

Colorado *Comadres* of the Chicano Movement: Women, Activism, and Motherhood in

Pueblo, Colorado

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Most historical accounts of The Chicano Movement, especially those about Southern Colorado, document the movement as having ended in the late 1970s, however el movimiento in Pueblo, Colorado continues on today because Chicana activists have made the movement intergenerational through their motherhood and their community networks of mentorship and compadrazgo. Chicana roles of motherhood, activism, and mentorship are inseparable, simultaneous, and therefore impact one another. Through an analysis of interviews conducted with six prominent Chicana activists from Pueblo and Southern Colorado and some of their children as well as ethnographic details of Pueblo, this thesis aims to reveal an ongoing Chicano Movement sustained by the lives and lessons of Chicana activists.

Acknowledgements

To the women who raised me

Rita J Martinez

Dr. Velia Rincon

Deborah Espinoza

Shirley Romero Otero

Dr. Irene Blea

Theresa Trujillo

Angelina Otero

Lucia Lawson

Raven Gutierrez

Juli Grigsby

In memory of Sheila Ibañez, a mother and activist

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Introduction

I like to say that my mother and my grandmother raised me. Both single mothers, both fierce advocates for my Chicana cultural and gendered empowerment. I am who I am because of the lessons they passed down to me through their mothering me. One of my strongest memories of the two of them and what they instilled in me took place at an immigrants' rights rally in my hometown, Pueblo, Colorado. In April of 2006, my mother and grandmother took my cousins and me to Mineral Palace to join hundreds of other demonstrators advocating for better policies that would allow smoother access to legal residency for migrant workers. We were a group of 7 women, our ages ranging from five years to fifty-two years old. I remember feeling bold, empowered, and immensely connected to the women who brought me to the demonstration. My mother was interviewed about bringing my cousins and I along to the rally by the Denver Post that day and was quoted saying, "I think it's important for them to see what we're struggling for, and that's justice for all. We're all Americans. We all come from somewhere" ("Hundreds Rally to Seek 'Justice' for Immigrants" 2006). That day, my mother and grandmother taught me to stand up for what is right, give voice to those who do not have the power to do so, and to be a part of something bigger than myself.

The rally we attended in 2006 was hardly Pueblo's first display of commitment to civil rights. In the 1960s and 1970s, Pueblo, Colorado and Southern Colorado were hotspots of the Chicano Movement. Chicano youth, particularly undergraduate college students propelled and sustained the movement (Marquez 1983). Chicanos across the region were vocal about issues relating to historic land rights in the San Luis Valley, discrimination and police brutality against Chicanos, economic inequality, and the absence of Chicano representation in schools (Marquez 2007; Archuletta Jr 2012). At the height of the movement, Pueblo's population was

approximately 125,000 with the Chicano population totaling 31,800 (Marquez 1983). Compared to Denver's population of 493,887 in 1960, Pueblo was much smaller and much less documented in its activity. Denver's Chicano Movement has been documented and historicized in articles, books, and documentaries (Vigil 1999; National Farm Workers Association 2007). *El movimiento* in Pueblo was however was more locally documented, especially by the alternative Chicano newspaper called *La Cucaracha*. *La Cucaracha* was started by students who moved from Colorado University Boulder to Pueblo to give Chicanos a platform to share their perspective on issues that were covered from the mainstream Anglo perspective in the local *Pueblo Chieftain*. *La Cucaracha* was a critical piece of information sharing that helped sustain the movement because the publishers and the content creators were Chicanas and Chicanos writing from their vantage point to Chicana and Chicano audiences. The newspaper included news coverage of incidents of police brutality against Chicanos in the area, updates on demonstrations happening in Pueblo and Southern Colorado, open letters to the Chicano community, advertisements for Chicana support groups and more resources aimed directly at a Chicano readership. It is now digitally archived by the Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, which allows for the memory and legacy of the movement to live on into the present. Other than *La Cucaracha*, a handful of academic essays (Archuletta Jr, Rick Christopher 2012; Marquez 1983) and mentions in Colorado historicizations of the Chicano Movement (Vigil 1999), it is difficult to find Pueblo-specific histories of the Chicano Movement.

The Pueblo-specific accounts of *el movimiento* that do exist center male voices (Marquez 1983; Vigil 1999; Martínez et al. 2016). Women's voices have been overlooked and largely erased in the recounting of the events of the movement in Pueblo, and in the larger

Chicano Movement nationwide. Most of the attention was paid to the male activists, namely the “Four Horsemen of the Chicano Movement” Cesar Chavez, Reyes Lopez Tijerina, Angel Gutierrez and Corky Gonzales who were public figures famous for their charismatic, individual leadership. Most people are able to name Dolores Huerta, who co-founded the United Farm Workers alongside Cesar Chavez, as a prominent Chicana activist, however only in recent years has she been recognized with the national attention through a PBS documentary (Bratt 2017).

While Chicana activists, their involvement in the movement and their reflections on their experiences in a male-dominated social movement such as the Chicano movement are not well documented among the male centered voices, even less documented are the other roles they occupied in conjunction with their activism. Several Chicana activists were (and are) mothers and caretakers. These roles cannot be separated from their roles as activists; conversely, they are intricately related to their activism. In removing these other roles they fulfill in their lives from our analyses of their actions, we miss a rich interaction between activism and motherhood, between activism and friendship, and between activism and *compadrazgo*¹. In all of these relationships between Chicana activists, their children, and the youth in their communities is realized a passing down of generational wisdom acquired by the elder generation and passed to the next. In this intergenerational transfer of wisdom is the continuation of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, Colorado. In order to highlight this continuation of the movement through the relationships Pueblo Chicana activists have with

¹ “Compadrazgo, "coparenthood," is a traditional ritual fictive kinship system that provides a network of mutually supportive relationships in the Mexican American culture”(Gill-Hopple 2012).

their children, each other, and the youth in their communities, this thesis focuses on the lives of six prominent Chicana activists who have worked and lived in Pueblo, Colorado.

During the summer of 2017, I began to interview Chicana activists in Pueblo and Southern Colorado who were involved in the Chicano movement in various capacities from the early 1970s to now. I was originally interested in their experiences as women activists in a nationalist movement, but I soon became especially interested in their roles as mothers and activists in a movement that many of them recognize as continuing on today in Pueblo and Southern Colorado. For many of these women, the work they were involved in during the height of the movement impacted their career choices and the trajectory of their lives as community members. In a similar way, their activism impacted their engagement with their motherhood. While several of the women expressed that this was a crucial interplay between roles in their lives, they also expressed that my interviews with them asking explicitly about this interplay was the first time they had been asked these questions. The inquiry into how their activism impacted and impacts their motherhood is a crucial piece of the movement because these two roles are simultaneous and inseparable.

El Movimiento, The movement, and The Chicano Movement

For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using the terms “The Chicano Movement”, “the movement”, and “*el movimiento*” in distinct ways. The Chicano Movement denotes the larger Chicano Movement that is recorded to have taken place across the nation, especially in California, Texas, and the US Southwest, during the late 1960s and 1970s. I will refer to “the movement” as the Chicano Movement that more specifically took place in Colorado in the same time frame. *El movimiento* will be used to denote the ongoing involvement and engagement in Chicano empowerment and activism that continues to shape Pueblo and

Southern Colorado today. These distinctions are important to this thesis as I argue that the movement did not end in the 1970s; it lives on through the work and lives of Chicana activists, their mothering and their children. I've chosen to use *el movimiento* to describe this continuation because while it translates to English as "the movement" its connotation can be more closely related to a flowing and moving process, whereas "the movement" carries a more static, historical connotation.

Furthermore "*el movimiento*" is already being used in Colorado discourse as a present day expansion on the events of the past. There are currently two museum exhibits, one in Denver and one in Pueblo, dedicated to recording the movement in Colorado. The exhibits are titled "El Movimiento: The Chicano Movement in Colorado" at the Colorado History Museum in Denver and "El Movimiento: The Chicano Movement in Colorado and Pueblo" at the El Pueblo Museum in downtown Pueblo. The exhibits are made up largely of artifacts curated by Chicana and Chicano activists, including their clothing, pins, protest signs, notes from meetings, and images of demonstrations. The two exhibits bring events from the past to the physical present in Downtown Denver, the capitol of Colorado, and Downtown Pueblo, the most frequented area in Pueblo for locals and tourists alike. The Pueblo exhibit has been up for almost two years and is now being moved to Pueblo Community College as the college lives up to its name as a Hispanic Serving Institution. Denver's exhibit is a permanent installation part of a larger "Colorado Stories" exhibit. Both of the exhibits express the necessity of remembering and preserving *el movimiento*.

"*El Movimiento*" is being used to sustain the memory of the movement also through print culture. Chicana and Chicano activists published El Movimiento de Pueblo: An

Anthology of Chicana and Chicano Activism in 2016. The introduction of the anthology describes the sentiment of “*el movimiento*” in saying,

“El Movimiento is the River Aztlán with no end. Racism, discrimination and prejudice are as visible now as in the 1970s. Our communities need help, and like the 1970s, that help has to come from within our own Chicano communities. That is the point of this book”(Martinez et al 2016).

The editorial committee for this book collected articles, poetry, and photos from “people who lived the Movement” in order to frame Pueblo’s history of activism from a first-person perspective and to lift the voices of those previously silenced by opposing powers (Martinez et al 2016). The book is available in Pueblo local libraries, the libraries at Colorado State University Pueblo and Pueblo Community College, and is now also being used as a textbook in Pueblo high school history courses. It is also available for purchase at the El Pueblo Museum and online. I carry my copy, which was purchased for me by my mom’s *comadre*² and my mentor Velia Rincon, who heavily influenced this thesis, in my backpack along with my interview transcripts and other resource materials I’ve obtained for this research project. Each time the book is read, referenced, or passed on to another person the histories and spirit of *el movimiento* grow stronger. Rita J Martinez, who served on the editorial committee for the anthology, signs each copy with “*el movimiento sigue*” meaning “the movement continues” and it is in this spirit that I use “*el movimiento*” to describe the continuation of The Chicano Movement in Pueblo.

² Comadre- female family member or friend who is a source of social support. Translating to “co-mother”, comadres are often godmothers who “have been identified as family of fictive kin that provide support through assistance with child care, household assistance, and general peer support for healthy behaviors”(Gill-Hopple 2012).

Literature Review

The lives of Pueblo Chicana activists are intersectional. As women, daughters, mothers, community members, students, teachers, and activists, their roles in their own lives and the lives of others are multiple and simultaneous. They have been faced with the task of negotiating and balancing these roles. Resulting from these negotiations are lifelong lessons passed down to their children who in turn carry the Chicano Movement on into the present day and the future.

In addressing women's involvement in a male dominated movement, it is important to also look at women's leadership, specifically Chicana women's leadership. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago (1992) looks at different aspects of Hispanic women's lives, including Chicana women, and how they impacted the ways Latinas managed their lives as developing leaders. This study was the first to include themes of Hispanic women's educational attainment, employment backgrounds, career goals, personal aspirations, cultural differences, societal obstacles, and styles of leadership. To understand Chicana leadership, we must also understand the factors that impact that leadership and what factors bring them to that leadership, one of the most important factors being Latino culture. Bonilla-Santiago found that eighty-four percent of the women leaders in her study attributed the way communal way they exercise leadership to the Latino culture. She found that their style of leadership is heavily connected to grassroots and community commitments and interests. This is a significant finding in regards to women exercising leadership because in the face of mainstream conceptions of leadership consisting of an individual leader and a group that follows, communal leadership often goes unrecognized and unappreciated. Bonilla-Santiago does not look at motherhood in her analysis of Hispanic women and their leadership styles,

however, her research supports mine in that several of the women came to be involved in the movement before they became mothers. It is important to note that leadership styles and motivations might have changed for the women during their motherhood (Bonilla-Santiago, Gloria 1992).

