the conference.

The majority of the Jotería committee self-identified as feminists and aligned themselves with both the academic and activist work that feminists did, more specifically queer Chicana feminists. Their activism therefore reflected these politics, which essentially allowed them to transform the spaces. While many queer organizations often failed to make the necessary connections with feminism, the Jotería committee successfully advocated a feminist agenda at the forefront. They further organized themselves in a non-hierarchical structure that allowed collective decision-making among all its members.

Angel, a fourth year student, for example, felt like he made it through the year because of the *familia* that was being built in the Jotería committee:

The reason that I did it was because I needed to be part of that space. I was motivated to do the work and the work in return kept me in school. The Jotería kept me going and helped me finish school. Having you all building this family. It was a collective, we had an equal play in it. Everyone in there wanted to be there and wasn’t out to join for individual reasons. My education was not about school, it was about my activism.

The Jotería committee was able to provide its membership with a space that encouraged healthy queer relationships. Angel felt it was important to be part of something where individuals’ voices could be heard, where he was an equal contributor to the “family,” like everyone else. He found a community among the Jotería committee members that not only had this but also helped him navigate the university system. As a marginalized
student, he found a space that did more than accept him, the Jotería committee embraced him through love and activism. This, in return, motivated him to push forward. Angel indicates that his Jotería activism was a leading force in keeping him in school. It was through his involvement in on and off-campus student organizing that he found meaning in his education (Revilla, 2004).

Similarly, Trinidad, a fourth year student at UCLA expresses how Jotería was making more then a conference happen, it was also organizing, creating visibility and forming safe spaces for queer Chicanos and Chicanas:

In coming out, I wanted to do work! I wanted to go to other Raza orgs and tell them, you need to address homophobia and other queer issues in your organization. And to me, all of these things were important. So I wanted to do the conference but then other things slowly came. We had the Queer Aztlán workshops for parents and youth at the Raza youth conference, it was amazing. We also had the protest! It was more then just the conference. I wanted to work with other Jotería, I wanted that space. That’s why I join.

Trinidad’s motivation to organize the conference is a reflection of his continued struggle in addressing homophobia. His experiences reveal how student activists often are burdened by having too much on their plate, specifically organizing and navigating the university system. As a result many student activists within predominantly White institutions experience racial battle fatigue, stress and anxiety caused by constantly dealing with both overtly racist actions and subtle references to one’s race (Smith, Hung, & Fraklin, 2011). In coming out, he wanted to make sure that activist organizations were
providing students with a type of space that could protect individuals’ identities. He did this by organizing with the committee members around Jotería issues. His experiences reflect how some marginalized students begin creating academic and social “counter-spaces” that challenge, establish and maintain a positive collegiate racial climate (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In Trinidad’s case, these spaces also include gender and sexuality.

Pilar shared how he and other organizers were queering up different organizations at UCLA by closely working with them:

I also liked working with the community in UCLA, cause we were asking them if they wanted to sponsor the conference. And if they were going to sponsor it, they had to change their mission statement to include queer issues. We got Conciencia to do it, MALCS, La Gente and we got LASA to consider it, RGSA declined it. So I really like that because it was concrete sponsorship. We pushed them to sponsor in a concrete ways, MEChA changed it, in Xicachli even got a queer workshop out of it...And in return they went to the high school groups and worked with them on queer issues...We opened it up to everyone. I really enjoyed that. We were putting pressure on everyone, because we had many of us. We confronted organization like RGSA. We pushed people to dialogue with us.

The Jotería committee’s frustrations with activist student organizations allowed them to take militant stances on issues of homophobia, sexism and racism. While the word militant has many layers and implications, I use it to describe how the Jotería committee was aggressively active in pushing queer Latina/o and Chicana/o politics on and off
campus. They demanded that different groups actively fight against sexism and homophobia by having them change their mission statement, schedule meetings with the Jotería committee to discuss the marginalization of women and queer people, requested they add gender and sexuality components to their organizations as well as continue the co-sponsorship of queer/feminist events. Not only were they building a familia amongst themselves, they were going back to their organizations and talking to them about how they were marginalizing others on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality and immigration status. They were a powerful group because they had numbers, they had support within various student organizations they were already part of. If an organization rejected the Jotería committee’s suggestions, other organizations pressured them to rethink their position.

