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Agencies of Transformational Resistance

Alejandro Covarrubias

Anita Tijerina Revilla

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AGENCIES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL RESISTANCE

Alejandro Covarrubias & Anita Tijerina Revilla

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In this Essay, we utilize a model of Transformational Resistance to propose a framework for examining advocacy organizations within marginalized communities, what we refer to as Agencies of Transformational Resistance (ATRs). We employ Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) to conceptualize and describe the socio-political spaces within which marginalized people create communities. These contested spaces, referred to as the “Intersection,” are identified as socio-political, ideological, cultural, and intellectual spaces influenced by the intersection of race, class, sexual orientation, and gender structures of domination challenged by resistance. CRT and LatCrit are also used to help operationally define the concepts of consciousness and social justice. In this study we are specifically concerned with the acts of transformational resistance demonstrated by marginalized people participating in ATRs that work toward transforming

the various injustices in the spaces that they occupy. ATRs are advocacy organizations that:

- Promote a multi-dimensional consciousness,
- Nurture a commitment to social justice,
- Provide and develop skills and services that make it possible for participants to engage in at least one of several forms of empowering changes (for example, self-transformation, school change, community empowerment, or societal transformation), and
- Create and sustain a community of inclusiveness.

In this Essay, we examine the processes by which two organizations nurture young activists, referred to as “agents of transformational resistance,” through the activities and the projects they make available.

I. INTRODUCTION

The miseducation of Latinas/os in general and Chicanas/os specifically can be traced to a history of social injustice.¹ Chicanas/os inhabit socio-political, cultural, ideological, and intellectual spaces that have been historically, and are contemporarily, shaped by the intersections of various structures of domination. We refer to this as the “Intersection.”² Within the Intersection they have had varied experiences marked by racial, ethnic, and cultural oppression, class domination, and gendered subordination of varying forms. Thus, they have had distinct experiences as social beings in the United States. As ethnic minorities, they have found themselves objects of racist violence and cultural imperialism for centuries.³ Their social and economic status has limited their life chances, relegating many of them to the lowest social class. Within the Intersection the macro

1. See generally RODOLFO ACUÑA, *OCCUPIED AMERICA: A HISTORY OF CHICANOS* (3d ed. 1988); JAMES DIEGO VIGIL, *FROM INDIANS TO CHICANOS: THE DYNAMICS OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE* (2d ed. 1998).

2. Our discussion of the Intersection draws on the work of CRT and LatCrit scholars, as well as Queer/Chicana Feminist scholars. See Kimberle Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, 1989 U. CHI. LEGAL F. 139, 166; Kimberle Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, 43 STAN. L. REV. 1241, 1252 (1991); Francisco Valdes, *Sex and Race in Queer Legal Culture: Ruminations on Identities and Interconnectivities*, 5 S. CAL. REV. L. & WOMEN'S STUD. 25, 49 (1995); Francisco Valdes, *Under Construction: LatCrit Consciousness, Community, and Theory*, 85 CAL. L. REV. 1087; see also GLORIA ANZALDÚA, *BORDERLANDS: THE NEW MESTIZA-LA FRONTERA* 20 (1987); ANA CASTILLO, *MASSACRE OF THE DREAMERS: ESSAYS ON XICANISMA* 40 (1994); *CHICANA FEMINIST THOUGHT: THE BASIC HISTORICAL WRITINGS* 7 (Alma M. Garcia ed., 1997); *MAPPING STRATEGIES: NACCS AND THE CHALLENGE OF MULTIPLE (RE)OPPRESSIONS* (María Antonia Beltrán-Vocal et al. eds., 1999).

3. See generally ACUÑA, *supra* note 1.

structures of capitalism, racism, sexism and heteronormativity are experienced simultaneously and interconnectedly on a micro level. Yet each individual experiences them differently because these structures of domination create distinct relations of power that can result in various forms of oppression and privilege for different individuals, depending on the context.

Schools have traditionally reflected society's greater system of domination as they too are marked by a similar intersection. Chicanas/os have demonstrated several organized efforts of educational resistance aimed at transforming the conditions that oppress them and their collective communities.⁴ Through this study, we attempt to examine the concept of ATRs.

We will offer as examples the experiences of various participants within two advocacy organizations, *Public Allies* and *Raza Womyn*, to illustrate the characteristics of ATRs. *Public Allies* is a comprehensive leadership-training program whose goal is to nurture young activists in their local struggle for community justice by placing them in an apprenticeship with a partner non-profit organization and providing continuous education and training.⁵ *Raza Womyn* is a university student advocacy group whose goal is to empower, support, and organize Chicanas/Latinas to engage in social justice efforts both on and off the university campus.⁶

The failure of institutions of formal education to empower most people of color, working class people, and queer people leads many of us to seek solutions to the problem of social injustice in other sites. The potential of these sites to empower the historically disempowered and to create instances of transformational resistance makes these sites necessary to study. These advocacy organizations serve in many communities as a bridge between the public and private spheres, between the formal and informal institutions. Below we will outline the origins of the guiding theoretical model of transformational resistance and describe how it helps inform the work of ATRs and how the specific organizations we examine help inform our model of ATRs.