Denise A. Segura (1989) compares motherhood and employment among Chicanas and Mexican Immigrant Women Workers. She argues that Chicana women, because they have been raised in a society that values and celebrates the traditional gender roles of family, “express higher adherence to the ideology of stay-at-home motherhood and correspondingly more ambivalence to full-time employment” (Segura 1989). The study is based on in-depth interviews with thirteen Chicanas and seventeen Mexicanas between the years of 1978-1979 and 1980-1981. Segura writes, “Among the study informants, differences in social origins, family economics, employment, and experience with manifestations of patriarchy influenced women’s conceptualizations of motherhood and employment” (199). Like Bonilla-Santiago, Segura addresses several factors that influence Chicana women’s path to involvement in the workplace outside of the home. “Chicanas described high levels of ambivalence concerning the interplay between motherhood and employment. This difference reflects Chicanas’ desire to realize the prevailing social construction of motherhood that exalts child rearing over paid employment.” (199). Segura found that Chicana women had deeper connections to idealized roles of motherhood that excluded being away from the home during the early years of their children’s’ lives. While ambivalence towards being employed and therefore spending less time with their children is a bit different from being involved in a movement, Segura’s findings are an interesting perspective on what has influenced Chicana women’s involvement

in affairs and activities that may keep them from fully embracing the traditional full-time role of “mother”.

My research has pulled me towards looking at the interplay between activism and motherhood and how the two inform each other in the experiences of Chicana activists in Pueblo, Colorado and Southern Colorado. In being mothers and activists, I am interested in what lessons the women were able to pass down to their children, whether they were deliberate or inevitable lessons. Jessica M. Vasquez (2010) writes about how contemporary Chicana mothers raise children in an age of racial hierarchy in the US. She writes, “Chicana mothering requires acting as a guardian or mediator between children and racial messages from the “outside world”(school, media, interracial social networks)”(Vasquez 2010). Chicana mothers, especially activist mothers are charged with the task of preparing their children for the outside world and the discrimination and obstacles they might face because of their identity. The lessons Chicana mothers teach their children and the way they teach them impact the child’s perception of the outside world and impact the way the child will then engage with it.

This project is concerned with the knowledge that gets passed down from Chicana activists to their children. Dolores Delgado Bernal (2006) describes what she calls “pedagogies of the home” as, “the communication, practices, and learning that occur in the home and community often serve as a cultural knowledge base that helps Chicana college students negotiate the daily experiences of sexist, racist, and classist microaggressions”(2006). This thesis expands this notion by suggesting that the lessons taught at home and in the community are valuable in more than just a college setting, but impact the lives of the children of Chicanas in various capacities. Delgado Bernal suggests that these pedagogies are

shaped by “collective experiences and community memory”. Especially in the case of Pueblo and *el movimiento*, Chicanas created social groups that cared for and supported each other and their children. This is evident in the several connections made even between the six Chicana activists I interviewed and their children. Several of the families are connected through baptizing each other’s children and therefore marking the community as family. Delgado Bernal writes, “This knowledge passed from one generation to the next – often by mothers and other female family members – can help us survive in everyday life by providing an understanding of certain situations and explanations about why things happen under certain conditions”. This thesis is concerned with the way that the knowledge that is passed down between generations has impacted the lives of the children of Chicana activists and the results of that impact on their present lives.

For some of the women involved in my research, religion has played a significant role in their lives as activists, mothers, and daughters, specifically Catholicism. Their relationships to Catholicism cannot be clearly characterized as positive or negative because their positionality towards a patriarchal religious system may shift depending on how they engage with the religion, how the Church has influenced their lives as women, and how their families interact with the Church. Brenda Sendejo (2013) has written about the spiritual practices and beliefs of women involved in social justice causes living in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. She argues, “women are critiquing and working to reverse gender hierarchies, patriarchy, and other social inequalities within and outside of organized religion” through their reconfigurations of how they view and practice spirituality. For some of the six women involved in my research, the Catholic Church served as a space for cultivation of a social

justice consciousness, whereas for others, it represented stifling gender role expectations for men and women.

Methodology

For this project, I employ a Chicana feminist framework (Hurtado, Aida 1998; (Irene I. Blea 1988, 1995), which addresses the triple oppression of Chicana women based on race, gender, and class, as this is a study on Chicana women in a working class setting who have been instrumental in the success and continuation of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, Colorado. In summarizing the contributions Chicana feminist scholars, creative writers, and artists have made to theorizing about gender subordination and the foundations for Chicana liberation Aida Hurtado writes, “Chicana feminisms were born out of acts of disruption, especially in the Chicano movement, to create spaces of resistance to patriarchy in general and patriarchy in their own ethnic/racial groups”(1998). This thesis is an act of disruption to the masculinist history of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo that has left out the vital voices of Chicana activists. In order to disrupt the mainstream historicization of the movement and to fill an absence of women’s voices, I have only interviewed women.

Dr. Irene Blea writes about the resistance that many Chicanas faced during the movement from the Chicano leaders who believed that any divergence from a focus on race was a hindrance to the success of the movement. “Men criticized women for drawing attention and energy away from the Chicano movement and into a movement that had little to do with Chicanas. They also criticized Chicanas for destroying the basis of Chicano culture: the family”(Irene I. Blea 1988). Chicanas faced this sexism within the Chicano movement and also faced racism within mainstream Women’s Rights movements. “Institutionalized racism created a division between minority women and other feminists. This manifested itself in the academic curriculum. Most women’s studies departments and programs did not develop

courses on Mexican American women and incorporate them into their curriculum until after Mexican American women developed such courses and curricula in Chicano studies”(I. I. (Irene I. Blea 1995, 1988). The racism that Chicanas faced in feminist circles affected and still affects the ways that the academy write about Chicanas. It is for this reason that I, in writing about Chicana women, must acknowledge the history of their discrimination in the social and academic spheres.

Further, in taking up themes of motherhood and intergenerational activism, this project draws upon Black queer feminism and revolutionary mothering theories. Alexis Pauline Gumbs posits motherhood as radical because of the ways that oppressive systems try to stunt and prevent mothering. She writes,

“Those of us who nurture the lives of those children who are not supposed to exist, who are not supposed to grow up, who are revolutionary in their very beings are doing some of the most subversive work in the world. If we don’t know it, the establishment does”(Gumbs, 20).

Women who raise children of color, like the women involved in my project, are raising children who are not supposed to exist within a mainstream Anglo-society. Yet they are raising them with a mentality of resistance and strength that lives on through the generations. In the case of the Chicano Movement in Pueblo, Chicana activists who were raising their children to see and experience the movement were exposing them simultaneously to a rich expression of the battle for equality against an oppressive Anglo-American mainstream society. As children of resistance, their very existence is a revolutionary site.

For this project, I am interested in what the children of Chicana activists inherit from their mothers through the process of having been raised in a social movement. I argue that having seen their mothers involved in a social movement, the children learned unique lessons and inherited a special kind of wisdom of resilience. Cynthia Dewi Oka writes,

“There is a vast store of experience, knowledge and resilience in the lives of oppressed women who have made *continuing* possible for their communities even as white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal capitalism has intensified its efforts to deprive us to form the means of mothering ourselves and our communities”(Oka, 52).

Chicana women, and women of color, are raising children up against the odds of oppressive systems. A main goal of the Chicano Movement was to protect and preserve Chicano culture for future generations. In the face of forced assimilation into mainstream Anglo-American society, Chicana activists not only advocated for their communities, they also prepared a future for their children to be able to know and appreciate their own cultural history. In this way, Chicana activists in Pueblo were mothers to their children and mothers to their communities. They did so and continue to do so by using their lived experiences as learning and teaching tools. Oka writes,

“The home is not a private resource that we draw from to do the real revolutionary work ‘out there.’ It is *the front of human sustenance* that is constitutive of hetero-patriarchal, white supremacist capitalism *and* its limits”(Oka, 54).

Here Oka contests the public/private sphere dichotomy often used to describe women and mothering as private matters. This project seeks to better understand how the public and private become less separated through Chicana activism and motherhood. Further, this project is focused on the lessons that Chicana activists in Pueblo taught their children by virtue of incorporating their activism into the mothering praxis.

As I am analyzing and discussing the interviews as texts representing lived experiences of the Chicana women, I also draw from Cherrie Moraga’s theory in the flesh as she describes it in *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.

Theories in the flesh allow for women of color to tell their stories in their own words, and in doing so create “a politic born out of necessity”(Moraga, 23). The work Pueblo Chicana activists engage in and the way they merge that work with their mothering and caring for

others comes from the necessity of merging these aspects of their lives. Because of who they are and the circumstances of their being, Pueblo Chicana activists' existence is a form of resistance to the many oppressive forces they experience as working class Chicana mothers.

Claudia G. Cervantes-Soon writes,

“Theories in the flesh conceptualize the body as the material site on which women of color experience the consequences of living in a particular social and geopolitical location and as the basis for an intellectual knowledge that is inexorably rooted in politics of resistance and liberation. In this sense, women’s brown bodies, rather than separate from the mind, are the channels and agents of theory and praxis”(Cervantes-Soon, 98).

From this theory, I depend heavily on letting the interviews, and the lives they represent, stand on their own as complex and sometimes contradictory. Theories in the flesh are especially important in the second section of this thesis in which the women talk about the multiple roles they fulfill as women, mothers, activists, students and teachers. In occupying these roles, their bodies are the sites of negotiating the different demands and expectations made of them from various external sources.

Methods

This research draws upon the stories I collected from Chicana activists, my own ethnographic experiences of being in my hometown of Pueblo, Colorado, and my media analysis of the online archive of the Pueblo Chicano Newspaper *La Cucaracha*. I have conducted two sets of in-person and phone interviews with Dr. Velia Rincon, Rita Martinez, Deborah Espinoza, Shirley Romero Otero, Theresa Trujillo, and Dr. Irene Blea. Each of these women was referred to me through familial and community connections. I advertised on my personal Facebook profile that I was interested in speaking with Chicanas who were active in the Chicano Movement and/or Chicanas whose work has been impacted by the movement.

