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Cover Page Footnote

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



LATINA/O SEXUALITIES

Lourdes Torres
GUEST EDITOR

In 1999, theorist Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano called for scholars to make sexuality a central factor in all social analyses. A decade later, there is a great momentum building around studies of sexualities and people of color. One example of this was the RACE, SEX, POWER: New Movements in Black & Latina/o Sexualities Conference that took place at the University of Illinois at Chicago on April 11-12, 2008. This Ford Foundation sponsored conference brought together over 400 scholars and activists working in the area of Black and Latino/a Sexualities. One of the goals of the conference was to begin to fill in the gaps concerning people of color and sexualities research and to disseminate new multi and interdisciplinary research on Black and Latino/a sexualities that challenges the racist and stereotypical renderings that have historically dominated in mainstream culture and most fields of research. As one of the main organizers of the conference, Dr. Marysol Asencio put it "Sexuality is a lens. In the same way that gender, socioeconomic status and race allow us to examine society and social interaction, so does sexuality. We view a number of broader issues through it. The study of Latino sexualities examines practices, meanings and contexts, not only because they provide information to assist in health related issues and social concerns such as HIV/AIDS and pregnancy, but for what they tell us about the larger culture and societal organization. Research with Latinos in the broad field of sexuality is still rather limited and many areas are still unexplored. Moreover, there has been a history of pathologizing Latinos and sexualities which needs to be addressed." While the conference was one site where new research on Latina/o sexualities was shared, this issue of *Diálogo* is another venue to further conversations in this emerging and rich area of study.

Many stereotypes about Latina/o sexualities circulate in both mainstream Anglo and Latina/o cultures. For example, the limited research on Latina sexualities that does exist, for the most part, continues to perpetuate long-standing stereotypes and assumptions such as the virgin/whore dichotomy that defines femininity as intrinsically dangerous and produces a set of restrictive extremes. Equally limiting stereotypes about men as machistas similarly dominate both mass media, cultural and academic representations. Latinas are essentialized as either long-suffering, traditional, and sexually repressed or eroticized as promiscuous and out of control. Latinos are represented as violent, controlling, and oppressive. These stereotypes are persistently reflected in film, literature and other cultural forms, and also surface in the social sciences and inform discussions on immigration, health and public policy. Fortunately, of late, we are beginning to see more nuanced studies about Latina/o Sexualities in academic research. This issue of *Diálogo* contributes to that growing literature with a powerful mix of scholarly and community writings on sexuality.

The writers in this issue help us understand that sexuality is complex, diverse, and conditioned by race, class and other social factors and locations. Latino/a culture is a contradictory site that may reproduce negative beliefs around sexualities, but also may and does provide places where Latina sexualities are experienced as positive and healthy. This issue tries to avoid the sweeping generalizations and recurrent stereotypes so prevalent in literature on Latino/as. One stereotype challenged is the idea that Latino/as are more homophobic than other cultures. Our call for papers on Latino/a sexualities produced a great number of articles on queer sexualities and fewer pieces on heterosexual sexualities. I like to

think that the reason for this is that queer Latina/os are beginning to claim a space in Latino/a publications. They have a lot to say and we need to listen to these stories.

While there is a growing body of literature on lesbian and gay theory and history, there is much less documented on the histories of racial and ethnic gay and lesbian communities and activist organizations. This work is necessary to expand the gay and lesbian historiography that has emerged by specifically articulating how race and ethnicity shape this vibrant history. Recent studies of gay and lesbian activist history provide an analysis of mainstream white gay and lesbian movements in the U.S., yet few research projects document the existence of Latin American and Latino gay, lesbian and transgender communities. Studies tend not to consider the intersectional complexity of gay, lesbian, and transgender movements of color; and how Latino/as fit into the mainstream gay and lesbian movement and their own racial ethnic communities.

The essays in the De Nuestra América section issue take up issues of sexuality and gendered expression in a range of Latin American and Latino contexts. The piece by Horacio Roque Ramírez explores how gay Salvadoran males traverse transnational spaces in El Salvador and Los Angeles. He explores the various meanings of distance for Salvadoran gay males who seek to create familia in different locations. In “Gay Men are Not Men,” Diego Costa likewise reminds us that sexuality and gender are not universally understood in the same manner. Costa explores how the representation of the bicha in Brazilian film helps us understand how conceptualizations of man, woman and gay men in Brazil differ from European and American paradigms.

Closer to home, Rosa Yadira Ortiz and Nicole Perez provide two perspectives on organizing The Dyke March in Chicago in 2008. Dyke Marches began nationally in the early 90s as a response and alternative to the Gay Pride Parades that some lesbians found problematic because they tend to be male-dominated and corporate-sponsored. The Dyke March is now a tradition in many large cities, where lesbians take to the streets, usually the day before the annual Gay Pride Parade. Dyke Marches began in Chicago in 1996. More than a parade, The Chicago Dyke March is a direct action demonstration and a celebration of dyke visibility. According to its organizers, the march “is an anti-racist, non-violent, volunteer-led grassroots event. Its goal is to bring together lesbians and allies across race, class, age, size, gender, ethnicity, cultures, faiths, and differing ability.” While this is the stated goal of the march, as Perez and Ortiz explain, the reality has been somewhat different. They describe their struggles and successes as they to work to build a multi-cultural, multi-racial and inter-generational Dyke March in Chicago.

In two revealing essays, Pedro Serrano, a young gay man, explores the impact of homosexuality on the individual and his or her family. In one piece, Serrano discusses the growing literature on gay and lesbian Latinos that can provide families with resources for how to embrace and support their queer children. In a more personal piece, Serrano traces his own trajectory as young gay male coming of age in a Mexican household. He explores issues such as silence, openness and “coming out” and clarifies that there is not only one way to be a gay male in a Latino context.

Closing out the De Nuestra América section, “¿La Voz de Quién?” by Erika Abad offers an analysis of a Chicago based Puerto Rican

Community Center. A long-time activist in the Humboldt Park neighborhood, Abad challenges sexism and heterosexism within the Puerto Rican diasporic nationalist movement through her incisive critique of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) and its newspaper, La Voz. She shows how PRCC’s representation of cultural heroes continues to reproduce limiting gendered readings of social actors, and while she applauds the Center’s attempt to be inclusive of queer community members, she questions its reproduction of notions of queerness and disease.

These essays are nicely complemented by the engaging stories and short narratives on the topic of desire in *Desde el Taller*. Through the use of humor, satire and keen observation, these pieces again make clear the diversity of experiences inherent in the topic of Latino/a sexualities. Rounding out the issue is an enticing collection of provocative poems that invite us to consider complexities, joy and passion contained within Latino/a sexualities.

We are especially proud to feature the work of gifted artist, Héctor Silva, on this issue’s cover. Héctor Silva is an L.A. based artist whose stunningly beautiful depiction of the Latino/a community is all the more impressive since he is self-taught. The images that are included in this issue introduce the reader to his poignant portrayals of queer Latina/os. The drawings convey the strength, vulnerability, sensuality and dignity of Latino/a queers. Like the articles, stories, and poems in this issue, Silva’s art work captures the presence, power and truth of Latino/a sexualities and makes evident the reality that Latino/a queers are very much an integral part of the Latino/a community. Considered all together this issue on Latino/a sexualities will hopefully spark more conversation on a topic that has for too long been ignored in our communities.

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