4. See Dolores Delgado Bernal, *Chicana School Resistance and Grassroots Leadership: Providing An Alternative History of the 1968 East Los Angeles Blowouts* (1997) (unpublished doctoral dissertation, on file at UCLA); Mary Pardo, *Mexican American Women Grassroots Community Activist: 'Mother's of East Los Angeles'*, 11 *FRONTIERS: J. WOMEN STUD.* 1, 1-7 (1990); Daniel G. Solórzano & Octavio Villalpando, *Critical Race Theory, Marginality, and the Experience of Students of Color in Higher Education*, in *SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION: EMERGING PERSPECTIVES* 211 (Carlos Alberto Torres & Theodore R. Mitchell eds., 1998).

5. About PA, *Public Allies*, available at <http://www.publicallies.org/aboutpa/vision.html> (last visited Oct. 5, 2001).

6. See generally Pardo, *supra* note 4, at 1. See also <http://comova.com/razawomen>.

II. MARGINALITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Before discussing the notion of intersectionality we find it necessary to discuss the concept of marginality. Marginality, as discussed by Bell Hooks, refers to the symbolic and sometimes actual physical space that minorities occupy in relation to members of the dominant group, who occupy the center.⁷ Although the margins can be oppressive spaces, Hooks recognizes the liberatory potential of this location and argues that it is often a chosen space that can provide strength and valuable insight for originating counter hegemonic discourses.⁸ Solórzano and Villalpando found that young Chicana/o scholars utilize this space as they navigate through the especially difficult process of higher education.⁹ Although the notion of marginality has been employed to examine the experiences of Chicanas/os, Vigil has suggested that multiple marginalities help us better understand the ways that Chicanas/os can be marginalized differently.¹⁰ Multiple marginality would hold that Whites marginalize Chicanas/os as a group, but Chicano males also marginalize Chicanas, and heterosexual Chicanas/os marginalize gay and lesbian Chicanas/os. Although the ideas of marginality and multiple marginalities have provided valuable insight about the experiences of Chicanas/os, we choose to employ the notion of the Intersection for this analysis.

We recognize the spaces that Chicanas/os occupy as spaces where they become participants, willing or not, in historically created relations of power. These relations of power, at times, position them as less powerful compared to others, and at other times privilege them in relation to others who are less empowered. For example, when Chicanas' and Chicanos' educational experiences are examined historically, it is clear that they have been denied access and opportunity for educational excellence because of their ethnicity, race, culture, sexuality, or class.¹¹ Still, Chicanos have also been empowered at the expense of Chicanas because of male privilege, and straight Chicanas/os have ostracized gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual

7. See generally BELL HOOKS, *YEARNING: RACE, GENDER, AND CULTURAL POLITICS* (1990).

8. See generally *id.*

9. See Solórzano & Villalpando, *supra* note 4.

10. See generally JAMES DIEGO VIGIL, *BARRIO GANGS: STREET LIFE AND IDENTITY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA* (1988).

11. *LATINOS AND EDUCATION: A CRITICAL READER* (Antonia Darder et al. eds., 1997); Cristina M. Misa, *Where Have All the Queer Students of Color Gone? Negotiated Identity of Queer Chicana/o Students*, in *TROUBLING INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND SEXUALITY: QUEER STUDENTS OF COLOR AND ANTI-OPPRESSIVE EDUCATION* 67 (Kevin K. Kumashiro ed., 2001); Richard R. Valencia & Daniel G. Solórzano, *Contemporary Deficit Thinking*, in *THE EVOLUTION OF DEFICIT THINKING: EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE* 160 (Richard R. Valencia ed., 1997); Richard R. Valencia, *The Plight of Chicano Students: An Overview of Schooling Conditions and Outcomes*, in *CHICANO SCHOOL FAILURE AND SUCCESS: RESEARCH AND POLICY AGENDAS FOR THE 1990'S*, at 3-26 (Richard R. Valencia ed., 1991).

Chicanas/os because of the privilege they wield due to their heterosexual identity. The point being that within the physical spaces that Chicanas/os create community there exist micro manifestations of intersecting macro relations of power, in which Chicanas/os participate to recreate or transform the relations of power within those spaces. Understanding these spaces is necessary for understanding oppositional acts that can serve as transformational instances of resistance.¹² In this fundamental way, the Intersection is different from the concept of multiple marginalities because it offers the potential for oppressed (or marginalized) groups to simultaneously experience privilege depending on the context. Thus, within this Essay we examine the Intersection through the experiences of Chicanas/os who engage in transformation resistance as participants of advocacy organizations.