Soon I had a list of contacts that were involved in various ways in the movement of the 1970s and in *el movimiento* that lives on today. The first set of interviews took place in the summer of 2017 while I was home visiting my family. Each interview lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour. I met the women in their homes, at their workplaces, and at local coffee shops to conduct the interviews. Before this research began, I had already met Velia, as she is a longtime *comadre* of my mother, I had known Theresa Trujillo as I had attended grade school and high school with her nephews, and I had known of Deborah Espinoza as I attended elementary school with one of her grandsons. As for Rita, Shirley, and Irene, it was my first time interacting with them one-on-one despite having known their names from local history and community connections. I reached out to each woman over email, text, and/or phone call depending on how they had been referred to me. Once I introduced myself as a Pueblo native returning to my hometown to write about Chicana activists, they were all excited and willing to meet with me. I asked several guiding questions including 1) Please introduce yourself and tell me about how you became involved in *el movimiento*, 2) What was your role in the movement? 3) What were your experiences as a woman in a male dominated movement? 4) What do you think makes Pueblo unique in comparison to other places where the Chicano Movement took place? 5) Where do you see the movement today in Pueblo? and 6) Do you have any advice to budding Chicana activists? I returned to Pueblo in the winter and conducted follow up interviews in January 2018 with Deborah Espinoza, Rita Martinez, and Irene Blea. I chose these three women for follow-up interviews because as my research question became more focused on motherhood and activism, I realized I had focused the least on their motherhood during our first interview rounds, despite them having raised their now adult children at the height of the movement (the late 1960s and early 1970s). Shirley Romero

Otero also raised her children during this time period, but I felt that she had already reflected on her motherhood and activism in our first interview. During these second interviews, I shared with them that my research question had shifted to focus on their motherhood as it was impacted by their activism. Because these were our second interactions with one another, I was more comfortable letting the interview be more casual with fewer leading questions. Instead, I asked that they share some memories with me of raising their children while being involved in *el movimiento*, and from there, the interviews took off on their own. Without many questions on my end, except for clarification on time frames and places, the women spoke for at least an hour each about the intersections of their activism and their motherhood.

The women who I interviewed vary in age, their roles in the movement were and are diverse, and their current professional and personal lives are unique. Their ages range from 40 to 72, so their stories and experiences of their introductions to the movement and their activism depend on how the progress of the movement intersected with their coming of age and social justice consciousness formations. While this thesis focuses on Pueblo as a geographical case study, not all the women are Pueblo natives, nor do they all live in Pueblo currently, however all of the women have either lived in Pueblo or have had extensive relationships with the Chicano community in Pueblo. Four of the six women were born outside of Pueblo, three moved to Pueblo in their youth, and two currently live in cities outside of Pueblo. Currently, these women work as educators, authors, land rights activists, community organizers, and grant writers. Three of the women, while retired, continue to spearhead several local demonstrations, protests, and celebrations. Each woman I interviewed identifies as Chicana. Some identify as indigenous and Chicana, Latina and Chicana, and/or Hispanic and Chicana. While Latina and Hispanic are often external identifiers assigned by

entities such as censuses, Chicana is a more deliberate, personal identity that not all people of Mexican descent adopt. Norma Alarcón (1990) writes about this name *Chicana* saying that it is “consciously and critically assumed and serves as point of redeparture for dismantling historical conjunctures of crisis, confusion, political and ideological conflict”. While many Chicanas are of Mexican or Mexican-American descent, *Chicana* is not readily interchangeable with Mexican or Mexican-American unless the user of the identifier decides this is so. Five of the six women have children of their own, while all of them are caretakers in their families. Two of the women consider themselves children of the movement because they were born while the movement was ongoing and their parents were involved in the height of the movement in the late 1960s and 1970s (Blackwell 2011).

Profiles

Dr. Velia Rincon, self-described as a child of the movement, is a Chicano Studies professor at Pueblo Community College, where she is the only ethnic studies professor on campus. She was also my first grade Spanish teacher at Cesar Chavez Academy, later my 8th grade counselor, and is now one of my mother’s closest *comadres*. She was born in Fruta, Colorado, a small rural community, and moved to Pueblo to obtain her undergraduate degree at Colorado State University- Pueblo. Rita J. Martinez, born and raised in the Pueblo, was a part of the Chicano Movement in her involvement with the Chicano newspaper *La Cucaracha* where she was involved with protesting and addressing police brutality against Brown and Black bodies; she now sits on the Cinco de Mayo Celebration³ board, she organizes a Día de La Raza, which is a day of education before Columbus Day to celebrate Pueblo’s indigenous

³ Cinco De Mayo Celebration in Pueblo is a day of celebration and education aimed at acknowledging the Mexican victory over France in Puebla, Mexico in 1862. Pueblo, Colorado celebrates this holiday with a parade, cultural entertainment at a local park, and a car show. See the 2018 advertisement for the 48th annual celebration.

heritage, and she spearheads the annual Columbus Day protest⁴. Deborah Espinoza was born and raised in Grand Junction, Colorado and moved to Pueblo to co-found the Chicano newspaper *La Cucaracha* in the mid 1970s. She is the former director of the El Pueblo Museum where an exhibit dedicated to Pueblo's Chicano Movement is currently housed. Shirley Romero Otero, a Jicarilla Apache descendent and heir to a major land grant in San Luis Valley, has been an active land-rights activist since the 1970s and continues her work tirelessly today. She was born and raised in San Luis and continues to live there today, however her work as a land rights activist has been heavily tied to the movement in Pueblo and she continues to be involved in *el movimiento* in Southern Colorado. Theresa Trujillo, born and raised in Pueblo, also describes herself as a child of the movement because of her parent's involvement in it during her childhood, works as a community partner with The Colorado Trust to help local groups gain access to state funded grants. Dr. Irene Blea grew up in Pueblo and was active at CU-Boulder as a student activist in the 1970s where she earned her Ph.D. in sociology, she taught the first La Chicana course at CU-Boulder, has written several books on studying Chicano communities and *La Chicana*, and she continues to write novels based on her life experiences in Pueblo and New Mexico where she currently lives.

I have also been in contact with children of Shirley Romero Otero and Irene Blea.

While this thesis is concerned with the way that Chicana activists mothered their children and cared for the next generation of Chicana and Chicano youth, hearing from some of the adult children of said Chicana activists provides this thesis with a perspective from the other side of mothering. Their stories shed light on the way that growing up watching their mothers raise

⁴ While the Pueblo Sons of Italy celebrate Columbus day in honor of their Italian heritage, Rita Martinez and the Abolish Columbus Day Committee seek to abolish the holiday as they recognize it as a holiday celebrating murder, hatred, and the first white supremacist to land in the Americas (Spencer 2017).

them while raising a movement impacted them. I argue that the intersection of Chicana activism with their motherhood has resulted in an ongoing *movimiento* powered by their children and what they learned from their activist mothers. Through explicit lessons they were taught by their mothers and implicit experiences they witnessed as being the children of Chicana activists, the children inherited ideologies and practices of social justice and community engagement. *El movimiento* is an intergenerational passing of wisdom and practice from one generation to the next through the intersection of activism, motherhood, and *compadrazgo*.

Pueblo: Space and Place

Pueblo, Colorado is located in Southern Colorado. It's about the same distance to Northern New Mexico as it is to Denver. When people ask where I'm from, I add this detail because it points also to our cultural closeness to the rest of the Southwest. *Pueblo* translates to *town* in Spanish, and beyond our name, we have several ties to Mexican and Spanish cultures. The Arkansas River that runs through downtown Pueblo delineated the US-Mexico border until 1812. The 2016 Census reported 42.8% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, the next largest population next to 52.4% of the population identifying as White, not Hispanic or Latino with only 3.8% of citizens having foreign born parents. Puebloans are often quoted saying, "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us" signifying a Mexican heritage both geographical and cultural. The Pueblo Historic Riverwalk is currently lined with French, Texan, Spanish, Mexican and American flags representing the different territories that once claimed the land on which our city sits.

We are a historically working class city. After the Rockefeller family bought Pueblo's largest steel mill in 1903, Pueblo experienced steel booms where laborers flooded the city in

the 1920s and again in the 1940s during WWII. The second boom brought New Mexican workers and Mexican migrant workers largely through the Bracero Program⁵. Hispanic workers, because of racism and classism, were pushed to the city's margins and took up residence in mostly on Pueblo's east side. By the 1960s the city's population was 125,000 with the official Chicano population figuring 31,800. Though Chicanos were a minority, they made up a majority of high school dropouts, juvenile probation offenders, welfare recipients, and inmates within the Pueblo jails. It was not uncommon for Chicano students to go a full twelve years of education without coming into contact with a single Chicano educator. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, influenced by the Chicano Movement in Texas and California, Colorado and Pueblo students sprung into action to confront these issues (Marquez 1983). This action has come to be remembered in Pueblo as *el movimiento*.

To supplement the stories obtained through the interviews, I have also spent time at the El Pueblo Museum in Pueblo where the exhibit "El Movimiento: The Chicano Movement in Colorado and Pueblo" currently resides. This exhibit displays several artifacts from the movement as well as videos and testimonies of those who had been active in the movement. I've also visited the main "El Movimiento: The Chicano Movement in Colorado" exhibit at the Colorado History Museum in Denver, Colorado, where I was able to gather a visual representation of some of the major events of the Chicano Movement in Denver and other parts of Colorado.

⁵ "The Bracero Program grew out of a series of bi-lateral agreements between Mexico and the United States that allowed millions of Mexican men to come to the United States to work on, short-term, primarily agricultural labor contracts. It was created by executive order in 1942 because many growers argued that World War II would bring labor shortages to low-paying agricultural jobs" ("Bracero History Archive | About" n.d.).

During the summer of 2017, while I was in Pueblo interviewing the six Chicana activists, I also took the opportunity to look at my hometown through the lens of a “native anthropologist”. As such, I became both the informant and the subject of study in this research. Mónica Russel y Rodríguez suggests “that being a Chicana anthropologist focusing on Chicana/Chicano communities disrupts [the] division of the knower and the Native”(Russel y Rodríguez 1998). Despite the discipline’s efforts to transcend it’s colonial past, in which Western ethnographers would travel to the Natives in order to write objectively about the Native subjects, anthropology still tends to leave the Native informer as unacknowledged because she occupies a contradictory space between objective and subjective(Russel y Rodríguez 1998). During my time in Pueblo, while I interviewed Chicana activists in my hometown, and while I analyzed their interviews, I have had to negotiate for myself what it means to have the privilege of writing as an anthropologist about people with whom I identify. On the one hand, I acknowledge my privilege as a college student returning to my working class community, writing about my community, and returning these writings to a collection of literature that has not acknowledged the specific group of Pueblo Chicana activists I have interviewed. On the other hand, I recognize my responsibility to my community to let their stories speak for themselves. In finishing this thesis, I hope to present my work to those who have been a part of this research, and further, I hope to add this to our local archives and repertoire of literature about Pueblo and *el movimiento*. As a Chicana and as a Puebloan, I am thrilled and honored to document some of the complex stories that have made Pueblo the place it is today.

El movimiento has been able to live on in different facets in the Pueblo and Southern Colorado region because of the work of Chicana activists and because of the generational,

experiential wisdom they passed down to their children and other community youth through their mothering practices. For some Chicana activists involved in this research, they themselves inherited the movement from their parents, and for others they passed it down to their children and the youth in the communities to which they belong. This thesis aims to highlight this ongoing Chicano Movement while also crediting and uplifting the voices of Chicanas who have been the catalysts and sustaining forces in its continuation. Chapter one shows how the six Chicana activists became involved in the Chicano Movement. The second chapter examines the challenges of balancing and negotiating the multiple roles, Chicana activists fulfill as mothers, *comadres*, and mentors. The third chapter draws on reflections from three daughters of Chicana activists and how their upbringing as children of the movement has impacted their lives as adults. These three sections come together to show the ways that Chicana activists carried their activism into their other roles as mothers, *comadres*, and mentors. In this crossover between roles, we begin to see how Pueblo Chicana activists cultivated and cared for coming generations of *el movimiento*.

