

Chicanas Making Change: Institutional Rhetoric and the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional

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This article draws on an archival case study of the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional (CFMN). Building on my experience as an activist and working in communities and institutions, I argue that it is valuable to examine and translate the histories and practices of organizations like the CFMN to learn the rhetorical abilities we need to operate and make collective change as both part of and outside of publics and institutions. To make this argument, I analyze how Chicanas of the CFMN incited change by writing, theorizing, and making an identity through what might be considered mundane and programmatic writing.

It still always surprises me when I realize that things in my life that I thought happened by pure coincidence in fact, had been building up to this moment and to this place. I am sure many of you can relate to those “aha” moments when your breath is literally suspended as you become aware that the path you have been on was always meant to lead you here. One time this happened was during my dissertation defense when I realized that perhaps I hadn’t been lost all along, and

that I had resisted giving up any piece of me in order to make this academic thing work. My dissertation braided together all of the pieces of me that on paper looked disconnected and centered on an archival case study of one of the first Chicana¹ feminist organizations, the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional (CFMN). As I had been involved with community and non-profit organizations, I wanted to focus on collectives. As someone who orients to the field through organizational writing, it was also important to me to expand where we turn to for evidence of theorizing and identity making. Through this research I was able to build from the ground up, a theory of a Chicana rhetoric and to extend the making of Chicana to programmatic writing and the building of an organization (Leon, *Building a Chicana Rhetoric*).

Another “aha” moment happened when I was interviewed by a writer from the newsletter for a people’s self-help type of housing program, which allowed low income people to purchase and build their own homes in their communities. To participate in the program, potential homeowners had to fall at or below 80% of the area’s median income level. For those of you not familiar with these types of programs, the way many of them work is that a group of prospective homeowners who meet the criteria are placed together in a group. The group then collectively builds their tract of homes. The homes are located near and often directly next to each other. I was being interviewed because this program is what allowed my Mom to build a house for my three siblings and I when I was five years old.

Our house was located in a racially diverse and socio economically depressed community, constituted largely by Hmong, Latina/o and African-American families. The neighborhood is located right in the center of the city. But, in a pretty obvious act of ghettoization, the city drew boundary lines around this area to exclude the neighborhood (and the poor and predominately brown skinned people in it) from receiving funds for things like sidewalks and access to other city services. Instead, we were considered “county,” despite the fact that

1 Throughout this article, I utilize “Chicana” when referencing the CFMN’s work in building an organization and an identity to better reflect their discourse and the context. I also use “Chicana” in relation to a “Chicana rhetoric” to remain consistent with the terminology I used in the work that I am referencing. Otherwise, I utilize Chican@ to queer its usage.

we were smack dab in the middle. This neighborhood had its own name that included “town” in it so it really sounded and felt like it was a separate place: It was (and still is) known as “the bad area” to outsiders. I remember when my Mom let me play basketball in the fifth grade and when I participated in the GATE program, I had to bus to other schools because our neighborhood school didn’t have either. I was the only Latin@ from the “poor school.” Many of the kids who I became friends with in these programs at different schools were not allowed to come over to my house because of where I lived. Yet, to this day, this is the area that I feel at home and supported by the people around me. For many of us, our neighborhood and the people in it became extended family members, which was strengthened by the fact that some of the few owner occupied homes (like ours) were built as part of the people’s self-help program.

During that interview for that newsletter, I discussed how in building our houses together, we were building communities. This community building happened in part through the stories or what we might call pláticas, all of our families told together, as the adults struggled to complete the houses, while working one or more jobs, perhaps a single parent like my Mom, with kids scrambling around each other, watched by a rotating slew of older siblings. While I was answering the interview questions, it dawned on me that it was this experience that led me to my interests in working in and later studying collectives. The learning and the relationships that I remember from this place, this place that I turned to for support and protection, were about doing good for your community and peoples; in essence what scholars like Octavio Pimentel have identified as *buena gente*. According to Pimentel, *buena gente* is a feeling of connectedness and a related “desire to put the needs of ‘others’ before oneself” (174). The purpose of getting any kind of institutional education was not just about individual status but about how you could leverage what you learned or got access to for the greater good. And while I was still in my neighborhood, I did my best to uphold that part of the deal.

But, when by sheer luck (and really, in my case it was and that’s a whole other story!), I ended up in this other place—the university—I found myself constantly trying to reconcile what always felt like

disparate parts of who I was and what I was committed to. As Miguel and Franciso Guajardo point out in their writing on this schism, working in the university can further distance us from our home communities and our commitments to the public good. They ask of those who survive and remain in the institution: “what does one keep, what does one give up, what does one sacrifice, and how does one adjust in order to contribute to the public good?” (73). How do we maintain our responsibilities to our home communities while also meeting the expectations for us as academics? Within the university, we are often further limited by what we study and how the bodies we inhabit—and those of the theorists we cite. Just like the city drawing boundaries around the neighborhood I grew up in, we are living the same ghettoization and disjuncture in our field: communities cannot teach us about institutions; the theories of only some people are applicable to all; and if we identify ourselves as Rhetoric and Composition scholars of color, it necessarily means we are given the authority to write about and care about only certain topics or issues.