III. THEORIES OF RESISTANCE

Theories of resistance attempt to illuminate the oppositional behaviors in which students, teachers, parents, and communities engage, by redefining the “importance of mediation, power, and culture in understanding the complex relations between schools and the dominant society.”¹³ Models of resistance posit that domination is never as mechanistic as Social and Cultural Reproduction models would have us assume, and instead is highly contested in the dialectic between ideological and structural constraints and human agency.¹⁴ Indeed, Henry Giroux argues that, “there has been an overemphasis on how structural determinants promote economic and cultural inequality, and an underemphasis on how human agency accommodates, mediates, and resists the logic of capital and its dominating social practices.”¹⁵ For example, Paul Willis discovers that despite the sometimes overwhelming socioeconomic pressures bearing down upon them, people are not passive or indifferent.¹⁶ Instead, Willis finds that students’ level of awareness or understanding of the forces of their exploitation provides them with an understanding that the options available to them are woeful, and thus motivates them to resist the control that is exerted over them.¹⁷ These

12. See Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 4.

13. Henry A. Giroux, *Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education: A Critical Analysis*, 53 HARV. EDUC. REV. 257, 282 (1983).

14. See generally Pierre Bourdieu, *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction*, in POWER AND IDEOLOGY IN EDUCATION 487 (Jerome Karabel & A.H. Halsey eds., 1977); SAMUEL BOWLES & HERBERT GINTIS, *SCHOOLING IN CAPITALIST AMERICA: EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF ECONOMIC LIFE* (1976).

15. See Giroux, *supra* note 13, at 282.

16. See generally PAUL E. WILLIS, *LEARNING TO LABOUR: HOW WORKING CLASS KIDS GET WORKING CLASS JOBS* (1977).

17. See generally *id.*

potentially liberating instances of resistance become double-edged, as they are stunted by “limitations” in the students’ cultural outlook, leading to the reinforcement of the students’ own oppression and the reproduction of the class structure.¹⁸ Although Willis demonstrates the importance of agency, he fails to focus on its potential for social transformation and minimizes the importance of racism and patriarchy in creating and maintaining systematic oppression and privilege.¹⁹ In response to their social condition, oftentimes subordinated groups demonstrate an array of oppositional behaviors that can range from self-defeating and conformist to reactionary and transformational.²⁰ Moreover, these theories render schools both potentially oppressive and liberating.²¹

IV. TRANSFORMATIONAL RESISTANCE

Recognizing the limitations of earlier models of resistance, Giroux offers a theory of resistance that can better account for instances of emancipatory resistance.²² He recognizes the strengths of older models of resistance as being their ability to mesh a critical theory with a newly emphasized human agency.²³ However, the weaknesses of these earlier models include: their failure to “adequately conceptualize the historical development of the conditions that promote and reinforce contradictory modes of resistance and struggle”;²⁴ their failure to take into account issues of race and gender and their specialized forms of resistance; the fact that they tend to include instances of accommodation and conformism in models of resistance; their focus on overt forms of resistance; and their inability and unwillingness to deal with how “domination reaches into the structure of personality itself.”²⁵ A key tenet of this new theory of resistance is the insistence that the “concept of resistance must have a revealing function that contains a critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection and struggle in the interest of social and self-emancipation.”²⁶

Delgado Bernal’s reexamination of the 1968 “East Los Angeles Blowouts” provides us with the theoretical framework within which ATRs

18. See Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 4.

19. See generally WILLIS, *supra* note 16.

20. See generally Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 4.

21. See generally Daniel G. Solórzano & Ronald W. Solórzano, *The Chicano Educational Experience: A Framework for Effective Schools in Chicano Communities*, 9 EDUC. POL’Y 293 (1995).

22. See Giroux, *supra* note 13, at 282-88.

23. *Id.* at 283.

24. See *id.* at 285.

25. See *id.* at 288; Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 4.

26. See Giroux, *supra* note 13, at 290.

can be examined.²⁷ Her study of the leadership role of Chicanas in this collective movement and process of resistance focuses on the transformational potential of resistance. Building on Giroux's description of resistance, Delgado Bernal rearticulates the characteristics of oppositional behavior and suggests one can conceptually locate various types of oppositional behavior within a model that contains both an "awareness" continuum and a "motivation to create change" axis.²⁸

Oppositional behavior, characterized by little or no level of awareness of systems of domination, and not motivated by a desire for self or social transformation, is described as reactionary behavior that has no emancipatory potential and may even contribute to a subordinated existence.²⁹ Along the same vein, oppositional behavior that is marked by some level of awareness of systems of domination, yet is unmotivated to engage in self or social transformation, is characterized as self-defeating behavior, which usually involves behavior that perpetuates domination.³⁰ Motivated by a desire for self or social transformation, or both, those who engage in conformist behavior usually lack a sophisticated critique of domination and hence involve themselves in expected behaviors that have a potential for change but require a much slower process of change and some degree of accommodation. Finally, oppositional behaviors that are motivated by a desire for self and social transformation and are coupled with some level of critique of systems of domination have the liberating potential to which Giroux alluded.