Chapter One: Making Connections

The Chicanas I interviewed connected with the movement in various ways. Depending on their age, their location, their skill sets, they served the movement in unique capacities. Before they became mothers and mentors themselves, they were influenced and impacted by others who were involved in and around the movement. Eventually they would come to balance and negotiate their roles within the movement with their roles as mothers, daughters, community members, and any other role they fulfill. This section focuses on the various ways that these six Chicanas found themselves involved in the movement and connected to one another as mentors, mentees, and *comadres*. In learning about the ways that Chicanas were brought into the movement, I hope to understand their motivations for passing their experiential wisdom down to their own children and young community members. By highlighting the women's entries into the movement, this section shows a multitude of experiences and perspectives these women brought to their activism. In this multitude, we might begin to appreciate the ways that Chicanas have been and are inspired to advocate for themselves, their community members, and eventually for their children.

Dr. Irene Blea

Dr. Irene Blea's father was an organizer for the Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporations, (locally known as the Steel Mill) union and for the AFL-CIO. It was from witnessing her father's work with these unions that gave her an introduction to a working class consciousness that would later influence her activism in the Chicano Movement. Beyond her father, she recalled that her feminist ideology began to form while she was young, and it was her Aunt Suzanna who challenged her to stand up for herself as a young woman. In our first interview, Irene recalled an instance in which her Aunt firmly reminded her sisters Suzanna and Estella

to demand that others use their real names when addressing them. She recounted her aunt saying, “Use your real names, those are women’s names. Claim those names... don’t let them make a little girl out of you”(Blea, 2017). Irene described her aunt as rough around the edges and that her raising children alone necessitated that she is rough around the edges. It was from her aunt’s influence that Irene was exposed to non-traditional roles of a Chicana woman who was not quiet, not complacent, and above all confrontational. In contrast to the lessons she learned from her Aunt Suzanna, Irene recounted a story from her childhood in which her mother asserted strong gender roles in the home. When Irene was young, she had wanted to “play priest” by wearing a cape and giving her younger brother “holy communion” in the form of a Necco Wafer. Her mother noticed what was happening and insisted that she give the cape to her brother because “women can’t be priests”(Blea, 2017). Reflecting on that moment, Irene said, “I realized that my mother had just done something that was very painful to me, but I had no language for it”(Blea, 2017). Irene’s mother had privileged her younger brother over her on the premise of gender and the patriarchal institution of the Catholic Church. She later became very critical of the Catholic Church because of “the fact that the women had been socialized to shape girls into more tranquil social positions and to ingest Catholicism and live out the Catholic life somewhat subservient to men”(Blea, 2017). Her criticism of Catholicism and the way it impacts women’s gender role expectations relates to the ways that some Chicanas engage in spiritual activism in which they critique and work to “reverse gender hierarchies, patriarchy, and other social inequalities within and outside of organized religion”(Sendejo 2013). Irene recognized the unfairness even in this one instance and carried that recognition with her into her feminist consciousness formation. While she experienced this gendered restriction from her family’s Catholicism via her mother, Irene leaned on her

Aunt Suzanna who “was a grand motivator in terms of speaking up and stating your needs, addressing your needs and not being dependent”(Blea 2017). That she picked up on the lessons from her Aunt more heavily than those from her mother points to the complexity of intergenerational wisdom among Chicana women especially demonstrated through a relationship referred to as *compadrazgo*. Marie “Keta” Miranda writes about *compadrazgo* and describes it saying that *comadres*, or close woman friends, “are not necessarily relegated by age nor defined through age relationships among women of Mexican heritage. Comadres can belong to the same age cohort or be intergenerational – an older and younger woman bonding through the system of *compadrazgo*”(Bonilla-Santiago 1992). It makes sense that Irene was strongly influenced by her aunt since her worldview more closely aligned with her own. As an intergenerational form of *compadrazgo*, Irene learned from her aunt what she was not receiving from her own mother. Irene went on to raise her own daughter mostly as a single mother and kept these lessons from her Aunt strongly in her heart as she embraced her motherhood.

Irene’s active involvement in the Chicano Movement began with her time on college campuses. She recalls that the first thing she recognized as a change in her experience at the college was the dress style worn by women. Dr. Blea remarked that she remembered women began wearing trousers and blue jeans more regularly in a time when she had assumed everyone had to wear “plaid suits and blazers to go to college”(I. I. P. Blea 2017) Her father asked her why she was wearing “the mark of a working man” when she was going to college, and not “working the way [he] worked”(I. I. P. Blea 2017). This time in her life marked a point of transformation that solidified her independence and feminism as a college student exploring and developing her own ideologies. During her undergraduate career at Southern

Colorado State College, now Colorado State University-Pueblo, when she was 19 years old, she participated in protests against the Vietnam War and the overrepresentation of Chicano soldiers in the war as well as protests against the Adolf Coors Company⁶ in the events that they were failing to promote Chicano workers to higher paying positions despite the high numbers of Chicano employment in the industry. It was also at this time that she began to boycott grapes in solidarity with Cesar Chavez and the grape strikes and boycotts⁷ taking place in California as a reaction to the unlawful spraying of pesticides on migrant farm workers harvesting the crops. Dr. Blea's activism was sparked and inspired by national events made local by the on-campus protests. She was able to bring her background from her father's organizing and her experiences with her Aunt Suzanna together to help her cultivate what it meant to be a Chicana activist.

Critical to her activism was Dr. Blea's role as an educator. While she obtained her master's at Colorado State University – Boulder, she advocated fiercely for the implementation of curriculum focused on the Chicana experience. She brought up the topic several times to a professor of Chicano Studies at the University saying there was gap in the curriculum that did not include the voice of Chicanas amid the voice of Chicanos. She persisted in advocating for the creation of this class until one day her professor, Sal Ramirez,

⁶ In 1966, The Denver Chicano activist group Crusade for Justice began boycotting Coors Company on the basis of their discriminatory hiring and promotional practices against Mexican-American workers. The Boycotts spread across Colorado, including a staged protest at Colorado State University-Pueblo (then Southern Colorado State College) during which students kept customers from ordering Coors beers at a campus pub (Brantley n.d. 2014)

⁷ The 1965-1970 Grape Strike and Boycotts were joint protests between Filipino American grape workers and the United Farm Workers Union founded by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. In order to address the horrendous pay and exposure to toxic pesticides, grape workers staged a strike and encouraged consumers to boycott grapes. By 1970, the strikes and boycotts were successful and table grape growers signed contracts for better pay and protections for workers. The strikes and boycotts began in California and spread across the country (Kim 2017).

took her with him to a curriculum development meeting where he introduced her as “the young woman from the sociology department” and had her propose the new course to the committee. Once approved, he informed her that it was up to her to develop the syllabus and she would be the one to teach the course. She became the first professor at Colorado State University- Boulder to teach a class on La Chicana. She went on to write several textbooks on Chicanas and researching Chicano communities that are still cited by anthropologist and sociologists alike. She is also a novelist whose books ⁸represent her experiences growing up as a Chicana in Colorado and New Mexico. She leaves her legacy and her lessons to the budding generation of Chicanas through her texts.

Velia Rincon

Dr. Velia Rincon is the youngest of the women I interviewed. At forty years old, she describes herself as a child of the movement. Her parents met while working in fields in Southern Texas as migrant workers, and their work and experiences heavily informed her perspective and role in the movement. She was raised in Fruta, Colorado, a small, rural community, but then moved to Pueblo for her undergraduate degree. Velia shared with me a story about how her activism began as an infant born to undocumented migrants in a small town in Wyoming. She was the first baby born that year in that hospital, which would normally award that child free diapers and a college scholarship, however, because her parents were undocumented, those prizes were rescinded. Velia recalled her mother telling her that she was born to be an activist because things are so unfair. She said, “From the time that we’re born, it kind of feels like the universe has always put me in that position to fight against that [injustice]”(Rincon 2017). While Velia was born in the late 1970s, at which point the

⁸ Beneath the Super Moon, 2016; Suzanna, 2012; Daughters of the West Mesa, 2016; Poor People’s Flowers, 2014

Chicano Movement in Southern Colorado had already picked up momentum, she quickly became involved in advocating for Chicano empowerment by the time she was in middle school. As a child, her mother would make her and her friends *baile folklórico*⁹ dresses while her friend's mother, Shirley Romero Otero, who I also interviewed for this project, would have them perform at various rallies, demonstrations, and meetings. It was around this time that she also met Rita J. Martinez, another lifelong Chicana activist I had the privilege of interviewing for this research. With Rita, Velia took part in Teatro performances to educate the public about issues happening in the Southern Colorado area concerning Chicanos and migrant farmworkers. The performances were modeled on Teatro Campesino, a performance group started in 1965 by migrant workers in Delano, California with the support of Cesar Chavez to dramatize and promote to wider audiences the quotidian struggles they faced ("Our History | El Teatro Campesino" n.d.) Rita and her colleagues would adapt these teatro performances to audiences in Colorado while students like Velia would be act in the performances. The relationship between Velia and Rita would remain strong especially as Velia moved from Fruta to Pueblo for her undergraduate degree; Rita was the first person she knew in Pueblo and guided her through her first years there.

As a young woman involved in activist work, Velia was guided by the generation that came before her. She was influenced not only by the women in her life, like her mother, Rita, and Shirley, she also spoke about the mentorship she received from Eddie Montour, a former

⁹ Baile Folklórico – translates to "folk dance" from Spanish. While there are many regional types of *baile folklórico* originating in Mexico, the most well known is Jaliscience performed with large, flowing, colorful skirts and boots with a wooden heel. Dances are performed in groups and in couples, often depicting a story or ritual.

Brown Beret¹⁰ in Pueblo and a lifetime advocate for education and community organizing.

Velia met Eddie through her relationship with Rita. For Velia, Eddie had a significant impact on her ideologies and perspectives as a Chicana woman advocating for social justice. She describes herself as always having been tough. When Velia graduated from high school, she was voted “Most Likely to Start the Next LA Riots”, so her strength and dedication to activism were evident from a young age. However, she remarked that what she learned from Eddie was a mental toughness. As we sat in her office in downtown Pueblo she said,

“Where Shirley and Rita gave me a lot of skills and the foundations for who I am, as well as my mom, Edie helped me to recognize a lot of what I was experiencing wasn’t because of who I am, but because of who they are. And you can fill in the blank for “they”. Which changed things for me. I was always like, “they treat me like this because I’m brown, because I’m a woman.” But Eddie was the first person to flip the script on it for me and say “No, they’re treating you like this because of who they are and let me teach you about who they are.”... And so how I approached issues of systemic racism, sexism is because of that switch he made for me”(Rincon, 2017).