This is what I experienced in graduate school (what I still experience, several years later as a faculty member), trying to find mentors who get the different parts of me, trying to find out how to navigate this place and figuring out how to make my various commitments and interests mesh together and to make sense to others. This became even more difficult as I shifted my scholarly focus to writing program administration and professional writing. In doing so, I have experienced a disconnect between this interest and my commitment to Chicana rhetoric and Latin@ communities. For instance, as I looked at research on institutional rhetoric and writing program administration, I found little that reflected a commitment to Latin@ communities and rhetorics. When I have shared my research on the CFMN, especially with crowds of people who want me to talk about their poetic writing, their individual leaders, or their more explicitly “activist” performances; or when I have attempted to connect what I learned from their organization to being (materially and intellectually) in an institution and to writing program administration, I am often asked: what does archival research on a Chicana feminist organization have to do with *this*?

And this leads me to another one of those “aha” moments. In talking about this organization with these different audiences, what I have come to realize is that this is the task for us who want to make change—to do the work of rhetorical translation and connectivity. This is precisely the type of ability that I was able to learn from the CFMN through their conscious decision to build an extensive and thorough archival collection so that as past CFMN president Eva Couvillion writes, “we all can refer to it when dark days loom large and we wonder why we are involved anyway” (CFMN’s “President’s Message”). In a letter to the past national presidents, Beatrice Olvera Stotzer also wrote of the value for future generations in establishing the CFMN archival collection: “This will in effect give historians a legitimate research mechanism which can be added to the data on the Chicana feminist movement. We can only speculate on the immense value of the information that Comision [*sic*] will contribute” (“Letter to Past Presidents”, 1).

What I want to share with you is an account of the CFMN doing just this type of work to make change, enacting an ability that we learn through stories to connect past and future, as well as community sites and institutions. I want to ground this account in a knowing and know how that is developed out of our material lives. Many scholars have described this grounded, strategic and connective practice. For instance, Chela Sandoval identifies this as “differential consciousness,” an ability to “read the current situation of power” and to choose how to respond in a way to push at, or transform the situation. According to Sandoval this is an ability that is “a survival skill well known to oppressed people” and enables coalition building (60). Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa, describes “conocimiento” as a holistic process of inner and connective work that enables us to build bridges and make change (“now let us shift”). Finally, Delores Delgado Bernal names her “mujerista sensibility” as one that necessitates putting oneself in relation to others and maintaining “a commitment to social change.” As part of enacting a “mujerista vision,” one has to “cross borders, learn from history, place a priority on collectivity, take care of oneself, and be committed to social transformation” (136). Regardless of what it has been called, it has been named. And it has been practiced, as evidenced in the CFMN’s building of a Chicana organization and its respective archival collection.



Figure 1: Copy of a CFMN logo

Started with a series of resolutions drafted at the 1970 National Chicano Issues Conference in response to the Chicanas in attendance who felt their issues were being excluded from existent activist movements, the CFMN grew to become a leading collective in the Chicana movement. Figure 1 shows a copy of a CFMN logo that was used for brochures and other publications.

Although the CFMN is most known for their activist work protesting the forced sterilization of women of color², and many of their leaders became well known as individual activists whose writings have been referenced and anthologized, much of their work was in fact programmatic and archival³. This work included documenting the

² Their participation culminated in the landmark case *Madrigal v. Quilligan* in 1978 and this case has been written about in and outside of rhetoric studies (see for example, Enoch 2005).

³ It should be noted that the CFMN also included copious copies of writings by other collectives and individuals involved with the Chicana movement broadly, such as activists, academics, as well as policies and legislation that were pertinent to the movement and their communities. I write of these documents as part of the rhetoric of the CFMN as they chose to include them