Transformational Resistance, as this final example of oppositional behavior, according to Delgado Bernal can be both internal and external, and overt and subtle.³¹ It creates the greatest potential for change of all the described behavior of opposition. Delgado Bernal builds on Giroux's work by examining both internal and external forms of resistance, shifting the analysis to a sociological and political one, and incorporating issues of race, class, and gender into her analysis of transformational resistance.³² She also adds a characteristic to Transformational Resistance that suggests that in order for resistance to be transformational it must not involve any self-defeating behavior.³³ Her work also accepts the challenge of historically contextualizing the Chicana activists' transformational resistance in a larger Chicana and Chicano movement and within the history of Chicana grassroots activism.³⁴ Thus, theories of resistance are

27. See Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 4.

28. See *id.*

29. See *id.*

30. See *id.*

31. See *id.*

32. See *id.*

33. See *id.*

34. See *id.*

progressively moving toward an interest in the dialectic between agency and structure and the potential for transformational resistance when examining the oppositional behaviors and academic achievement of historically underrepresented minorities.

This model is useful for examining oppositional behavior demonstrated by some groups and individuals; however, below we will demonstrate its utility for examining advocacy organizations, or ATRs, specifically. First, we expand on the theory of transformational resistance as defined by Delgado Bernal.³⁵ We re-conceptualize “awareness” as a dynamic and achieved *multidimensional consciousness* that consists of a sophisticated critique of how multiple, intersecting structures of domination³⁶ (e.g., racism, capitalism, sexism, heteronormativity, etc.) interact with each other and impact one’s social and political situation as part of an historical condition. Consciousness is understood as a fluid process within which those who are developing it will be at different levels at different times in their lives. There is a range of consciousness within each specific dimension. These degrees of consciousness are ranked in terms of their critical nature such that it is understood that having a higher degree of consciousness, or being more critical, is desirable. Furthermore, one can achieve a high degree of consciousness along one dimension (e.g., a race consciousness), but can be unconscious along another dimension (e.g., gender consciousness).³⁷

A second dimension of Transformational Resistance involves behavior that demonstrates a commitment to social justice. This expands on Bernal’s notion of actions “motivated by a desire for self or social transformation.”³⁸ Commitment to social justice in this context is understood as the commitment to engage in a process of transforming all relations of inequality, whether they are individual or systemic—both understood as political. While there are several scholars who challenge the deterministic arguments of reproduction models by refocusing their attention on human agency, few focus on Chicana and Chicano resistance

35. *See id.*

36. By a class consciousness, we refer to a sophisticated understanding and critique of the political economy, one’s socio-political location within the relations structured by the economy in relation to others, and their concrete material consequences. By a racial/cultural consciousness, we mean a historically contextualized understanding and critique of the construction of race and the nature and effects of racism, the power relationships between various cultural forms and the groups which practice them, and one’s imposed and self-defined identity within the racial/cultural hierarchy. Finally, gender consciousness refers to a historically contextualized understanding of the construction of gender, the roles and characteristics assigned to males and females, the relations of power which these constructions have meant in real terms, and one’s location within this relationship.

37. *See generally* Joyce E. King, *Dysconscious Racism: Ideology, Identity, and the Miseducation of Teachers*, 60 J. NEGRO EDUC. 133 (1991).

38. *See* Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 4.

and most have failed to grant their attention to the possibilities of resistance to create social change.

V. AGENCIES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL RESISTANCE

In Richard Delgado's piece, *When Equality Ends: Stories about Race and Resistance*, he conceptualizes a strategy of mobilizing the political left by forming a new strategy of resistance that links policy analysis, community organizing, and youth training.³⁹ Primarily he calls for the creation of advocacy organizations that attempt to mobilize disenfranchised communities through activism and scholarship with the goal of achieving social justice.⁴⁰ He critiques the political left for not creating a structure to disseminate their ideology to the masses of people who are not currently engaged in the discourses of the political left.⁴¹ Delgado claims that the ability of political conservatives to engage conservative masses in their political movement has led to their ability to prosper in the current political climate and shift the tide to the right.⁴² We contend that creating a model of ATRs, and understanding the network of resistance which can be and has been created by such advocacy organizations,⁴³ can lead us closer to achieving a more unified progressive movement for change.

ATRs are important to the educational and professional experiences of Chicanas/os, and they can have a beneficial impact on the life opportunities of members of their communities. Our work with advocacy organizations in the area of community education and student activism has led us to understand at least six critical roles of these types of organizations in disenfranchised communities/marginalized spaces:

1. They create a community of inclusiveness,
2. They provide valuable resources for community members,
3. They provide a critical voice for the community regarding community issues,
4. They empower the community through the expansion of resources and development of skills,
5. They help members of the community develop a raised level of consciousness and a commitment to social justice, and

39. RICHARD DELGADO, *WHEN EQUALITY ENDS: STORIES ABOUT RACE AND RESISTANCE* *Passim* (1999).

40. *Id.*

41. *Id.*

42. *Id.*

43. Oftentimes one finds that ATRs are either formally linked to other ATRs through collaborative efforts on various projects or informally linked through the floating participations of their participants to other ATRs. This network of resistance is currently being studied by the two authors as it relates to these two specific organizations.