Dr. Rincon’s comments point to the multiple sites at which consciousness and identity formation can be impacted by different people at different times. She had grown up being conscious of the inequalities faced by Chicanos and their families by virtue of where they were born and the way they were racialized before and during the Chicano Movement; her parents were her first example of these inequalities. She had participated in protests, demonstrations, and performances all aimed at equality, justice, and empowerment of Chicanos from a young age. This new perspective she gained from Eddie was another site of transformation for her and her ideologies and praxis as a Chicana activist. It is with this

¹⁰ Brown Berets in Pueblo, Colorado organized the first school walkouts in Pueblo during the 1969-1970 school year. They were high school students recruited and politicized under the Chicano Activist Al Gurule. They advocated for better education opportunities for Chicano youth, they denounced racism, and addressed the poverty rates found in their neighborhoods (Martínez et al. 2016)

perspective that she continues to approach her work now as a Chicano Studies professor at Pueblo Community College and as the Southern Colorado Coordinator for Teach for America.

Dr. Rincon's activism has always been connected to education. After she received her undergraduate degree in Pueblo, she went on to receive a master degree in Education from Harvard University Graduate School of Education and then her Doctorate of Education from the University of Phoenix Educational Leadership program. She returned to Pueblo and was one of the founding members of Cesar Chavez Academy, a public-charter school I attended for eight years. The aim of the school was to provide a quality education with an emphasis on the celebration and recognition of Chicano history and culture. As a Spanish teacher, the MEChA coordinator, and as a guidance counselor, Dr. Rincon had the power and opportunity to empower a new generation of Pueblo students through education, starting from when she was still only 22 years old herself. Now as a professor of Chicano Studies at Pueblo Community College (PCC) and as the Southern Colorado Coordinator for Teach For America, she is able to impact incoming generations of Chicana activists and scholars. I interned with her for a summer and worked on programming for Teach for America to help get her corps members involved and integrated into the Pueblo community. I remember her emphasizing that she wanted and needed her teachers to know the history of Pueblo and to appreciate the significance of Chicano culture in Pueblo before taking over classrooms.

Deborah Espinoza

Print culture was a major catalyst for *el movimiento* in Pueblo. *La Cucaracha*, an alternative Chicano newspaper, provided a perspective that was not available to the public through the mainstream Pueblo Chieftain. Deborah Espinoza and her husband Juan, with the help of another CU Boulder graduate, moved to Pueblo from Boulder to publish this

newspaper from 1968 to 1974 (?). Deborah is originally from Grand Junction, a smaller Colorado town located around 300 miles west of Pueblo. She had moved to Boulder, Colorado for some of her undergraduate degree until she and her husband moved to Pueblo to start *La Cucaracha*. She recalled that Pueblo was a prime location for a successful Chicano newspaper because the strong, active Chicano community there. At the time, there were several Chicano owned businesses that would be able to support the newspaper through buying advertisement spaces and through consumption and circulation of the news itself. Pueblo was also the home to much of Deborah's family for whom she was able to care once she moved there. For the initial years of publication, Deborah's house was the central hub for all the working parts of distributing *La Cucaracha*. She told me, "to start out, the newspaper was originally published in my living room, in my kitchen and spilled over into the little family room... my bathroom became the dark room"(Espinoza, 2017). Deborah was quite literally at the center of an integral part of the success of the movement in Pueblo, however, in our first interview, she told me that she had no impact on the paper at all. She recalled, "I was kind of the duck out of water. I didn't have that journalism background and I was still a very young mother"(Espinoza, 2017). I was surprised to hear that a woman who brought the newspaper to Pueblo and eventually supported its existence through housing could believe herself to not have had an impact on its success. She was the only woman involved in the publication for a while until Rita Martinez joined the team. But her comment points to a widespread need – at the time and still now – for a distinguished Chicana voice among the Chicano nationalist voices of the time. Espinoza expressed a similar sentiment to what many Chicanas have written about extensively since the Chicano Movement and in the years following in saying that within counterpublics and alternative news sources, there is still a

need for Chicanas to create their own space and cultivate their own voices in tandem with, and sometimes against, Chicanos. Maylei Blackwell writes about Chicana print communities that were created through *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* and the academic journal *Encuentro Femenil*. In her book, she describes these as “strategic site[s] of intervention and contestation for women in the Chicano movement”(Blackwell 2011). She focuses on the way that print-mediated exchange has the potential to share discussions and debates around identities, ideologies, practices, and strategies across regions and campuses. In a similar way, *La Cucaracha* was a platform through which Pueblo Chicanas were able to share their thoughts on local happenings and larger discourses on Chicana involvement in *el movimiento* and Chicana issues in general.

While Deborah might not have acknowledged her impact on *La Cucaracha*, she did recall her efforts as a social organizer among women who were a part of her community. Before she moved to Pueblo, and before she was a mother, she was adamant about bringing more women into the movement. As a student at CU Boulder, which was a major hub for student activism and engagement during the 1960s and 1970s, Deborah focused her attention on those women who were unable to attend meetings because of their other commitments as mothers and workingwomen. However, she met some pushback in her efforts, especially from the women’s husbands. In our second interview in 2018, Deborah described the obstacles to bringing more women to campus to have discussions about women’s roles in the movement saying,

“I wanted to do something and help them. I just made the mistake of assuming that they wanted to be helped. I put forward the idea that single women should help them get to campus and attend the meetings and should be providing daycare. I didn’t have the kids yet. I had a couple meeting and when I went to go pick them up and give them rides, their husbands weren’t exactly thrilled...

they were aware of what was going on, but really their husbands didn't like it"(Espinoza, 2018).

While Deborah's work with and around *La Cucaracha* was invaluable, even if unacknowledged by her, she also left a significant impact on Pueblo as a Chicano community through her work with the El Pueblo History Museum where she served as Museum Director. The El Pueblo History Museum currently resides in downtown Pueblo, Colorado. It highlights the history of Pueblo and other cities in the region through cultural and ethnic perspectives and traditions. The museum showcases a re-created 1840s adobe trading post and plaza, emphasizing the indigenous roots on which our city was built. It also currently is home to an exhibit called "*El Movimiento: The Chicano Movement in Colorado and Pueblo*". This exhibit is a Pueblo specific version of the "*El Movimiento: The Chicano Movement in Colorado*" exhibit housed in Denver at the Colorado History Museum, and it was brought to Pueblo under Deborah's leadership. Deborah became involved with the museum just after she completed her undergraduate degree in History. At the time, the museum was much smaller and was located on Pueblo's Southside, which is much less of a central location than where it currently resides. She began by giving tours and lectures and then eventually she was hired to do an educational unit on the history of Hispanics in Pueblo area. She said she loved it, and while it was only a six-month project, "that's really what launched [her] career"(Espinoza 2017). This museum is a highly influential space now in Pueblo. It stands as a physical continuation of Chicano advocacy and empowerment as well as a commemoration of the robust history Pueblo has as a community of activism. The museum is used for not only as a space for exhibitions, but also for educational purposes. In fact, my younger cousin volunteered at the El Pueblo Museum for a summer during which she taught other children to make flour tortillas and how to make dolls out of cornhusks. In the winter season, children

can attend workshops to make Christmas decorations out of dried red peppers making *ristras*¹¹ to hang in their homes. Through cultural education aimed at the young generation of Pueblo youth, the museum acts as a site for the preservation of Chicano cultural memory.

Furthermore, the gift shop and information center inside the museum give tourists the opportunity to gain insight into the cultural history of Pueblo and take a bit of that history home with them in the form of books, postcards, and memorabilia from the movement.

Shirley Romero Otero

For some Chicanas, their introduction to the Chicano movement came from educational institutions and community encouragement. Shirley Romero Otero became involved in the movement through a pre-collegiate program implemented by recent graduates from CU Boulder. Part of the program required students to take Chicano Studies courses, participate in *baile folklorico* dance groups, and engage in the lettuce and grape boycotts happening nationwide. Shirley recalls being hesitant to be a part of a program that told her what to do, but ultimately, she was thankful for having been introduced and exposed to these modes of organizing. Of her first Chicano studies class, she recalled learning about Chicano history that she hadn't previously learned about in her public education experiences despite many of her teachers in San Luis being Chicano. She said,

“I was so intrigued by that history that I had never had that as a woman, as a brown woman, as a member of the Chicano community. It just opened up these doors for me that wow! I have my own history. And that was very appealing and very exciting to me”(Romero-Otero 2017).

She took her first Chicano studies class in the mid 1970s at which time there were strong pushes from within Chicano movements to decolonize their curriculum learn about the

¹¹ *ristras*- A hanging arrangement of dried vegetables to be used later for consumption. *Ristras* have also become trademark decorations of New Mexico and Southern Colorado.

histories that had been and have been erased by mainstream, Eurocentric histories. It wasn't just learning about the history of her people that influenced Shirley. The Chicano Movement also offered her an opportunity to develop her cultural identity. Shirley identifies as *mestiza*: a mixture of Spanish and Native American blood, culminating in a Chicana identity label (Romero Otero, 2017). Through understanding her own history better, she had a foundation for her cultural identity, which would come to influence the work she has pursued for the past four decades, and further, it influenced the way she raised her four daughters.

In our 2017 interview, she told me, "I've always said I was born at the right time because those folks were able to mentor me. And today, we're all *compadres*, good friends, lifelong activists in the movement for whatever issue. So they just became part of my extended family"(Romero Otero, 2017). One of those especially notable mentors was Reyes Lopez Tijerina, one of the "four horsemen of the Chicano Movement", as Shirley referred to them, among Cesar Chavez, Corky Gonzales, and Angel Gutierrez. It was Lopez Tijerina who taught Shirley about her status as an heir to a communal land grant in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains¹² near her hometown of San Luis. She explained to me that as a descendent of one of the "original Mexicano-Indio Hispano families that settled San Luis prior to the mid 1800s", she is an heir to a 77,000-acre communal land grant. This specific communal land grant is a Historical Use grant meaning that the community awarded this grant shall be allowed to hunt, fish, gather medicinal herbs, camp, graze their animals, and gather firewood on those acres. 40 years ago, she began working on holding the US Government accountable

¹² A part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, a legal agreement intended to end the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), the Sangre de Cristo Land grant had been broken by the United States until 2002 when land heirs began to legally claim their inheritance to the land. Shirley Romero-Otero serves as chairwoman of the Land Rights Council and was recently awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award at the New Mexico State Capital in February of 2018 (Lobato 2018).

to honor these land grants that previously hadn't been recognized. Protecting and honoring land grants became her main focus in the movement, though she offered and provided support to any other cause that she could. Romero-Otero has dedicated the past four decades to working on the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant struggle as well as being a support for any other branch of *el movimiento* that her *comadres* and *compadres* are involved in. She was recently recognized in February of 2018 at the New Mexico State Capitol where she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Lt. Governor Robert Mondragon (Lobato 2018).

Rita Martinez

Like Shirley, Rita Martinez also found herself involved in the Chicano movement through her educational experiences. She was born and raised in Pueblo and attended Pueblo county schools. She recalls her racial consciousness formation beginning in high school when she moved from Seaton, the private catholic school, to Central High School, a public high school with a high percentage of Black and low-income students, in 1970. She recounted a story from her high school years in which her father was less than welcoming to a few of her Black friends who had come over to visit the house one afternoon. It was in this instance that she began to realize that even within a relatively small city like Pueblo, there were racial tensions between minority groups. However, she recognized that in her own life at school she was inclined to interact with people from multiple ethnic backgrounds.