The Jotería Movement

The Jotería committee was able to accomplish much needed unity among many student Raza organizations that were actively fighting racism, sexism, xenophobia, gender discrimination and homophobia. They created spaces that both challenged and transformed what it meant to be a queer Latina/o and Chicana/o. They were able to do so because they were part of a legacy of many queer Latina/os and Chicana/os who fought physically, intellectually and spiritually for their existence. From the queer people of the Americas to the queer Latina/o and Chicana/o communities of the United States, la Jotería has existed. This recognized ancestral past is part of an ongoing movement that is based on radical Jota/o love. It was through their resistance that many of Jotería committee members began exploring new ways to love and exist among themselves.
Their Jotería consciousness allowed them to continue finding dignity and self-worth. The notion of radical Jota/o love comes from a collective effort to root queer Latina/o and Chicana/o love in activism and a multidimensional consciousness. Perhaps the most important factions of the Jotería committee is that they were constantly fighting for social justice and envisioning new possibilities. They were part of a Jotería movement.

As Lupe explained excitedly:

Yes there is a Jotería movement! Although it hasn’t been explicit, I am not going to say that it doesn’t exist....Cherrie and Gloria have fought for it...It has been an on-going movement and I’m not going to measure it with ourselves. By others talking about this movement and writing about it is important I will argue there is but I don’t know what is called.

From this research, we saw that many queer Latina/os and Chicana/os have struggled to find and locate themselves among different movements and organizations. They have often felt rejected in spaces that were supposed to cater to them as queers and Latina/os, or both. By acknowledging that there is a Jotería Movement, Lupe is recognizes that we have a history as well as a contemporary movement and vision, and that we have spaces where we can be both queer and Latina/o and Chicana/o. Although, we cannot clearly define this movement, we know it is ongoing and growing.

Alex further defined what he thinks the Jotería movement to be:

I understand a movement as an organizing effort to resist oppression. So yeah there is one. But I understand that it is developing and quiet. We are talking about movements developing that are from privilege folks that are learning about
theory, so we become these little nerds. And well not everyone is privileged to have access to all of this theory and books. So I understand that why the Jotería movement is not strong in south central L.A. Where poverty is increasing and there is violence...Survival there is different. They are struggling because the cops are harassing them, the queens, because everyone harasses them. A queen resisting to get off a bus is a part of the movement. It’s hard to organize when you have all these things working against you. When you have things like 209 working against you. We are not getting retained like we used to. All these issues affect us.

For Alex, the Jotería Movement encompasses queer Chicana/o intellectuals and queens from South Central Los Angeles. He also understands this movement to be happening simultaneously from one location to another. While many acknowledge that there has been a Gay Rights Movement, Women’s Liberation Movement, Chicano Movement and Black Liberation Movement, very few have acknowledged the possibilities of a Jotería Movement, partly because it cannot be pinpointed and credited to specific groups or specific timeframes. However, to not acknowledge the historical presence of a Jotería Movement, is to not acknowledge the resistance of queer Latina/os and Chicana/os throughout time. The Jotería committee’s ability to engage in the conversation of movement building reflects their vision of liberation.

The organizing of the 1st annual Jotería conference allowed the Jotería committee members to develop a safe space to discuss issues important to them. They engaged in meaningful Jotería discourse and analysis that consider multiple identities and
positionalities. Through their activism, they were able to push forward their vision for social justice.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

It is through my experiences as a Joto that I have come to understand living, loving and surviving. The complexities and contradictions of being queer, Xicano, working-class, gender fluid, and immigrant have all guided my writing and activism. While some scholars have distanced themselves from including personal narrative in their writing, I found it necessary to interweave my own experiences into this work. It has been through this connection that my research remains humanizing and community-oriented. As I cannot separate my identities, I cannot separate my writing and activism. They have worked together to generate the kind of research that speaks from the heart. While academia has traditionally viewed the heart as negatively emotional and subjective, I have found it essential and empowering to work from a site that challenges the status quo. Similarly, my research participants connect their activism and their academic journeys. Their will to survive and thrive in an academic setting is rooted in allowing themselves to show up authentically to school, home, and work—always being activists, queers, and seekers/producers of knowledge.