6. They provide hope for educational advancement of many community members.

ATRs can come in multiple forms and sizes, such as large-scale organized social movements, community-based grassroots organizations, student protest movements, student activist groups, and scholarship-centered activists groups.⁴⁴ In order to guide the study of advocacy organizations, we offer some characteristics of ATRs, which have been informed by several theoretical frameworks, pilot studies, and our own personal and professional participation within these types of organizations. These should not be taken as a final or comprehensive description of what ATRs look like. We expect that further research and participation with such organizations will greatly influence our conceptualization of ATRs. And if ATRs can have any level of success, they will likely be shaped by the context within which they developed and currently exist and by the participants themselves. Furthermore, Delgado Bernal's model of oppositional behavior can be utilized to conceptualize other advocacy organizations, besides ATRs, that are not transformational (and not discussed here).

Adapting Delgado Bernal's model of oppositional behavior can help us understand advocacy organizations in many Chicana and Chicano communities. ATRs involve themselves in ensuring that personal needs are met, the skills of participants are refined, the relationships between their hardship and structures of domination are understood, and the possibilities for transforming their world are made a reality.

VI. RAISING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The first characteristic of ATRs expands on Delgado Bernal's notion of awareness of systems of domination. We refer to this awareness as a consciousness that consists of multiple dimensions (of which we focus on four in this Essay: class, race, sexuality, and gender) interacting with each other. A critical understanding and critique of the Intersection should be the basis of this multidimensional consciousness. In the process of helping others to develop this multidimensional consciousness there must be an active effort to assist agents to connect their own understanding about their personal experiences with a critique of more systemic structures of domination; the micro must be connected to the macro. Also, one's personal experiences with oppression and privilege must be connected to the oppression and privilege of others. Consciousness involves the

44. See, e.g., ACUÑA, *supra* note 1 (stating large scale movements include the Chicana and Chicano Movement); Pardo, *supra* note 4 (writing extensively about community-based grassroots movements). For student organizations, such as *Mecha* and *Raza Womyn*, see CARLOS MUÑOZ, JR., *YOUTH, IDENTITY, POWER: THE CHICANO MOVEMENT* (1989).

dynamic process of understanding and critiquing the intersectionality of race, class, and gender structures of domination.

During an interview, a *Raza Womyn* member named “Lucia,”⁴⁵ talked about the process by which she gained awareness of oppression. She said, “consciousness comes from everything. It comes from your community, your parents, from the older ones, from the younger ones. . . . It comes from the environment. The actual material conditions that we’re living through . . . to what we’re exposed to.”⁴⁶ Thus, her consciousness is based on her location in society and in life. In other words, it is based on her location at the Intersection. As I asked her how she came to define social justice, she stated,

I think I came to that definition, a lot has to do with my involvement of Raza Womyn, but I think that it has to do with my experience and involvement with my community, especially youth. I know that some of the older women in Raza Womyn also started opening my eyes because they would pose questions and we would talk about certain stuff. And it motivated me to challenge myself, and to start thinking about the conditions we were living in.⁴⁷

Her personal experiences revealed the reality of discrimination and injustice, yet her critique of oppression and dedication to social justice developed through her work with youth as a teacher/mentor and her membership in *Raza Womyn*. Through daily interaction that includes questioning and analyzing, the organization challenges its members to critically reflect on their lived experiences and to recognize that their oppression is based on a wider system of subordination.

While many of the Allies already come with an understanding of injustices in society, *Public Allies* further develops its participants’ consciousness through various interactive activities. “Carlos,”⁴⁸ the son of two long time Chicano/a activists who at one point worked with the likes of the Chicano icons Bert Corona and Cesar Chavez, explains how his social understanding was planted by his parents’ involvement in the movement:

[A] lot of this stems from a background, an upbringing from my parents who were very much active in their time and very political. My mother and my father were very much involved with the Mexican-American, Chicano movement. They were

45. Lucia is a pseudonym.

46. *Raza Womyn* transcript of a one-on-one interview with Lucia (Nov. 2, 1999) (hereinafter Lucia interview).