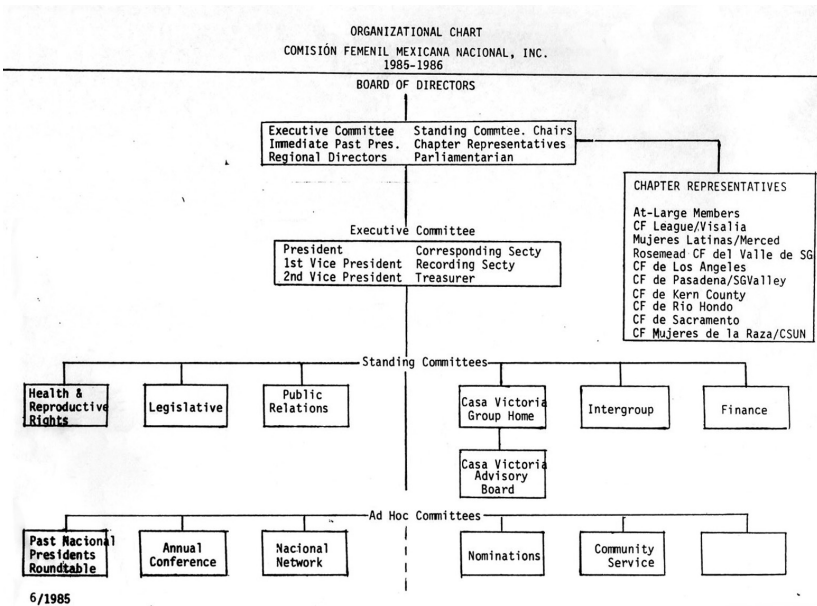


Figure 2: Copy of a Board of Director's Flow Chart

building of an organization and the making of a collective identity. As part of my commitment to making connections with histories, I think it is valuable to have a broader sense of how Chicanas have incited change by writing, theorizing, and making an identity. To understand how change occurs, I had to be able to look outside of what might be expected of me as a Chican@ scholar in Rhetoric and Composition—I looked away from the poetic writing and more public performances and instead, researched programmatic writing like the organizational flow chart in Figure 2. This writing was frequently mundane, and often looked like marginalia and small notations on the archival documents.

From my experience as an activist and working in communities and institutions, I know that change is often achieved through subtle shifts in behind-the-scenes practices that in order to be recognized require adopting different heuristics. I think this is especially true for Latin@s as we experience being constructed as non-actors in the

in their archival collection, and to reflect that this is at once a story about an organization as it is about making an oppositional identity and movement.

world of what we might label as “public rhetorics,” as if to denote that there is something inherently accessible about such spaces. In other words, for the CFMN, as well as for myself and other Chican@s in higher education, being Chican@ means we are faced with constructions of Latina/Mexican women as not rhetorical in these public and institutional spaces; our challenge is learning how to change this. In response, I argue that it is valuable to examine community-based groups and to listen to histories like the CFMN and Chicana rhetoric broadly, as a way to learn about the rhetorical abilities we need to operate as both part of and outside of publics and institutions.

In my previous writing about this organization, I have discussed two rhetorical practices that the CFMN adopted that reflected and built Chicanidad: La Hermandad (or Chicana sisterhood) and re-envisioning the past to instantiate a historically organizing Chicana (see Leon “La Hermandad”). In this article, I focus on a story told through the archival collection that centers on the CFMN and their affiliate organization, the Chicana Service Action Center (CSAC). This story traces their involvement with accessing and developing employment training for Chicanas, specifically with the California Employment and Training Act (CETA). I examine this story in two ways: first, in the moment as indicative of the ways that Chicanas responded to a historical absence of their experiences in employment training discourse; and second, as indicative of a strategy of action which demonstrates the movement of collective change as working slowly through the nuanced internal work of an organization that was often not visible as public a act.

“Spanish origin persons are included in the white population!”
—CETA/Manpower and Employee Training Programs

..just recently, in looking, for example, at publications that the Employment Development of the State of California puts out, over 150 publications for this past year, only three or four had any kind of statistics relating to minorities period. And some of those didn't even have statistics for minority females. I ask you, how can a job training program such as CETA, such as the Job Training Partnership Act be

developed around the needs of these women when we don't even know what they are. What are their characteristics?

—Maria Rodriguez, MALDEF attorney and collaborator with the CFMN, Testimony before the California Legislature Senate Committee on Health and Welfare and Assembly Human Services Committee, “In the matter of: The feminization of poverty”

In the above epigraph, taken from a document in the CFMN files, Maria Rodriguez⁴ alludes to a vexing problem that Chicanas faced: a historical erasure of the experiences of minority women that manifested as a lack of statistical employment data. In turn, this altered the ontology of what “minority women” could be and do. To be more specific, as you will see in the following story of the CFMN’s involvement with employment training programs, this absence of statistical evidence of the experience of “minority women” resulted in a lack of federal funding for employee training programs for “minority women” because an exigency had yet to be established. The CFMN and their partner organizations existed to redress such absence in the public discourse on employment. These interventions took place through the invention of public issues, in debates about defining the problems at hand, and through strategic behind-the-scenes work that slowly redressed the physical absence of Chicanas in public spaces.

To tell the story about the CFMN’s involvement in employment training initiatives, I am going to set up three scenes for you⁵. Scene one provides some context, exigency if you will, for pursuing employment training as a Chicana organization. This scene relays

⁴ The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) worked with the CFMN to file the lawsuit against the forced sterilization of poor women of color during the 1970’s in *Madriral v Quilligan*.

⁵ It should be noted that I have constructed this story based on the archival research only. Therefore, as with any story of history, this is constructed by the documents the CFMN included. Adopting the movement of Chicana rhetoric to work connectively, as part of my methodology, to construct each scene, I did not adhere to a strict linear chronology; instead I drew upon documents that were included in the collection and connected them thematically. This approach also better reflects the CFMN’s deliberate arrangement of their archival collection. Instead of a chronological organization, the CFMN elected to arrange the collection to mirror the structure and function of the organization (Guide to Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional Archives 1967-1997).

the way that being such an organization meant inventing the issue to begin with. Scene two also provides some context and it relays the “crisis” of this moment for the CFMN. In scene two I focus on a representative sample of texts and actions that are more public: the activist performances that are externally focused and attempt to respond to misconstructions of Chicana identity. Scene three follows a different story that happens at the same time as the first two scenes. While the CFMN forwarded a public strategy to address an issue, at the same time, they enacted a rhetorical knowing and practice that strategically addressed the source of the contention. This is the scene in which I see evidence of differential consciousness in action and to which I turn for a rhetorical education on how to be in institutions.