Originally, after high school, Rita was on track to work in the healthcare field. She studied to be a nurse, passed her board's exam, and worked as a nurse at a local Pueblo hospital. She realized after a few years that this was not her passion and that she had joined this profession largely out of her father's insistence on her taking up a traditional woman's job such as nursing. She went back to school at Colorado State University Pueblo, then called

Southern Colorado State College, and it was here that she took her first Chicano Studies course that ignited her involvement in the movement. Her professor suggested that she and some other students in the course volunteer with *La Cucaracha* because they were in need of more support. While others eventually dropped their involvement with the newspaper, Rita realized that she thoroughly enjoyed the work of exposing another side of the story to the Pueblo community. Reflecting on her experience with *La Cucaracha*, she said, “I really dove into the whole thing and I not only helped with producing the newspaper, but I think was also part of making the news”(Martinez, 2017). Through her involvement with the newspaper, Rita became exposed to the issues she would go on to tackle for the rest of her career as a community organizer and activist, such as community health and police brutality.

Rita went on to mix her experience as an activist and as a nurse by sitting on the board for the Community Health Centers in Pueblo where she was able to get Medicaid patients seen by willing physicians in the community. She has since served Pueblo in several capacities in addition to her activism. She has worked with MEChA¹³ chapters in Pueblo City Schools, she helps coordinate the annual Columbus Day Protest, she is involved with the Día de La Raza¹⁴ celebration, she sits on the Cinco De Mayo Celebration board in Pueblo, and is currently working with the Familias Unidas organization to make at least one Pueblo Catholic church a sanctuary church for undocumented families to find refuge if they are in danger of deportation. Along with all of her community engagement, she continues to be a mentor to

¹³ M.E.Ch.A stands for *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán*. This student organization promotes higher education, community engagement, political participation, and Chicano culture and history. There are MEChA chapters nationwide in grade school, colleges, and universities (“Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán” n.d.)

¹⁴ Dia de La Raza is a day of education organized by Rita J Martinez and other community members to share the history of Pueblo and its indigenous heritage. It is celebrated the day before Columbus Day.

young people in the community like myself. On the last day that I saw her, she was headed to a poster making meeting for the Chicana contingent of the Women's March took place in Pueblo on the one year anniversary of Trump's inauguration.

Theresa Trujillo

Theresa Trujillo was born into the movement in the late 1970s. She was introduced to social justice work through her parents' involvement with community organizing and their participation in demonstrations, planning, and support of the movement in Pueblo. Theresa is the oldest of seven, and to this experience, she reflected, "I feel like I was born being a community organizer, I just started on my family first"(Trujillo 2017). She was born in Pueblo in the late 1970s and recalls her parents taking her and her eventual six younger siblings along to all the meetings and protests they were apart of. From an early age, she was exposed to many people coming in and out of her house who were planning and preparing for events. Theresa's social justice consciousness formation was a result of the intersection between what she learned from the nuns and Bishop Buswell in the Pueblo diocese and what she witnessed from her parents and other young adults who were already activists. At the time of her childhood, Bishop Buswell, an antiwar activist who was arrested for protesting the Vietnam War and who believed women should be ordained, was a progressive voice in the Catholic community in Pueblo. Theresa told me that many religious women from around the nation flocked to Pueblo to be a part of his ministry because of his progressive views. Under Bishop Buswell and the nuns who supported his ministry, Theresa learned about the connections between the Chicano Movement and Catholic social teaching. She reflected, "It was really nuns who helped me understand those connections and begin to understand what

my own lived experiences, my family's lived experiences meant in a global perspective"(Trujillo, 2017).

What Theresa describes here is what Gloria Anzaldúa calls spiritual activism. Ana Louise Keating writes, "Anzaldúa's spiritual activism offers a visionary yet experientially based epistemology and ethics. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that posits a relational worldview and uses this holistic worldview to transform one's self and one's worlds"(Keating 2008) Theresa, through her Catholic social teaching from the nuns and Bishop Buswell and through watching her parents protest various injustices in Pueblo, was able to position herself as a part of the larger world community, while also paying close attention to what was happening at the local level.

Theresa was later influenced by the, at the time, college aged women who were already active in the movement. Rita Martinez was one of the women who constantly invited her to organizing meeting and demonstrations. On this relationship to an older woman in the movement and the relationships she witnessed between the older women, Theresa reflected,

"One of the things that I learned and loved the most about growing up in the movement, that I've carried over, not always successfully into my work life is that there were no boundaries. There were no boundaries between doing the work and sitting in someone's kitchen and supporting them through a personal loss or something going on in their own lives. And none of those pieces were separate. People's lives were not as compartmentalized as maybe they are in more professional settings. So that whole grassroots feeling, it felt like family all the time (Trujillo 2017).

This spirit of no separation between work and personal life is what maintains the spirit of *el movimiento* today. The Chicana activists who supported the movement were friends and comadres inside and outside of their work as activists. The bonds between them made their work stronger and more resilient because those bonds gave them a commonality that

surpassed just sharing the same goal for Chicana empowerment. They cared for one another more than just as colleagues and community members, they cared for each other as family.

Compadrazgo

Not only are their individual stories of coming to *el movimiento* significant in showing the diversity of backgrounds involved in the development of Chicana activism in Pueblo, the way that their stories are interwoven is also complex and points to the nature of Chicana activist communities and communal sense of work and care. With each interview, I was impressed and moved by the way that the women would reference and talk about one another not as co-workers but as family. Each time they referenced another woman and shared a story of their friendship or of raising their children together was a reference to compadrazgo. Marie “Keta” Miranda talks about compadrazgo and its popular usage. She says it “refers to friendship between women who have children, and thus the affiliation is between the godparents or through the friendship that is publicly recognized as a witness of matrimony”(Miranda 2003). However, in the case of Pueblo Chicana activists, marriage and having children are not necessarily the precursors to sharing compadrazgo with one another. Their bonds and friendships are intergenerational and are not dependent on being married, as some of the women were single mothers while others were married.

Rita, Shirley, Deborah, and Irene were in high school and college in the 1970s. Velia and Theresa were born in the late 1970s and were then influenced by Rita, Shirley, Deborah and Irene. Like I mentioned earlier, Velia became involved in *teatro* performances through Rita’s influence. Velia also grew up closely with Shirley’s children and became a part of their family through that friendship. Shirley gave Velia the same resources that she gave her own daughters, especially in terms of support and guidance for the college application process

before Velia's undergraduate career. Theresa's family became related to Rita's family when Rita's brother married a woman who had been living with Theresa's family. From there Rita invited Theresa to meetings and protests and cared for her as a mentor. Deborah and Shirley's children went on to become godparents of each other's children, therefore combining their families in the eyes of the Catholic community. After having worked together at Cesar Chavez Academy, Velia and my mother became *comadres* and my mother later baptized Velia's youngest son. Dr. Velia described the friendships she's made with women who have worked with her at Cesar Chavez Academy and who have remained in her life past her time at the school. She said,

“I don't believe the people you work alongside in the movement are people who work for you. They're people who work alongside you, so they become your family, and I fell in love especially with these seven women that are my *yayas*. We've been together now for 16 years. Some a little less, but most of us 16 years. It's helped us, I think, to, in this movement, to stay alive, one. But two, we're like a support system in all the different fields that we're in to be able to come back together and give each other joy. Because this work is really hard, we are able to provide such great joy for one another... You don't want anyone else standing beside you to do the work. When one can't do something, the other one can. So we all compliment one another to get things done (Rincon, 2017).

The *Yayas*¹⁵ to which she refers are the women who have been in my life since I was a child. They have mentored and supported me because I am the child of one of their *comadres*. Velia's friendship with these women is an extension of the *compadrazgo* formed between her and the elder women who mentored her. She and her *comadres* are now mentors to my generation and me.

As Chicana activists fulfilled roles of mentor, friend, *comadre* and more to each other, they fulfilled roles of caretaker, provider, guardian, and teacher to their children and the

¹⁵ My mother named her group of *comadres* the “*Yayas*” after reading Rebecca Wells' 1996 novel *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* about a group of lifelong friends.

children in their communities. The movement extended into their daily lives and into the relationships they maintained at home, in the community, at school, and in their professions.

Chapter Two: *Mujeres, Mentors, Madres y más*

Chicana activists in Pueblo and Southern Colorado occupy several spaces and participate in those spaces in various roles. As women, daughters, mentors, community members, and mothers, and activists, their roles are intricately interwoven. This section addresses the negotiations that Chicana activists have made as they integrate their activism into the many other facets of their daily lives. It is precisely in these negotiations that we see the intersections of the public and private spheres, of community and family, and the continuation of *el movimiento* as a result of these intersections. For Chicana activists, these negotiations between roles was not optional, but was a way of life and of survival. Their roles of caretakers and activists could not be compartmentalized by nature of their communities and their homes being blended together through their involvement in the movement.

While the Chicano movement was a movement that advocated for the empowerment of Chicano people, the Chicana perspective was often considered a lesser priority. Sexism within the movement was blatant, and at times violent. Women were mostly expected to occupy traditional women's roles such as food preparation, childcare, and background support for the men who were more public figures in the movement (Blackwell 2011; Irene I. Blea 1988; López 1977). Despite Chicanas having always been involved in the Chicano Movement, their labor was often taken for granted as traditional women's work or overlooked completely by their male counterparts. Women's work was especially overlooked or disregarded if and when it did not fit what machismo masculinity defined as the "ideal" woman's work. In her essay, "The Role of the Chicana within the Student Movement", Sonia

A. Lopez writes, “The ideal woman within the Mexican culture has been defined as faithful, passive and obedient”(1997). Along with these traditional expectations, came the assumptions that Chicano liberation could only be carried out by the male front-runners of the movement (Lopez 1997). Women who spoke up and advocated for women’s rights within the Chicano movement were pinned as divisive and were accused of weakening and detracting from the main goal of the movement: Chicano liberation and empowerment (Espinoza 2018; Blea 2017; Romero Otero 2017; Lopez 1977). The Chicana activists in Pueblo faced these criticisms and more, yet they persevered in the hopes of creating a space for women’s liberation within the Chicano movement. They pressed onward in the face of threats, insufficient safety and housing, and the conflict of occupying the roles of “ideal women” and community activists.

Deborah Espinoza was one of those women who were labeled as divisive. She told me a story about when she and her husband Juan were hosting a dinner party in their home with other young couples. She remembered that at one point in the evening she invited all the women to come into the kitchen to discuss how they could be more active in the movement. Espinoza recalled, “I totally ruined a party at my house... that was a part and they didn’t get it. And that was when I got the name Cesar Chavez”(Espinoza, 2018). After that occasion, some of the men in her circle mockingly called her Cesar Chavez because she was trying to include more women in the conversation and to include issues faced by women in the mission of the movement. She was not well received by the women that night, and even less by their husbands.

Women’s perspectives and work was not as highly recognized or valued in the movement largely because it was seen as support work for the men who were made more

visible (Lopez 1997; Blackwell 2011; Blea 1988). Irene recalls her work going unrecognized and unappreciated by the men who benefited from it. In remembering her college days she said,

“The men couldn’t write speeches, and I could. So I would write the speeches, and the men would give them. They would get the applause. And yay! that was good because it was for the cause”(Blea, 2017).