47. *Id.*

48. Carlos is a pseudonym.

with an organization called CASA . . . they stood up for immigrant rights. My mom was involved with the farm workers movement in Delano, with Cesar Chavez.⁴⁹

He goes on,

my political and social awareness came from being in that whole environment. In the late seventies, I remember being involved in the marches and protests, in that whole environment, going to meetings . . . eventually I was able to take over. It made me very much aware of my surroundings of my environment.”⁵⁰

He suggests that it made him understand that, “what happens in one place can affect another community and it could happen a world away, or half a world away in another country, but it could affect our country or our country could affect the whole world . . . that comes from living and understanding, just going through life.”⁵¹ So, Carlos’ awareness of social injustice is too rooted in his life experiences as the child of two long-time activists as well as his understanding of the limited resources available to many members of his Montebello neighborhood. His last comment also demonstrated his awareness of the connectedness of justice issues and how macro relations of power can influence micro experiences. Although he does not articulate it as clearly and as theoretically as the *mujer* from *Raza Womyn*, it is clear that he understands this connection. This last point illustrates that consciousness is understood and articulated in a context specific manner, so that it is relevant for one’s current situation.

While Carlos and other *Allies’* consciousness about different issues may be well developed, *Public Allies* further helps them critically reflect on how multiple injustices are related to each other and impact their lives and the people they serve.⁵² This is accomplished through various ways. *Public Allies* provides their participants with weekly trainings that are broken down into skills development and issue development.⁵³ As explained by the executive director of *Public Allies*, the latter is “really more of a dialogue on issues that affect Angelenos. Our trainings fall into the context of what’s going on in Los Angeles, politically, socially, and

49. *Public Allies* transcript of a one-on-one interview with Carlos (Feb. 21, 2001) (hereinafter Carlos interview).

50. *Id.*

51. *Id.*

52. See *Summary*, PUBLIC ALLIES, available at <http://www.publicallies.org/aboutpa/summary.html> (last visited Oct. 5, 2002).

53. See *Leadership Training*, PUBLIC ALLIES, available at <http://www.publicallies.org/aboutpa/whatlearn.html> (last visited Oct. 5, 2002).

culturally . . . issues like power and privilege, like gender politics,” sexual orientation, racism, ableism, and other interconnected issues of injustice.⁵⁴

VII. NURTURE A COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

The second characteristic of an ATR is its ability to nurture a commitment to social justice. This expands on Delgado Bernal’s notion of action “motivated by a desire for self or social transformation.”⁵⁵ An ATR should be able to nurture within its participants a commitment to social justice, with which they commit to dismantle all relations of power that create inequality. Initially one may begin to work toward the elimination of oppressive relations of power that they see as impacting their own lives. But as an agent further develops a multidimensional consciousness, which recognizes the struggles of others as their own, that individual moves toward a struggle beyond the self. As this occurs, collaboration with others in a common struggle becomes necessary, because as Laura Padilla explains, “[e]ffective change agents must collaborate in their efforts to wipe out those vestiges of oppression which many in the dominant culture continue to practice, both unintentionally and intentionally.”⁵⁶ Although ATRs must specifically work toward meeting each of these goals, the development of consciousness is never independent from the nurturing of a commitment to social justice, as they have a symbiotic relationship. Commitment to social justice in this context is understood as the commitment to engage in a process of transforming all relations of inequality, whether they are personal and individual or systemic and based on groups—both understood as political.

One way that *Raza Womyn* connects social justice with consciousness is through the development of an annual Chicana/Latina conference, for which they invite women across the city to participate in workshops and discussions about Chicana/Latina struggles. During this conference, the goal is to work towards social justice in several areas, from increasing the number of *mujeres*⁵⁷ in college to teaching women about *maquiladoras*, domestic violence, and queer awareness. There are a multitude of other issues that are addressed. There are about twenty workshops for different topics every year. Their fourth annual conference program stated,

This year’s theme is. . . The Fire in Our Spirit Continues the
Flame of Collective Revolution. . . It represents our internal

54. Interview with Rafael Gonzales, Executive Director of Public Allies, in Los Angeles, Cal. (Summer 2000).

55. Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 4.

56. Laura M. Padilla, *LatCrit Praxis to Heal Fractured Communities*, 2 HARV. LATINO L. REV. 375, 379 (1997).

57. We use *mujeres* and *mujer* to signify women of Latina/Chicana backgrounds. This is also a common practice of the *Raza Womyn* members.

passion, the ability to motivate ourselves and create change. It is the fire that burns within us to destroy the many “isms,” such as sexism, racism, homophobia, and classism, that attempt to dismantle our communities.⁵⁸

While *Raza Womyn* is a university women’s organization, the scope of their work is not limited to the confines of gender or university issues. They move beyond university concerns to address the needs of whole Latina/o communities. The way social justice is defined depends heavily on the location and identity of the individual that defines it. One member of *Raza Womyn* defines it, saying, “[s]ocial justice is having everyone in our community, each one of us defining what is and what we want as a whole community. And not having someone else tell us what is right and wrong for you. Being able to say, no this is what we want.”⁵⁹ She goes on to say this in reference to her identity:

Me being Chicana, me being a feminist, by me being a revolutionary, activist, educator, it’s like, it defines what I want to do and what I want to practice and how I want to educate people and what I want to do with my life and what I want my community or the people around me to start thinking, to opening their eyes.⁶⁰

While not all the members of *Raza Womyn* define themselves, and social justice, in this way, this perspective is definitely supported, nurtured, and shared within the organization. In this way, social justice begins to be defined and redefined collectively.