SCENE ONE: CHICANAS NEED EMPLOYMENT TRAINING—CREATING A PROBLEM AT HAND

During the 1970’s, Chicana identity became more widely circulated; its emergence and circulation was a response to the realization that there was a lack of experiential stories told that had *real* consequences. At the same time, the country had a growing need for employment training programs, with a push to train workers in the skilled trades. Prior to the inception of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), the Department of Labor began collecting and distributing statistics on the employment needs of their populace. In their needs assessment report, Department of Labor’s fine print noted “Hispanic populations are included in the white population” (as cited in Flores, “Speech”). As Maria Rodriguez pointed out in her testimony that I used to introduce this case study, the experiences of Hispanic populations, especially Latina women, were not being specified in the data collection and reporting on employment training programs. According to the CFMN, having their lives collapsed within a category of people who were not visibly or linguistically marked in the same way meant that their concerns were not seen *as* issues. As a result, no one recognized the need. The problem of the availability of jobs or barriers to securing jobs was not seen as a problem for Latinas because their experiences were not accounted for in data collection. Materially, without these statistics to identify a need, the CFMN was unable to obtain federal funding.

Chicanas affiliated with the newly formed CFMN recognized a need to tell stories about accessing employment for their own communities. They knew they had to respond to a historical absence of numerical accounting in order to later redress the issues that they would reveal with their own community-specific data collection. In other words they needed to invent a problem that seemingly did not exist. The CFMN made the invention of this problem part of their organization's mission, which in turn built a trajectory for the organization.

As such, the CFMN decided to conduct their own needs assessment that targeted Latina women. A lengthy questionnaire in the CFMN files dated April 11, 1972 included questions about children (when born and how many); about marital and employment status; formal education received; current childcare arrangement; if the respondent had dropped out of school and the reasons for this; past participation in a job training program and the success of this participation; and interests in receiving training and in what field (Mexican/Chicana women's survey). Now these questions were strategic—they asked about their experiences accessing employment and being employed. They asked about their lives holistically—as women, as mothers, and as wage earners. From their needs assessment, they created two related physical centers that were affiliated with the CFMN: the Chicana Service Action Center (CSAC) and El Centro de Niños, a bilingual and bicultural childcare center. The Chicana Service Action Center, founded in 1972, is an organization located in Los Angeles.

In its earliest iteration, on paper the CSAC was a project of the CFMN. However, in its operation, it *was*, presumably, the CFMN (until it later split into a separate entity due to disagreements between staff and board members and the realization that the center would best exist on its own). Although it became a separate entity, a relationship persisted due to shared people and historically because the CSAC files are part of the CFMN archival collection⁶.

6 Because there is such a significant overlap and sharing of resources (including people) between the CSAC and the CFMN during this time period, it is difficult to distinguish boundaries between the organizations, and therefore, the locus of rhetorical action. In addition, the leaders appeared to intentionally elect to speak on behalf of one of organizations based on an awareness of ethos and audience. Whenever these boundaries are made clear, I will use the appropriate organizational attribution; however, when the



Figure 3: Copy of a Chicana Service Action Center flyer

As a result of building these two centers, the CFMN was able to talk to the clients these two centers served. They listened to women relay stories about prevalent assumptions that were effecting members of their communities to obtain employment. One was that the model utilized by available employment training services, which were presumably accessible to all, were really geared toward Anglos and more frequently, Anglo men. For example, when accessing employee training, women in their community were being referred to secretarial and office work—which posed a problem for some monolingual and/or bilingual women as it relied on particular language use and on unspoken cultural norms about office behavior.

boundaries are not made clear I will use CSAC as the identifier when it is clear that the physical employment-training center is being discussed; everything else will be identified as the CFMN.

Further, the only apprenticeship training programs that paid apprentices were in the skilled trades—carpentry, plumbing and so forth. As former CSAC director Francisca Flores pointed out in a later letter to an Edna Olivia, a research associate at the University of Texas, the clients they worked with at the CSAC were unable to access the apprenticeship programs that were federally or state funded. Flores wrote, “these programs are restrictive and ‘controlled’ by the employers hiring the persons (men or women) that are eligible to be trained by the unions in the various industries. It cannot honestly be said that the unions are waiting breathlessly to receive women into the various crafts” (1). In this same letter, she shared some startling statistics on women in the Department of Labor sponsored programs: “Total number of women in California Apprenticeship Program as of January 1980 is 4.1%. Hispanic and Black women, each group, constitute .004%. Total number of minority women in this program are .008+%! (2 of 3)⁷.”

Accessing these apprenticeships was proving to be impossible for women in general. This was compounded by the fact that Latina women needed paid employment training. However, this was not even considered an issue because of the stereotypical construction of Latina women. As CFMN representatives pointed out in their publication “Chicanas and the Labor Force,” in spite of the construction of Latina women as submissive housewives supported (and controlled) by Machismo husbands, many of the women they saw were single heads of household. In their monitoring in CETA’s administration and implementation, the Chicana Rights Project of MALDEF filed an administrative complaint against the city of San Antonio on the basis that the city failed to equally include Mexican American women in their programs (Hernández)⁸. The design of CETA intake forms that disallowed women from selecting “head of household” was one

7 Although almost a decade after the CFMN and the CSAC began working to address employment issues, I think the numbers are telling. Flores also must find the statistics to be shocking, as evidenced by the exclamation mark. We can only surmise how much lower the numbers would have been in the early 1970’s.

