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The University Setting Reinforces Inequality

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Academia and its institutions foster inequality. Class, race, and gender inequalities permeate institutions of "higher learning." The power of academia rests upon the control or monitoring of ideas (what goes in and what comes out of academia) and its hierarchical, elitist ("selective") structures which promote rich over poor and working-class, whites over people of color, and men over women.

When we as Chicanas and Chicanos assaulted institutions of higher education more than a decade and a half ago, we recognized some of these inequities. We demanded fundamental changes within higher education. Our attention then focused on racial inequities. Class inequities were obviously present as well, but it took us a while to address that dimension of inequality head-on.

Certainly, such inequities persist. But currently, we are recognizing the incomplete agenda of our previous movement for equality. Attention is now turning to the pervasiveness of yet another dimension of inequality: the question of gender. I want to address our role in higher education as well as the question of gender in these remarks.

We can recall easily how the goals of our student *movimiento* were to change the structures and processes of higher education. Was this an idealistic movement? Yes, no, maybe? It certainly has been problematic. Many would question whether our collective struggle to foster equality *and* fundamental change in higher education has vanished; it certainly has diminished. Perhaps that aspect of challenge to the status quo has diminished partly because Chicano studies have now undergone an initial phase of institutionalization. To be sure, as compared to twenty years ago, there are more of us as students, Ph.D. candidates, faculty, and administrators. But how do we define our role in higher education? What is our political responsibility in academia? Do we still have political commitments?

Much of that desire for change in higher education has yielded to different notions of what we are about. Institutional power and

control loom as the guiding principles of who we are, what we want. Carefully examined, the current quest for institutional power and control is based upon criteria well accepted by institutions of higher education. Some illustrations:

(1) Personal power and authority are sought; power is seen as resting in individuals and what they control, that is, their "turf."

(2) Elitist principles go unchallenged; indeed, they are adhered to in some cases. There is, for example, an on-going categorization of each other among ourselves. Such categorizations adhere to the ever-so-hard-to-define criteria that most academics love ("scholarly excellence and objectivity," "an expert second to none," etc.) Rather than helping us appreciate and work with the diversity among us, reaffirming our strengths and strengthening our weaknesses, such categorizations serve other purposes. They tend to discriminate, to exclude, to separate us.

(3) Hierarchically based processes and policies are followed. For example, recruitment into graduate schools, academic departments, colleges, and universities still reflects traditional mechanisms: networks of who knows whom. Such a process is steeped in race, class, and gender biases.

(4) Finally, personal loyalty, allegiances, and commitment are becoming more attached to the institutions in which we work than to the community which supported our integration into those institutions. For example, Chicano/a presence in universities has been attributed more to university responsiveness than to any political movement of women and men to forge such a presence.

In short, there are certain values, attitudes, and behavior defined, supported, and enhanced in university settings which generate or reinforce inequality. Such values, attitudes, and behavior emerge as a result of the politics of class, race, and, most assuredly, patriarchy. Such values, attitudes, and behavior are also permeating our own endeavors. The question is: how do we respond?

Both Chicanas and Chicanos confront inequities in higher education. But I would like to make three distinctions here:

(1) We as Chicanas *experience* inequality differently than men;
(2) We as Chicanas *perceive* inequality differently; and
(3) We as Chicanas *respond* to inequality differently.

Our experiences differ in many ways, for many reasons. On a very

basic level, there are simply fewer of us (Chicanas) in higher educa-
tion, in graduate programs, and on faculties. Also, we occupy lower
positions within academia's hierarchy. We are not department
chairs, directors of programs, and so forth. As Rosabeth Moss
Kanter explains forcefully in *Men and Women of the Corporation*
(New York: Basic Books, 1977), a group's numbers and placement
within hierarchical structures hold numerous implications for that
group's power and status in those hierarchies.

Our perceptions of inequality also differ. Concerns of Chicanas in
higher education will be similar, but also significantly different from
those of men. Drawing upon feminist dialogue and discussion on in-
equality, Chicana feminists will tend to confront, to challenge, the
separation of our professional world from our community-based
commitments and personal responsibilities. We do not accept the
artificial separation of our lives into the so-called public and private
realms. We as Chicana feminists are calling for altering the basis of
power and influence within our communities and places of work.

Because of these different experiences and perceptions of what we
want, our responses to inequality also differ from those of men.
Feminist dialogue continues to point out that the "personal is
political." We must foster equality in our work and personal
behavior, and not just publicly support such a principle. In general,
a total reorientation is called for: reexamining what we are about, as
students, teachers, scholars. What does our intellectual activity en-
tail?

All of these three factors, the different experiences, perceptions,
and responses on the part of women, point to the fact that Chicanas
have a leading role to play in the articulation of issues for the
Chicano community within and outside the halls of academia.