Carlos’ commitment started at a young age as his parents modeled it, “my involvement with political issues and social injustice issues very much stems from my parents becoming very involved, very active.”⁶¹ While his consciousness and commitment to social justice was initially awakened through his parents’ work, he would soon come to be active himself as a volunteer with *One-Stop Immigration* to fight against proposition 187; as a participant with the Latino Leadership Conference sponsored by the *National Conference of Community Justice*, from which a student coalition was formed to fight for student rights at local universities during the aftermath of the anti-affirmative campaign; through his mentoring within the *Big Brothers’ Amigos* Program to expose fatherless children to cultural events, libraries, the arts, and various college campuses; to his present work as a program coordinator with the *Constitutional Rights Foundation* and his participation with the Strategic

58. *Raza Womyn de UCLA*, Program for Fourth Annual Chicana/Latina Conference (1999).

59. See Lucia interview, *supra* note 46.

60. *Id.*

61. See Carlos interview, *supra* note 49.

Action for a Just Economy's information campaign against the Staple Center's expansion.

VIII. DEVELOP SKILLS AND EXPAND RESOURCES

Third, ATRs provide participants with the skills, tools, and services necessary to make change possible and probable. ATRs involve themselves in ensuring that personal needs are met, that skills are developed and refined, that the relationship between their hardship and structures of domination are understood, and that the possibilities for transforming their world are made a reality. Not only does it become important that individuals develop consciousness and commitment to social justice, but it becomes of greatest importance to understand the different avenues through which one can begin to create change and develop the skills to work through these various avenues to create change.

In *Raza Womyn*, the members each have distinct qualities that contribute to the success of the organization. Purposely, the organization has a loose structure that allows fluid participation and depends on self-initiative. There is no president, vice-president, or roles of that sort. Instead, there are committee chairs that take the lead on funding, and on external, internal, educational, and community programming. During the spring, the women hold an all day retreat, at which point they describe the work that each committee chair does, and they ask mujeres to volunteer to take on those roles in the upcoming year. Based on their interests, they discuss who might be a good fit for each committee. There is no official voting process; rather, these positions are filled based on a person's commitment and desire to fulfill the role. This process is done at the beginning of the spring quarter because the previous leadership trains the incoming leadership to take on their roles within the organization. This mentorship is especially important for funding purposes because all programming heavily depends on finances. The process of being funded has been an on-going challenge for *Raza Womyn* because of their small membership and marginalized presence. One woman, "Rosa," recalled the challenge that she was faced with when she became a leader of *Raza Womyn*:

There was so much drama because I remember my first year alone. We were fighting for office space. It was my first year. I didn't know anything. I was sitting down just telling people there asking me why we needed the office. I didn't know jack shit. We got shit funding. They didn't give a fuck about us. We were just another feminist group. You know. And as progressive as [the undergraduate student government] might have been, there was still a lot of homophobia, a lot of sexism. There were still so many issues.⁶²

62. Rosa is a pseudonym. *Raza Womyn* transcript of a focus group interview with Rosa (Mar. 9, 2000).

These experiences, during which women struggled with funding and maintaining their space, taught them the importance of teaching incoming members of the organization how to effectively deal with these concerns. To maintain their resources, they share and document the steps they take to sustaining these things. As the fourth year member of the organization who handles the majority of funding gets closer to graduating, she is reminded to share her workload and to get an “intern” who will learn how to maneuver the system.

IX. CREATES AND MAINTAINS AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Fourth, ATRs create a community of inclusiveness where injustice is grappled with as it relates to all its participants and their greater communities. The ways in which injustice impacts each individual in similar and distinct ways becomes an important issue for the formation of the community, as each individual is encouraged to be respectful of others’ perspectives while keeping in mind a common goal of working toward social justice. A common goal and definition of social justice may not become realized, but within the community the various struggles of empowerment are recognized and viewed as necessary. Maintaining a respectful and cohesive community can at times come into conflict with the efforts to challenge participants to develop a more critical and self-reflective consciousness. Nevertheless, all ATRs develop at different levels in terms of consciousness. This may cause certain struggles to lag behind others until the level of consciousness is raised around the specific issue that may lag behind others. The four characteristics of ATRs become common goals that the community strives for together and individually. With these preliminary characteristics of ATRs, we move to understanding the value of LatCrit for these organizations.

X. LATCRIT THEORY AND PRAXIS

Laura Padilla’s work on LatCrit Praxis can further assist us as we continue to define a model of ATRs. We believe that certainly LatCrit can and should be a vital tool for any agent involved with ATRs.⁶³ The way it gets utilized within an ATR can be guided by Padilla’s challenge to scholars (and others) to engage in LatCrit advocacy, LatCrit scholarship, and LatCrit practice.⁶⁴ By engaging agents in advocacy, scholarship, and practice, one begins to work towards meeting the goals outlined above.