8 This case resulted in an increase of minorities and women in San Antonio’s CETA programs. See also the Chicana Rights Project’s summary *CETA: Services to Hispanics and Women* for more information on the impact of CETA on Mexican American women, as well as on their participation in the program.

way that women were not adequately represented in the program participation data. Just as the Department of Labor data collection enveloped the Hispanic population into the White population, intake forms used in employment training programs concealed a reality that women, and more precisely minority women, faced as they sought employment⁹.

To combat this problem, the CSAC and CFMN shifted an invisible issue in institutional discourse on employment into existence through statistics. These findings were also presented by Yolanda Nava to the California Commission on the Status of Women in "The Chicana and Employment: Needs Analysis and Recommendation for Legislation." In this document, Nava identified a disjuncture between a reductive stereotype and construction of Latina women and the reality that many Latina women were working outside of the home. The CFMN and the CSAC as organizations were being built around the contention that, first, employment statistics did not include information on women and minorities (let alone minority women); second, that training programs did not make available "non traditional" jobs to women in general that would allow for large number of Latina women who were heads of household to support themselves on one wage; and, third, that training programs geared toward women did not factor in language, cultural differences, or expectations in workplace settings¹⁰. In response, then, the CFMN

9 In her later "Testimony at a Department of Industrial Relations Fair Employment Practice Commission" Francisca Flores responded to guidelines the Department intended to implement to remedy sex discrimination.

Flores argued that the guidelines did not address the institutional myopia on employment as only about labor. Rather, she states, it "begins at the institutional level" in a failure to educate bicultural children (1).

10 It is important to note that the CFMN/CSAC also explained the difference between an Anglo feminist approach to employment counseling, and that developed by and for Chicanas. In "Employment Counseling and the Chicana," CFMN leader Yolanda Nava outlined this difference. She explained that the CSAC built transitional steps for employment training (i.e. place in small offices where Spanish is spoken), and addressed other issues like family planning. One example was mothers of some of the young women they worked with indicated to the CSAC staff that they were not comfortable talking about family planning but said they were fine with the CSAC employment counselors discussing it with their daughters as long as they were able to "use discretion." In other words, employment training for Chicanas was much more expansively addressed by the CSAC (*Encuentro Femenil*)

created a public problem through their data collection and by writing about these research findings in various reports. As a result, they garnered the ability to argue for federal funding.

SCENE TWO: ENTER THE COMPREHENSIVE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACT (CETA) OR, NOW WE HAVE A DIFFERENT PROBLEM

The CFMN, then, effectively created a public problem: that Latinas were employed outside of the home and needed to access employee training programs. However, the problem at hand shifted. In 1973, the Federal government passed the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act to provide funds for employment training programs as well as job opportunities in the public sector. The implementation of the CETA Act opened up the ability to have a discussion about employment training and created available funding for collecting statistics more broadly. The CFMN acted on this exigency by submitting a request for funding for a special survey of female, Spanish speaking participants in programs authorized under CETA. On the back of a letter in response to their request, a CFMN member left a record of their research and action plan: “1. get L.A. statistics on monolingual women who work in L.A./on welfare/heads of households 2. on some groups who have limited English who need ESL 3. U.S. school young women—poor language skills/to identify/outreach/recruit/refer/and/or/train—one year/place on job” (Note on back of letter to Pierce Quinlan, re: Reply).

Using this research and action plan, the CSAC secured Department of Labor contract #4047-06. One purpose of the contract was to collect statistics on female, Spanish-speaking participants in CETA funded programs administered by the Manpower project¹¹. The CSAC and CFMN shared these statistics in multiple texts such as booklets, presentations making recommendations at legislative hearings, and the well-known and reprinted presentation: “The Needs of the Spanish Speaking Mujer in Woman-Manpower Training Programs.” Anna Nieto Gomez delivered a version of this report as a presentation at a Manpower symposium. Gomez began her presentation of this report by stating that the initiative was brought by women attending the Manpower seminar, in response to the fact that the “federal

11 The Manpower project was an employment staffing and job training provider that received federal CETA funding in the 1970's.

programs are only sensitive to minority groups or to women, it was felt that the needs and issues of Spanish speaking women have not been addressed” (1). If women are addressed, Gomez claimed, it was only along a white/black breakdown, without considerations for other minority women. Accordingly, Gomez called for further research to study the “socioeconomic factors related to the Spanish Speaking women in the labor market” and to develop effective policy that included utilizing community resources (1). Gomez pointed out that many of the training programs developed by Manpower required little English speaking abilities, such as in the skilled trades. As such, Gomez posited that it would make sense to create bilingual and bicultural curriculum to train women in traditional and non-traditional jobs for women, since, given their statistics, there was a “heavy concentration of Spanish speaking women” in “low-paying traditional jobs” that require little or no English speaking language abilities (2).