As an activist scholar, I have actively highlighted the voices and queer stories of Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at UCLA. My research came from an urgency that could only exist from a writer who acknowledges and positions himself as part of the community he is researching. I feel this clear representation is a political one; it allows for the queer and Brown to be at the center of knowledge production. Being able to, at
minimum, view and theorize from my own perspective has cultivated important insights about Jotería activism.

In my introduction I crafted and detailed four focal questions. As I conclude, I will address each one. First, what are the experiences of Queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at UCLA? My research shows that “out” queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at UCLA have had a strong standing for well over two decades. The inception of La Fan1ilia provided a specific space for gay and lesbian Latina/os on campus whose membership showed consistency over time. Their primary objective to come together in the early 1990’s was to create familia, a family based on the shared struggle of being queer and Brown. Through the years, La Familia transitioned from a support group to an activist organization. La Familia’s participation in various political actions within the Latina/o community on and off campus during the 90’s was often met with animosity; there was a visible presence of homophobia and sexism.

Queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at UCLA had to often deal with discrimination on multiple levels. The participants of my study had originally come together because of the disillusionment and discrimination they experienced in their respective organizations. Many of them did not feel comfortable in fully expressing their multiple identities in the spaces they were previously part of. They were looking for a space that could embrace all of their identities as well as help nourish new ones.

The second question, how do queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists perceive and respond to racism, classism, sexism, heteronormativity, homophobia, xenophobia and gender discrimination? From the conversations with the participants, it is
noted that they understood racism, classism, sexism, heteronormativity, homophobia, xenophobia, and gender discrimination as being interconnected and working simultaneously together to create borders. The majority of the participants specifically discussed how many student Raza organizations failed to make this connection. While some organizations were active in fighting racism, they failed to include gender and sexuality. The Jotería committee was able to make these connections because they were issues that directly affected them. As Jotería, many of the participants lived within these borders and were very conscious of their existence in marginal spaces. As a result, the Jotería committee learned to transform marginalized spaces into ones of nourishment and transformation.

Their response to their interconnected struggle of being working-class, Latina/o, Chicana/o, queer, women, men, gender non-conforming and immigrant was to organize various events on and off campus to address all of the discriminatory issues. The organizing of the 2006 UCLA Jotería conference provided the participants of my study a unique queer feminist space to actively fight multiple oppressions. The participants addressed discrimination through creating a new space and organizing various events throughout the year. The first annual Noche de Jotería provided a queer Latina/o cultural space where students could simply feel comfortable being Jota/os. By March and May, the participants of my study took part in the historic immigrant rights marches of 2006. This allowed them to publicly voice their concerns regarding the queer immigrant rights struggle. As the end of the year approached, they organized two Queer Aztlán workshops to educate parents and youth about their Jota/o experience at the 2006 RYC. Lastly, they
were successful drawing a large number of participants to the 1st annual Jotería conference.

The third question, what is Jotería identity? While many of the participants first heard the term Jotería being mentioned in the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, they continued in defining it for themselves. My research found that queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at UCLA were engaged in meaningful acts of pedagogy through their collective actions and conversations. The organizing space they created was able to garner critical consciousness among the Jotería committee that took into account their multi-layered identities. The interviews and surveys suggest that the participants formed a distinct collective Jotería identity and consciousness. This identity and consciousness closely coincides with Anita Revilla’s muxerista pedagogy. However, there are specific tenets of this identity and consciousness, including but not limited to the characteristics listed below. Jotería identity/consciousness:

1. is rooted in a Mexican and Latin American past and present,
2. is derived from the terms Jota and Joto and has been reclaimed as an identity/consciousness of empowerment,
3. is based on queer Latina/o and Chicana/o and gender non-conforming realities or lived experiences,
4. is committed to social justice and activism.
5. values radical queer love,
6. values gender and sexual fluidity and expressions,
7. values the explorations of identities individually and collectively,
8. rejects homophobia, heteronormativity, racism, patriarchy, xenophobia, gender discrimination, classism, colonization and any other forms of subordination,

9. claims and is aligned with feminism/muxerista pedagogy,

10. claims an immigrant and working-class background, and

11. claims a queer Latina/o and Chicana/o ancestry.

The Jotería committee’s vision for social justice came from a collective effort to transform their lives as well as their communities. It was through creating safe spaces that they were able to be active in making those changes happen. In doing so, they produced a specific language and culture that allowed them to empower and redefine what it meant to be queer and Brown. Jotería identity and consciousness speaks to them in ways that other identities did not because it included various aspects of who they were.

Finally, in the fourth question, how do queer Latina/o and Chicana/o activists work to achieve social justice? My research indicates that the Jotería committee at UCLA worked to achieve social justice on two levels, externally and internally. Externally, they were engaged in a variety of collective actions that included protest, marches, rallies, cultural nights, meetings, conferences and coalition building. In this way, they maintained a much needed visible presence both on and off campus. They succeeded in challenging Raza organizations and community members on their heteronormative, racist, xenophobic, sexist and homophobic attitudes. Internally, they went through a process of self-education, self-acceptance and self-empowerment. While some of the participants were coming to terms with their sexuality during the planning of the conference, others were simultaneously exploring their gender, working-class and
immigrant identities. They did so in a loving environment that proved to continually guide them from feeling marginalized and oppressed to spaces of reclamation and transformations.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, various student Raza organizations, queer organizations and movements keep making the same mistakes of the 60s, 70s and 80s. While some succeed in providing a healthy site for racial justice, they fail to fully include women and queers, or the opposite; they fail to include issues of race in queer and women spaces. In an attempt to address these issues, I have highlighted some recommendation for organizations and movements who seek to create inclusive and transformational spaces. These suggestions are based off of strategies used by the Jotería committee as well as from participant surveys, participant conversations, interviews, collective dialogue and my own experiences in working with the Jotería committee:

1. **Declare a “No one is free when others are oppressed” Mindset:** Many have made the mistake of failing to see how all our struggles intersect in one-way or another. We must be able to make all connections as oppressed/marginalized people. This includes Jotería.

2. **Denounce Tokenism:** Just because there is a queer identified person in an organization, does not mean the organization is not homophobic. The false appearance of inclusive practices is common in many organizations and movements.

3. **Recognize Your Privilege:** In order to create safe spaces, individuals need to recognize that they might be speaking and carrying out privileges from being White, heterosexual, male, gender normative, etc.
4. **Create Collective Spaces:** Hierarchal structured spaces tend to silence people and favor the voices of a few. While collectivity often places more value on democratizing processes. Importance should be given to extend participation equally.

5. **Create Safe Spaces:** Organizations and movements should place value on loving environments that nourish self-growth and openness.

6. **Accurate Representation:** Organizations and movements should represent and reflect its membership. While women have been part of the Chicano Movement since the beginning, they have not been accurately represented and recorded in the movement. Organizations and movements should constantly revisit their goals, manifestos, mission statement, values, defining language and name to make sure they are including everyone at the table.

7. **Be an Ally:** Individuals, organizations and movements need to find value in being allies to communities they are not a part of.

8. **Celebrate Resistance and Survival:** Traditionally oppressed/silent organizations and movements need to actively celebrate their contributions to this world. They must be vocal and visible.

In creating and valuing this list, I recognize the difficulties and challenges that exist in implementing each recommendation. Homophobia, sexism, heteronormativity, classism, xenophobia, gender discrimination and racism still exist in every faction of our society. They are the very systems of injustice that discriminate against our communities and work together to create borders. Similarly, activist organizations and movements will
continue to respond to them differently. This list represents only a few ways that queer Latina/o and Chicana/o student activists at ULCA have responded to injustice.