While she wasn’t involved in the movement to gain recognition or fame, this memory points to the erasure of women’s work in the movement regardless of its value to the overall progress and benefit for Chicanas and Chicanos alike. This erasure of women’s work expanded past Irene’s speech writing. The work of food preparation, distribution, and clean up all fell on the shoulders of mainly women, especially in the cases of fundraisers, and went under the radar as less significant than the speech-giving that the men were doing (Blea 2017). The sentiment that women’s voices carried less weight than those of their male counterparts was felt in several sites and spaces regarding the Chicano Movement as a national movement. In writing about the Chicana activists in California, Maylei Blackwell says, “many female organizers in the Chicano Movement felt that the gendered division of political work was a reflection not only of male privilege but also of the ways in which Chicanas were disregarded as real political actors and relegated to the kitchens and mimeographing rooms of the movement” (Blackwell, 2011). Although the women’s work was vital to the success and continuation of the movement, it was still largely seen as complimentary and not supplementary. Women’s roles were perceived as both indispensable and non-essential simultaneously.

Irene further explained that perhaps the men believed that they were honoring the women. She recalled,

“I remember one of them saying, we hold you in high esteem. We hold you on pedestals. And I said, “It’s hard to move on a pedestal! You can’t move on a pedestal! I was very angry, but I was angry at the issues. I was ever angry at the men”(Blea, 2017).

The notion of men holding women in a venerated position yet undervaluing and dismissing their work as less significant stems from *machismo* masculinity. Maylei Blackwell writes about this contradictory position into which *machismo* masculinity puts women. It was the role of the man to protect women, yet that protection often relegated women to a position with no agency. “They [women] were seen simultaneously as the bearers of tradition, culture, and family – which became politicized ideals in nationalist thinking – and the unspoken subjects of a discourse of political rights”(Blackwell 2011). Chicana women have been traditionally seen as the ones who make and care for *la familia*, the family. In this homemaking and caretaking, the traditions of Chicano culture are to be passed down to their children so that the culture can continue to prosper. *La familia* Chicano people as a whole and as a unit that needs to be kept intact in order to protect the culture from whitewashing at the hands of Anglo-American mainstream. In this framework of masculinity, men revered women when they served their idealized roles as caretaker and homemaker, and much less so when they chose to be their own protectors and guardians (Blackwell, 2011). *Machismo* masculinity determined much of the work of men and women in the Chicano Movement nationwide and in Pueblo, Colorado.

In speaking about the sexism in the movement, Shirley Romero Otero said, “the men in the movement were products of their own environments and of this patriarchal society”(Romero Otero, 2017). Shirley doesn’t necessarily blame men for their ideologies. She acknowledges that *machismo* masculinity was seen by many of the young men as strength for protecting Chicano culture. However, she also took time to explain that the movement also

gave Chicanos an opportunity to redefine their identities to “take that empowerment and break out of those chains”(Romero Otero, 2017). Velia Rincon also expressed similar sentiments towards the possibility of reworking traditional gender roles and expectations in the movement saying,

“What was nice about the Chicano Movement is that we had the chance to start redefining what a leader meant, redefining who we are as people, and remembering our own precious knowledge and that our indigenous ancestors weren’t raised to believe this way, that we were indoctrinated and colonized to believe this way”(Rincon, 2017).

Maylei Blackwell calls this remembrance and redefining “retrofitted memory”. She defines it as “a practice whereby social actors read the interstices, gaps, and silences of existing historical narratives in order to retrofit, rework, and refashion older narratives to created new historical openings, political possibilities, and genealogies of resistance (Blackwell, 2011). Velia and Shirley acknowledged the potential for the liberation of women to be included in the mission of Chicano empowerment while Dr. Irene Blea speaks to the necessity of women’s liberation. She remembers listening to a speaker who came to visit her campus at Colorado State University Pueblo, then Southern Colorado State College. The speaker was talking about freedom, to which Dr. Blea interjected loudly, “First you have to free the women!” (Blea 2017). For Blea and her contemporaries, women’s liberation was interwoven with their goals of racial equality. Chicana women cannot separate being women and being people of color. Their identities are simultaneous, and they demanded that their issues be addressed as such.

The roles the women fill as mothers, caretakers, guardians of the home, and activists intersect in the bodies and minds of the women. The work of being community activists impacted their work in their households while their household work impacted their activism.

The private and public spheres of their lives are not distinct rather they overlap with one another. The home became a physical space for the intersection of the women's roles as mothers, students, daughters, and activists.

Deborah shared a memory that reflects the overlap of her different roles as mother, student, and activist.

“I remember sitting in the house that looked like squatters lived there. Things piled up, and I was just focusing on that paper. Just focusing on that report. Kids around, they were clean and they were fed. They were playing. But my house was a wreck. That was so difficult”(Espinoza, 2018).

While she finished her bachelor degree in history, she was still minding the children all the while *La Cucaracha* was being published and distributed in her home. She served as mother, student and activist while her house was also the site of collective activism, childrearing, and education. Often times, she would come home from a day of classes, take care of tasks that needed attention in the house, and then after the children were finally asleep, she would begin to work on her own studies for her degree. Each day was a negotiation between her roles and spaces.

Rita Martinez's home became and has remained a meeting place for movement action planning as well. When I arrived at her home for our second interview in January of 2018, she had several metal folding chairs leaning against a wall and a few cases of water bottles that she had had for a Cinco de Mayo planning meeting. She lives in the house that she grew up in with her parents, as she became the primary caregiver for her mother in her last years. She commented,

“We've been meeting here for years because my mom was here, and I used to say “It's much easier so I don't have to find someone to be with her. So everyone got used to coming here and meeting. I told them, you know I can go somewhere else now if we need to, and they say, oh no, we're used to this. Let's just keep it here”(Martinez, 2018).

While her house is no longer the space where she cares for her mother, the memory and institutionalization of it as a meeting place for the movement remains a constant in her life as a community organizer.

For some of the women and mothers who were activists in the Chicano Movement, their physical safety was at times in jeopardy. Because they were women who stood up for their beliefs, Chicanas were faced with immense obstacles from lack of sufficient housing, intimidation, to physical violence. Irene Blea, when she moved to CU Boulder, where she would go on to earn her PhD, was a single mother to a young daughter. One of her memories of this time in her life was having to negotiate with the administration of the university for proper housing. At the time, the housing that was available through the colleges for families was named Married Student Housing at the University of Colorado. Irene had divorced her husband prior to pursuing her PhD and thus did not qualify for this housing arrangement. As a single mother and student, she could only afford local motels, which at the time were not safe spaces for young children to grow up. She and her dean, another person of color on campus, worked together to eventually get the name changed to “Family Student Housing”, and then she was allowed to live on campus. At a time in her life when she was pursuing higher education to improve her status as an educated Chicana and to improve the life of her child, Dr. Blea had to advocate for the right to access to safe housing. As a single mother, she had to protect and preserve the life of her child on her own without much help from her institution. She was already only the second person in her family to ever be divorced, so her status as a single Chicana mother was a precarious one; one that she didn’t have experience navigating until she was in the position herself. Without the resources and community she needed to keep

herself and her child safe, she had to advocate fiercely on her own and seek out the power structures that would provide her safety.

For Rita Martinez, her home became the target for intimidation from people who did not approve of her activism, much less of her activism as a mother. She recalls receiving hand written hate mail in her mailbox telling her to “just take care of [her] kids and not get involved in this”(Martinez 2018). Beyond the mail, she also remembers the lights in her backyard being shot out by bb guns, someone would drag a stick across her metal railing in her front yard, and she reported a break in. All of these events occurred while she was raising her school-aged children as a single mother. It wasn't until she had a few friends from the community that would stay out at night in front of her home to show that they were aware of the intimidation and to display physical resistance and protection for her and her family. Also a single Chicana mother, Rita was intimidated and her children's safety was jeopardized. Her home was invaded and those who felt that she had overstepped her bounds as a woman advocating for herself and her people jeopardized her sense of security.

For some of the women, their own physical safety was at risk as was the safety of their children. The work that these activists were engaged in and their identities as Chicana women and mothers made them vulnerable to the negligence of institutions and the backlash of the public. Incidents like these necessitated that the women be even more vigilant and fierce in their activism and their protection over their children.

The physical bodies of Pueblo Chicana activists and the spaces in which they move about are sites of negotiations consequential of the multiple roles they fulfill. Cervantes-Soon writes, “Women's brown bodies, rather than separate from the mind, are the channels and agents of theory and praxis”, which in this context points to the necessity Chicana activists

have to create a balance between the roles they fulfill in order to survive and thrive among the external sites of oppression they experience.

In each of these negotiations of roles, Chicana activists pass their knowledge and wisdom down to their children and to the children in their communities. They set the example for the young people in their lives and passed their passion for social justice on to the next generation, often times subconsciously. Now, as “elders”, or as the older generation of *el movimiento*, these women are being looked to by the new generation of Chicanas and Chicanos for advice, guidance, and support in the continuation of Chicana and Chicano activism. The next section examines the ways that Chicana activists inspired, motivated, and cultivated an ongoing *movimiento* through the way they cared for their children.

Chapter 3: *El Movimiento Sigue*

While the children of Chicana activists were exposed to the harsh realities of social justice work and social movements, they were also exposed to a world of consciousness and action that not every child has the opportunity to experience. Several of the women I interviewed expressed that their children went with them wherever they went, including meetings, demonstrations, and celebrations as early as they could manage. The children were also introduced to the social circles to which their mothers belonged from their involvement in the movement. In their exposure to protests, demonstrations, and the day-to-day of community engagement and organizing, the children of Chicana activists in Pueblo inherited ideologies of social justice and Chicana feminism. This section aims to show how their activism impacted Pueblo Chicana mothering and further, the lessons three daughters learned and valued from their experiences growing up as children of the movement.

Rita Martinez began taking her children along with her to various meetings and demonstrations when they were as young as a month old. She recalls being on the steps of the Federal Building in Denver with her daughter Neva a few weeks after having given birth. She said,

“My kids went with me everywhere... I was for the most part, a single mom. I had three kids, so they went with me everywhere. They grew up in the Chicano movement. They grew up going to meetings, whether the meetings would be at parks, whether they'd be at the university”(Martinez 2018).

While children attending meetings on its own isn't spectacular, what they began to pick up and recognize would later prove to be immensely impactful. Rita went on to tell me about her sons' experiences attending MEChA meetings at Colorado State University-Pueblo where she served as a community liaison. She watched her oldest son's interest in the meetings transform once he got to middle school. Rita recalled that he used to take a bag of toys to the MEChA meetings to keep himself entertained until one day he exchanged the bag of toys for a backpack with a notebook. He would carry the backpack on his back with only one strap like the college boys did and take out his notebook to take notes like the older boys would. Rita knew then that he was being positively influenced by her engagement with the MEChA program. She saw that her son had wanted to pay attention to what the older students were talking about. Her son went on to become the leader of his own MEChA club immediately when he entered high school. Not only was he enthusiastic to model what he had learned from his mother as an activist, but also what he had witnessed in the young student leaders.