What Gomez subtly made apparent was the interesting “logic” of the Manpower training programs. If most of the programs did not require English-speaking abilities, then why did they not use bilingual trainers? Also, the jobs that these women were able to access were interestingly paid a lot less than the traditionally male jobs that required similar English speaking abilities. Thusly, Gomez argued, it would behoove the Manpower project—a project dedicated to providing employment training for everyone to improve their lives—“to train and/or upgrade monolingual women into both traditional and non-traditional jobs for women” (2).

In addition to distributing statistics and recommendations to government agencies, another purpose of the CFMN’s Department of Labor contract was to recruit women to participate in a pilot program “through personal contacts, clients who came in [and] referred neighbors” and by using connections with other community organizations and Spanish-oriented media (Department of Labor Contract). As described in her presentation to the Manpower project, the pilot program would create “bilingual/bicultural Spanish speaking, self-development program designed to increase positive attitudes towards women in the labor force and to also expose myths of working women as well as identify the socio-economic importance of women’s

roles in society” (Gomez 3). This program would approach employment training for Chicanas holistically, meaning that they would include, among other things, a staff of bilingual trainers, access to bicultural child care, vocational training in the trades, communication skills development, and counseling for families and co-workers to facilitate their understanding of the “cultural and economic work patterns of the Spanish Speaking woman” (Gomez 6).

Using the data from their own research and the recommendations they made to the Manpower project, the CSAC ran a pilot program in which they provided culturally appropriate training to meet the needs of Chicanas. The results of their pilot program was that 46% of the women they worked with were placed; 18% were pending placement in jobs or training programs; 9% were referred to agencies; 19% of the cases were closed, and 8% were still pending (MAPC proposal). The CSAC sent the evaluation of their pilot program and the statistics that established the success rates of their program to the local Manpower Area Planning Council along with a request for funding through the CETA ACT to have culturally appropriate trainers given the identified need. In the proposal, the CSAC/CFMN identified to the planning council that current Manpower employment training programs did not meet the needs of Chicana women in terms of employment training: “Skills training and supportive manpower services tailored to the needs of Chicanas are almost non-existent. A lack of skills, age, testing, stereotypes, racial and sex discrimination, all contribute to the plight of the Mexican American woman/women” (*Manpower Area Planning Council (MAPC) Proposal* iv). The CFMN further contended that the trainers that CETA funded through the Manpower project that the Chicana Service Action Center could access for their clients were all Anglo men. Therefore, they applied for CETA funding from the Los Angeles Manpower Planning Council to work with Manpower to design employment-training program geared toward Chicanas, using trainers who could deliver culturally appropriate training.

The result? The CFMN/CSAC were denied further funding¹². The reason? Not lack of success, and not inability to establish a need (what used to be the problem). Rather, the Manpower Council denied

12 The CFMN were welcomed to access to use the job trainers provided by the Manpower program—these trainers, CFMN charged, were all Anglo men.

them funding because the term Chicana was deemed “discriminatory.” The Council argued that because the CSAC identified Chicanas as the community they would be serving, and that they were operating as a *Chicana* Service Action Center, that they could not give them funding because they were discriminating against other groups. A flurry of rhetorical activity ensued. Testimonies were given at various government committees, and a general public outcry by the CFMN and CSAC took place: much of this in public hearings and others in the front-page editorials of their newsletters¹³. In one newsletter column titled “A Rose by any other Name...” CSAC director Francisca Flores shared with her reading audience that the Manpower board felt the use of the term Chicana was discriminatory. She wrote that at a later meeting with Manpower’s appeals committee, they expounded on their decision stating that their proposal only “singles out Mexican women to be served...” They said, furthermore, the CSAC proposal was feminist!” (emphasis in the original, 1). What is interesting here is that, according to the article, the CSAC and CFMN explained to the commission that 80% of the people in their geographic neighborhood were Mexican American or Chicano, so they were reflecting the background of people who live in the area. In rebuttal, the Manpower Council committee pointed out that Anglos also lived in the surrounding area and were thusly being discriminated against. Therefore, Flores wrote, “With that little stroke of statistical genius the CSAC contention was dismissed” (1).

Whereas before the Anglo population was deemed the universal norm for employment statistics—and it was statistically sound to subsume Hispanic populations in the white population—now the Anglo population was pulled out as being excluded. Small details like the definition of who receives federal funding and based on what criteria often found in the small typeface of government forms and other professional writing documents, help us understand that the implicit issue was about not wanting to give money to the organization *because* of the people they served. While the training

Further, access to job trainers alone would not comprehensively address all the web of conditions that mediated access to employment for Chicanas.

- 13 See Flores’ “”Testimony Before Joint Committee on Legal Equality” and her testimony “Regarding Proposed Guidelines for the California Fair Employment Practices Commission on Sex Discrimination,” as well as CSAC published booklet titled “Chicana Status and Concerns,” as just a couple of moments where these issues were explicitly or implicitly discussed.

programs funded by the government up until that point were in fact exclusionary and catered to English speaking Anglo males as the *CFMN* had proven, they appeared to be inclusive, unmarked, and cohered to the government's guidelines.