Lastly, the Jotería committee has achieved social justice through constantly envisioning themselves as part of a Jotería Movement. It is because of these visions that they have been able view themselves as part of a larger struggle where their identities can exist together. These conversations of movement building happen when groups seek to define their liberation. Many of the Jotería committee members have continued to establish their vision of social justice long after they graduated UCLA. While some are doing it through higher education and non-profit organizations, others are forming new organizations that continue embracing Jotería. In Los Angeles, some of the past Jotería committee members have been developing grassroots organization Xin Fronteras and in Las Vegas others have been working with the United Coalition for Immigrant Rights (UCIR), both embrace a multidimensional consciousness and movement. On a national level, Jotería committee members have been part of creating the newly formed organization, the Association of Jotería Arts, Activism and Scholarship (AJAAS).

The Jotería committee had both short-term and long-term goals, all of which were connected to their personal and collective vision of social justice. UCLA, the Los Angeles community, Southern California, the members of the committee, and everyone they come into contact with benefit from their personal commitment to self-education, community organizing and multidimensional struggle.
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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT SURVEY

LA JOTERÍA DE UCLA: QUEER LATINA/O CHICANA/O STUDENT ACTIVISM

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Name:

Age:

Religion/Spirituality:

In School/Work:

Place of Birth:

Involved in any other organizations and/or social movements?

Ethnicity:

Latina/o Chicana/o Hispanic Mexican Mexican-American Mestiza/o African American Asian Black White Other: ________

Sexual Expression:

Gay Bi Lesbian Two-Spirited Downe Down-Low Fluid Questioning Other: ________

Gender: Male Female Transgender (MTF) Transgender (FTM) Other: ________

Do you identify with Jotería?

Yes or No Why? ____________________________

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APPENDIX B: LIST OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

LA JOTERÍA DE UCLA: QUEER LATINA/O CHICANA/O STUDENT ACTIVISM

LIST OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

• **Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA):** is a student organization that promotes higher education, cultura, and historia for Latina/o and Chicana/o students.

• **Conciencia Libre:** is a multi-ethnic, progressive student organization founded in 1998 by UCLA students seeking to link international issues with local problems, as a way to enhance the educational experience of students at UCLA.

• **Academic Advancement Program (AAP):** is a Mentoring Programs committed to social justice and to the transformation of the academy at UCLA.

• **La Gente de Aztlan:** is a bilingual Latina/o Student News Magazine published, circulated, and run at the University of California Los Angeles.

• **Teatro Revolver:** was a grassroots student teatro founded by UCLA students to express social justice issues through the art of theater.

• **Movimento Bolivariano:** it is a political movement named after South American independence hero Simón Bolívar. The political movement was founded in Caracas, Venezuela on December 8, 2009 by a group of 950 left-wing activists from 26 Latin American nations.

• **Grupo Folklorico de UCLA:** has existed since 1966, the Grupo Folklorico de UCLA is committed to the celebration of the Mexican heritage through the regional music and traditional dances of Mexico.
• **Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS):** is an organization of Chicanas/Latinas and Native American women working in academia and in community to work toward the support, education and dissemination of Chicana/Latina and Native American women's issues.

• **La Familia de UCLA:** has existed for over 20 years to serve the Queer Latina/o, Chicana/o and Raza students on UCLA campus.

• **Queer Alliance:** at UCLA exists to provide a bridge between all people dealing with issues of sexual orientation or gender identity.

• **Queer Bi Girl:** is UCLA's multi-issue political and social group for queer, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered women and allies of all genders.

• **Improving Dreams Equality Access and Success (IDEAS):** is a student-based organization which focuses on issues of immigrant students and those who support their struggle for equal opportunity in their university education.

• **Raza Womyn:** is a Chicana/Latina organization dedicated to collectively organizing and creating safe, critical, and fierce spaces for the empowerment, education, and liberation of all mujeres.