Returning to Delgado Bernal's "pedagogies of the home", what Pueblo Chicana activists shared with their children informed their childhoods and remained integral to their personal development in their adulthoods. In her testimonio about raising her own children, Delgado Bernal says her motherhood is informed by critical race feminist praxis, which she

defines as “the braiding and weaving of ideas, pedagogies, and methodologies of both critical race theories and Chicana/Latina feminist theories”(2018). For her, this means combining the social justice foci of critical race theories and Chicana feminisms to recognize the opportunities where parenting can impart a sense of “hope for change and the possibility that a younger generation can engage in self-love and challenge normative constructions of race, gender, and sexuality”(Delgado Bernal 2018). Rita’s anecdote about her ambitious son learning from her and the other boys shows that her bringing him along to her meetings was indeed a point in her mothering that impacted the younger generation. Now we look to some reflections from three daughters who were raised at rallies, demonstrations, and in situations of negotiation.

After contacting two of Shirley Romero Otero’s daughters and Dr. Irene Blea’s daughter, I had the chance to see what the children of these powerful women remember about their childhood as children of activists. The three of them reflected that their childhoods were definitely different from the average childhood. For the Shirley’s daughters, Angelina and Lucia, their vacations were spent traveling to different states to take part in protests. At the Latino Network’s 18th Annual Cesar E Chavez Memorial Breakfast in Riverside, California, Cesar Chavez’s granddaughter Julie Chavez Rodriguez shared that she thought her childhood activities of selling United Farm Worker (UFW) pins, silk screening UFW flags and attending protests were part of a “normal childhood”(“Cesar Chavez’s Granddaughter Recalls Her Childhood in the UFW” 2017). Children of Chicana and Chicano activists have a repertoire of experiences that afford them a unique perspective rooted in a childhood during which they themselves were embedded in the movement by default of their parents’ involvement. These experiences have the potential to impact their personal ideologies and identities. For Dr.

Blea's daughter Raven, being a child of a Chicana activist meant bonding with her mother in a less conventional way, in which she shared her mother with the movement. She recalled,

“One thing about being a child of a strong woman activist is that she was gone quite a bit I didn't have the normal childhood of playing with my mom or creating memories because she was always busy making a difference and paving my way (Gutierrez 2018).

Lucia had a similar memory saying,

“We also had to share our parents with other kids who were less fortunate. When I was young I would resent that at times but now I see the impact my parents have made on those kids whose parents were absent or single parents and needed help. My mother saved a lot of young folks from falling through the cracks and to see the fruits of her labor are rewarding to me as well as her. Never once was she any less of a mother to us simply because she was a mother to others as well. It created a huge sense of community for all of us” (Lawson, 2018).

Both of these remarks reflect feelings of absence from their mothers, but a retrospective understanding and appreciation for the work their mothers were doing. Chicana activists in Pueblo had dual responsibilities to their family and to the movement that became an extension of their families. As we understand from the previous section, Chicanas' activism was not separate from the other roles they fulfilled as mothers and caretakers. Sometimes this also meant that their motherhood spilled into their activism, which is demonstrated in Lucia's memory of sharing her mother with other children in the community. Pueblo Chicana activists took it upon themselves to not only mother their own children, but to extend their motherhood to children in community. Keeping in mind the nature of Chicana activists' *compadrazgo* between one another, this co-parenting was also realized through them taking children from outside their biological kinship under their care. Such *compadrazgo* helps to sustain the close-knit community feeling and strength of Chicana networks.

The three daughters also reflected that the feminist ideologies and strong mindedness they have now is a direct translation from the lessons they inherited from their mothers'

activism. Angelina commented, “We are very strong-willed, strong minded and outspoken individuals. I know had I not grown up in the movement I would not be the woman that I am today. As a mother now I hope that has passed on to my sons as well” (Otero 2018). In a similar fashion, her sister Lucia remarked,

“All of my sisters, myself included, are confident enough with ourselves to survive and thrive in a "man's world". Her activism taught me who I am and how I factor into this world. It taught me that I must work three times as hard as the average person because I am brown skinned, I am a woman and I am empowered and people do not like that”(Lawson 2018).

Lucia’s comment about her mother Shirley Romero Otero’s activism teaching her how to situate herself in the world emphasizes the way that Chicana activism impacts identity development in their children and how that identity development feeds into the adult lives of the children. Lucia recognizes from her mother’s struggles as a woman up against male voices that she must advocate for herself in order to “thrive”.

In describing how her music career has been impacted by the lessons she learned from her mother Dr. Irene Blea, Raven reflected, “My music is very expressive also very aggressive and very loud. My voice is strong and sometimes it feels like those rallies are pulled through my music through my attitude”(Gutierrez 2018). Here Raven describes the impact of her upbringing in settings of protest on her career as a Chicana rock and roll singer in New Mexico. Videos of her singing show her captivating audiences while she commands full control of the stage from behind the microphone stand. Her voice is full, front and center. Beyond her stage presence, Raven has had to make demands that men in her field of artistry take her seriously, especially in signing contracts and hiring musicians. As a woman in a male-dominated genre of rock, she has had to assert herself. In essence, Raven, like her mother, is a pioneer for women. She remarked,

“I might not make a big difference but I do know that I empower women by being on stage with such a strong stage presence but it goes further than that; I have been taught to protect my surroundings, my beliefs, my family.”

As a daughter of a Chicana activist who advocated for the safety of her family and the empowerment of Chicana young women, Raven now embraces that same mentality in protecting what she believes in and in protecting her own daughter.

Each of these comments points to the argument that Chicana activists' work impacted their motherhood and the lessons they passed down to their children. Specifically, each of the daughters' comments presented here speak to the impact their mothers had on their identities as strong women, how they interact with their surroundings, and how they intend to pass these teachings on to the next generation. In the context of the Chicano movement, especially, in which women had to intentionally and fiercely advocate for their own recognition among the male-dominating voices, these comments describe disruption of power. Writing in the context of Latina mothers in Chicago who advocate for better schooling for their children, Mirelsie Vasquez writes, “These women seek to utilize their collective voices to disrupt the institutionalized power that has limited their access to education and political power”(2017). According to Velasquez, women, but more specifically in her case study Latina mothers, are traditionally the ones who are the contributors to their communities in paid and unpaid labor practices. As we can see in the multiple roles occupied by Chicana activists in Pueblo and from the reflections of their children, Pueblo Chicanas are building communities through their practices and embodiments that disrupt oppressive institutional power. While she reflected on a phone call she had with her daughters, Shirley Romero Otero told me,

“If I died today, I would be okay with that because I know that my daughters are educated, grounded in their cultural background. But more important, they are able to speak up about any issue where they're not going to be oppressed or subservient to their husbands or their male counterparts at work. And I think that to me is what I call success in raising children: Chicana women”(Romero-Otero 2017).

Shirley, mother of four Chicana women, fully recognized the necessity for her to teach her children how to be fierce advocates for themselves especially as women, as brown women. As a woman who disrupted the male dominance of the Chicano Movement, she passed that spirit of disruption to her own daughters so that they might have that same fire and passion as she has.

While, the children of the Pueblo Chicana activists recognized that they might have missed out on a “regular” childhood, they recognize the essential ideologies that they learned and inherited from their mothers’ lessons and examples. They acknowledge the power in their identities and how that power can impact future generations of Chicanas and Chicanos.

Conclusion

The spirit of *el movimiento* connects Chicana activist mothers, their children, and their communities. *El Movimiento* lives on because of the work Chicana activists accomplished in both their activism and in their roles as mothers, *comadres*, and mentors. In the intersection of activism and the other roles they fulfilled, Chicana activists cultivated a network of *compadrazgo* and community through which younger generations are able to learn and continue the work started by the elders. Beginning with their own introductions to the movement, Chicana activists in Pueblo began weaving their activism into their daily lives. For Dr. Irene Blea, the movement became a part of her educational endeavors and her presence in the academy as a sociologist. For Rita and Shirley, the movement very much became the driving force of their community engagement as organizers and coordinators of protests, demonstrations, and celebrations. Deborah’s introduction to the movement through the newspaper *La Cucaracha* led her to a career in preserving the history of Chicano culture in Pueblo and educating the community about our heritage. Dr. Velia Rincon and Theresa

Trujillo inherited the movement from their parents' involvement and have continued to incorporate the lessons they learned into their work and into their roles as mentors and caretakers.

As their lives developed and they became mothers, *comadres*, and mentors, Chicana activists blended their activism into their other roles. This blending was born out of the necessity to occupy spaces while fulfilling the multiple roles embodied in their beings. Chicana activists' bodies are "the material site on which women of color experience the consequences of living in a particular social and geopolitical location"(Cervantes-Soon). As Chicanas, as mothers, as educators, and mentors, the women experienced demands from external sources and met those demands with resistance to oppressive ideals of Chicana womanhood and racist, sexist systems in educational and professional institutions. Out of their responses to demands and oppressive forces, Chicana activists cultivated praxis of care influenced by their work that then impacted their children and the children in their communities.

The reflections from three daughters of Chicana activists highlight the way the practices and ideologies are passed down from mothers to children, from elders to the younger generation. In raising brown children in a time when civil rights were denied brown people, and in raising women in a movement that undervalued women's work and perspectives, Chicana activists taught their children life long lessons on resistance and strength. Lucia Lawson, one of Shirley Romero Otero's daughters says,

"For me personally, once a revolutionary always a revolutionary because you cannot unwire the way you were raised, your experiences and knowledge, you grow from it and you evolve yourself which in turn evolves your people as a whole" (Lawson 2018).

Children of Chicana activists in Pueblo experienced the movement as children and developed their own consciousness from those experiences. They were exposed to issues of social justice and also to ways that their mothers were combatting those issues. In this exposure, children of Chicana activists were integrated into existing networks of *compadrazgo* that they then extended into their own lives as adults. It is in these connections that the spirit of *el movimiento* lives on in Pueblo. Come to any Cinco de Mayo celebration and you'll find Rita Martinez with her whole family, grandchildren included. The day after my last interview with Deborah Espinoza, she was headed to Rita's house for a poster making session for the Chicana contingent of the Women's March in Pueblo. Present with the contingent were Velia and her daughter Maya. *El movimiento* lives on in all of these moments of passing wisdom down to the next generations. Dr. Irene Blea's daughter beautifully reflected, "The advantage of being Irene Blea's child is that I got to watch her do a lot of her work... Now, we are both strong women getting old together. Still living. Still Loving. And definitely still learning." (Gutierrez 2018). As children of Chicana activists watched their mothers and mentors, they learned not only about the issues at hand, but also about resistance, strength, and care. Looking back at my own memories of attending Cesar Chavez Academy and Dolores Huerta Preparatory High, of attending rallies with my mom and grandmother, and of learning from the elder Chicanas in Pueblo, I am grateful to find myself immersed in a community that values and promotes cultural and gender empowerment.

There are pages more to write about the power and potential of Chicana mothering and *compadrazgo* in Pueblo, Colorado. Future research could lead me to speaking with more women who were active in the movement and more children who were raised at demonstrations and rallies. While I have found myself studying Pueblo as my hometown, this

research question is applicable for other women from smaller cities who also experienced the Chicano Movement in conjunction with other aspects of their lives. The aim of this thesis is to shed light on an underrepresented facet of Chicana activists' lives in Pueblo and to honor the multiple roles fulfilled by these women. It is my hope that the work of motherhood and *compadrazgo* can be recognized as crucial to the sustainment of *el movimiento* in future conversations about Pueblo's history. I look forward to witnessing the intergenerational transfer of wisdom and work from the elders to the youth. I am thankful for the women and *comadres* who have encouraged and empowered me to live out the legacy of *el movimiento*.

El Movimiento Sigue

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