In response, the CSAC and CFMN wrote appeals to representatives in Sacramento. These appeals claimed that traditional Manpower training programs were not prepared to effectively train bilingual women (particularly in the skilled trades), that Chicana was not discriminatory, and that the naming was not as relevant as the actual services provided. At some point, it is noted that the CSAC employed the ACLU to work on their behalf. Included in the archives are various letters written by the ACLU to government officials, which argued that the Manpower committee had a "mistaken notion of discrimination." In one letter they wrote that if "if such legally erroneous and uninformed view were prevalent among the members of your council, serious damage could be done to the Los Angeles County participation in the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act" (Ripston, 1 of 2).

Further, the CSAC asked the CFMN members and supporters to attend CETA related meetings whenever possible (Letter to Comision [*sic*] Femenil Members 2 Dec 1974¹⁴). In another newsletter column titled "A Sequel" Francisca Flores detailed one such meeting with the city of Los Angeles to discuss their denial of funding from the city Manpower Advisory Board. According to Flores, the majority of this meeting was spent discussing "terminology" and not the reasons why they were denied funding. At these meetings, then, the definition—or perhaps more accurately, the signification—of Chicana and of discrimination continued to be a source of contention. In other words, consensus over the meaning of Chicana, or what constituted the actual problem at hand, could not be reached.

SCENE THREE: A DIFFERENT STRATEGY TO THE PROBLEM AT HAND

Now, it is not clear to me, based on my archival research, if the aforementioned lawsuits filed were successful, if public debates resolved the meaning of Chicana or determined whether it was discriminatory, or if these debates settled what constitutes a

14 Sent internally December 2, 1974.

discriminatory term to begin with. To be honest, I am not interested in following their outcomes. Because what we do know is that something shifted—we see it in the fact that the CFMN have in their records receipt of CETA funding received after having been denied it because of the usage of “Chicana.” To see this though, as a researcher, I had to adopt a different methodological heuristic. I had to turn away from following the actions and exciting rhetorical performances of individuals in order to notice the CFMN’s behind-the-scenes connective work that eventually un-did the public problem at hand. This connective work, I argue, displays a type of knowing that Sandoval articulates as the differential: a knowing of how one is read as a Chicana and an ability to respond in a way to undermine power configurations.

Between the rhetorical activity mentioned that is documented in the public arena, it becomes apparent in the collection that the CFMN employed a different type of strategy: to circumvent the issue of the term Chicana to begin with. This work happened less publicly and more in the nuances of their organizational work. A 1972 press release from the Women’s Bureau of Labor about the secretary of labor working to open up jobs to women lists names of representatives (*Brennan Pledges*). The list includes the name of one woman with a perhaps visibly Latina name. The name is underlined—Carmen Maymi—with a phone number written next to it (Note written on *Brennan Pledges*). A few months later, Yolanda Nava of the CSAC and CFMN sent a letter to Carmen Maymi. The letter appears to be a follow up to a conversation they have had. In the letter, Nava inquired again whether the CFMN will have input on the “above matter” (presumably the Bureau of Labor working to increase employment opportunities for women). She also asked about the chances for getting a Chicana appointed to one of their boards. At the end of the letter, Nava includes a “CC” to the Secretary of the Department of Labor along with a note (for Maymi to also read) which states that she just wanted to make sure that their office had statistics with the numbers of Mexican and Latina women to demonstrate why they should have representatives on their board (2 Nov. 1973 Letter). This represents a very tactical way, I think, of pointing out the absence of Mexican and Latina women on the board and then alluding that this absence must be an ill informed decision due to a lack of research on

their part. Because, surely if they knew the numbers, someone would have been appointed.

We can infer the effectiveness of such a not-so-subtle hint by a later letter from Yolanda Nava to Alan Cranston, forwarding resumes of women to appoint to the Women's Advisory Committee to the Department of Labor and an additional letter sent the following week to a Pamela Faust of the Commission on the Status of Women with the resumes of 17 qualified Chicanas to recommend for appointment (30 Aug 1973 and 1 Sept 1973 Letters). There are several other examples of such work in the archival collection—of newspaper clippings reporting on various government happenings or issues related to employment to reports from US Department of Labor. Many of these documents include some kind of notation of rhetorical activity—names underlined in newspaper articles, stars next to names, someone has written, “call.”

After being denied funding from Manpower, an internal memo was sent between the CSAC and CFMN board members. In the memo, the board members raised questions about the members of the Manpower Area Planning Council Board of Directors¹⁵. In this memo, the board asked about the composite of the Manpower Council, specifically in regards to the selection process and who made the selections. The purpose of this memo was to begin to strategize within their organization. Publicly, they were continuing their outcries in response to being deemed discriminatory; inwardly they were developing a plan that worked at the foundations of the Manpower Council.