Engaging in any type of progressive scholarship, but particularly LatCrit scholarship, can lead to a greater awareness and development of

63. See generally Padilla, *supra* note 56.

64. See *id.* at 379-94.

critiques of injustice as well as can be a manifestation of resistance. As agents within ATRs engage in LatCrit scholarship, they not only further their critique and demonstrate their commitment to unveil injustice, but they also are able to share with others an alternative, critical view of their world. LatCrit scholarship also can be a deviation from traditional neutral scholarship; therefore, it serves as a manifestation of resistance. Through LatCrit scholarship we can not only develop our own critique, commitment, and skills, but we can also challenge others to do the same. Scholars often feel that only they can engage in research, critique, and theorizing, but as it has been demonstrated time and time again, this is not the case. When we begin to recognize the abilities of people within other social and political spheres and see them as potential scholars of their own world, we can also move toward challenging them to engage in a critical analysis of their world.

Advocacy is also central in meeting the goals of ATRs. As we become advocates for and within our various communities, we are not seeking to save the others within our communities, but instead to share with them our critique of the conditions of that community and challenge them to serve as advocates for their own communities. We must recognize that members of disenfranchised communities can, and should, have a role in the construction of equality of opportunity.

Finally, LatCrit practice must be an essential way of developing consciousness and nurturing a commitment. It certainly becomes the best way to help develop skills and tools to create change as one begins to consider and demonstrate the various means of creating change.

XI. FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the previous four characteristics form the preliminary criteria for defining and understanding ATRs, there are other noteworthy observations that Covarrubias made while participating within multiple ATRs and conducting three pilot studies. First, ATRs are certainly influenced by the context within which they are formed, such that how participants or organizations themselves define concepts such as inequality in relations of power, social justice, and skills necessary to create change, are specific to the context (space and time).

A second observation made of ATRs relates to their interconnectedness with other ATRs through a “network of resistance” which is created. Oftentimes one finds that ATRs are either formally linked to other ATRs through collaborative efforts on various projects or informally linked through the floating participations of their participants to other ATRs. We have yet to encounter an ATR that is critical of all power relations that create problems. For this reason, participants will often be involved with several organizations in different capacities in order to gain further insight

and to commit to other issues of injustice, or to engage in action against certain types of injustices elsewhere. For example, Lucia, who is the most involved activist of the group, is active with several other organizations throughout the city. She is a youth educator, and thus was heavily involved in protesting Proposition 21, an anti-youth initiative in California. This year she attended a conference that shared strategies for working with youth of color, as well as an academic conference for Chicana/o studies. Last year, she gave her testimony at a protest for the Bus Riders Union and participated actively in the Justice for Janitors Strike in Los Angeles. She has been involved in affirmative action rallies, protests in support of the indigenous people of Mexico (the Zapatistas), and immigrant rights protests. Her level of involvement is extensive, and she is strongly committed to every cause that she feels accosts her community. She explains,

And I am angry. Yes, I am angry. There's a lot of reason for me to be angry. There's a lot of reason for our communities and youth to be angry. How is that anger going to be expressed? And that's how as the educated people that we are becoming, we have to understand that anger and the way we use that anger. We have to turn it into not so much of a violent and negative way, but more into a positive, active way. Where we're actually thinking about what we're gonna do and we're organizing.⁶⁵

This woman's passion stems from the injustice that she sees in her multiple communities. The pain that her students encounter in their communities and schools enrages her, as does the discrimination against indigenous people in Mexico, as well as the fact that anti-affirmative action initiatives in California have caused overwhelming decreases in the number of people of color in the universities. *Raza Womyn*, as an organization, does not necessarily participate in all of these different spheres, but this one member of the organization gets involved. Consequently, she not only makes the other women aware of these concerns, but she also recruits them to participate and network with these other organizations. Through these multiple relationships with these various communities, participants not only informally connect these physically unconnected groups, but they also, as individuals, begin to develop various distinct, yet connected expertise, various interrelated critiques of relations of power, and various commitments to several issues related to social justice. Part of the connection is made by, for example, carrying into these various groups the ideologies and insights learned in other groups.

65. Lucia interview, *supra* note 46.

XII. CONCLUSION

The model outlined above has attempted to produce an understanding of social justice-oriented organizations that work to alleviate the production and reproduction of inequality within schools and society in general. Besides providing us with important tools for a better understanding of social reality, ATRs have also progressively moved toward advancing greater possibilities for social justice. Despite progress, limitations remain. We must borrow from other traditions to begin to understand the role of race, class, sexual orientation, and gender as social concepts that explain the educational social experiences of minority students. We seek to understand students of color and poor students, not only as people that are individually oppressed, but also people whose experiences intersect with society to create a larger system of subordination.