Following this internal strategizing, the CFMN sent a letter to Carlotta Mellon of the California State Governor's office. Mellon was apparently in a position to recommend people for appointment to government boards, including the boards that neglected to include statistics of Mexican/Latinos in their accounting and including those that determined funding requirements for employment issues. In response, Mellon sent a memo to the CFMN. In it, Mellon summarized a discussion she had with the Governor's office on behalf

15 Nov. 1974, “Memorandum re: Refunding of the Chicana Service Action Service a project of the Comision Femenil Mexicana Nacional.”

of the CFMN. She stated that there was “a commitment to bring many Chicanas into government” and to do this they “wanted to receive resumes so that we could consider Chicanas for appointment.” Furthermore, Mellon wrote that she also “had receive[d] loud and clear their [the CFMN’s] message of retaining Chicanas in their existing positions and that if any were to be replaced it would be with other Chicanas” (3).

It should be noted that the people the CFMN contacted were not the actual elected officials or the chairs of these committees; rather they were more often than not, the assistants or secretaries to the officials. The assistants were the people responsible for previewing the mail and forwarding necessary mail—including resumes—up the chain of command. It seems that the CFMN and CSAC leaders developed relationships with these people who then would work as allies on their behalf. Through this relationship, they were able to get government officials to agree to not only appoint Chicanas to boards but also to replace any current Chicana members with other Chicanas in order to ensure ongoing Chicana representation.

With this strategy in play, there is evidence of later letters sent from Mellon to then, CFMN president Chris Fuentes, thanking her for recommendations for appointments to a range of government boards. One board mentioned is the California Employment Training Act Council, the very group who funded the Manpower Planning Area Council and who denied funding to the CFMN for being discriminatory. We then see in an editorial for the Chicana Service Action Center 17 Feb. 1975 newsletter, a congratulations to Corinne Sanchez, Administrative Assistant to the CSAC, for being appointed to the board. She would not be the last Chicana from the CSAC or the CFMN to gain access to the CETA council¹⁶. In other words, Chicanas strategically gained access to the board governing the allotment of CETA funds. Tellingly, CETA funding was later reinstated to the CFMN. A Sept/Oct newsletter column noted, “[on] October 15, 1975, the Chicana Service Action Center, Inc. met with the State Manpower Council to officially sign the state CETA contract which has been awarded them” (“Chicana Center Signs State

16 In fact, in May 1975, Francisca Flores was appointed as a chairperson for the newly formed Chicana Coalition’s Manpower Committee (“Francisca Flores. . . appointed as chairperson,” *CSAC Newsletter* 19 May 1975).

Contract”). This funding reinstatement happened even without them changing their name from a Chicana Action Center. The members of the CFMN must have known that an agreement over the definition of Chicana could not be reached because of a historical absence of Chicana women on these government boards. Instead of arguing about whether “Chicana” is exclusionary, these Chicanas worked connectively to get appointed to the boards, thereby ascertaining power to actually change the terrain of the discussion. The result is that they effectively made an issue (exclusionary terminology) a non-issue.

Their strategies for accomplishing this happened within their organization and between people and can be realized through paying attention to the rhetorical activity visible in the marginalia on their programmatic documents. During these less public moves, these Chicanas operated with government officials to imbue spaces with Chicana ideology and Chicana presence, so that Chicana became an active part of the policy-making and makers. While they may have lost the public battles of employment training programs, Chicana as a point of contention had less of a rhetorical impact in regards to access to CETA funding. This was achieved from a different approach to activism, through practices that are perhaps equally explicit but operated in less public spaces. The CSAC and the CFMN began to focus on leadership development, and by doing so, placed other Chicanas or like-minded people on the boards and commissions that made decisions that had real impacts on whether or not the CSAC and CFMN could provide the services the knew were vital to their community.

CONCLUSION

Such strategizing evidenced in the CFMN’s work to address employment training for Chicanas can be understood as a way of knowing and acting that emerged from being disempowered in institutions. But, the CFMN and CSAC were also aware that they *had* to be able to access government funding for their services. Knowing that they would not be able to reach a shared understanding of the actual problem, the CFMN worked strategically and connectively to redress the situation at hand. This is not to say that the CFMN and CSAC stopped their public protestations against the discrimination

claims, or that their testimonies and fiery speeches did not continue to be part of their Chicana activist repertoire. Rather, they developed a rhetoric that was at once responsive and effectual; public and internal; activist and institutional. And they effectively made these seeming contradictions productive as they worked toward an end of garnering federal funding to redress an absence of employment training programs for Chicanas, as well as an absence of Chicanas on federal and state labor boards.

Many of us can relate to seeing absence in institutional spaces. So how do we change this? Part of the challenge for us and for our allies is to do the work of *translations* across time and space: as we can revision history to enable new futures, we also can turn to the work of community organizations to learn about institutions. In this way, we can obviate the reductive binary between institutions and communities that are based on a static subject and space. Had I only sought out the performances of Chicana rhetoric that *seemed* Chicana or activist, I would have overlooked a significant portion of what the CFMN archived and what they considered important to becoming and acting as a Chicana organization. This work included making connections, often within institutions. Likewise, had I only looked at existing scholarship on institutional rhetoric, I would have missed learning from communities whose practices I wish to adopt and reflect in my own work. Each time a Chican@ like myself learns from the CFMN and shares their stories (or of other community organizations), we can create new histories and lineages of change makers. In doing so, we can continue to carve spaces for our commitments into this place of higher education.

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