

# **From Scholarship Girls to Scholarship Women: Surviving the Contradictions of Class and Race in Academe**

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This article explores the dilemmas graduate education poses for women of working-class origin who come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. It proceeds in a chronological narrative using examples from the authors' personal experiences to make general points about how the intricate web of class, race, and gender relations shaped their experiences in higher education. Both women—Cuádras, a Chicana, and Pierce, a white woman—struggle with the feelings of alienation and marginality as outsiders within the academy as well as their material needs for financial support. Their personal narratives reveal, as well, how race shapes their experiences in the academy. Racism renders Cuádras' class status visible, whereas "whiteness" masks Pierce's background. Finally, the authors shift their focus from an examination of the structures which shaped their lives to an exploration of their attempts to find their own voices in academic work, and to resist the very structures which excluded their experiences as women from working-class backgrounds.

## **Introduction**

The term scholarship student<sup>1</sup> describes an individual from working-class origins who experience social and economic mobility into the middle classes, largely because of his or her academic excellence

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and achievements. Mobility, however, is not without its price, as these individuals experience a malaise which permeates daily life.<sup>2</sup> In this article, we appropriate the concept of the scholarship student to describe our personal experiences as white and Chicana working-class women in graduate school. As "scholarship girls," we have experienced the mobility promised by a trajectory of academic achievements, but we also own the uneasiness attributed to that path. In doing so, we have become keenly aware that our trajectory from scholarship girls to "scholarship women" has been and continues to be laden with tensions produced by the very structures which have shaped our experiences. Moreover, as a woman of color and a white working-class woman, we face these tensions from different relational positions to the existing configurations of power and privilege.<sup>3</sup>

The vignettes presented in this article are meant not only to describe the paths that we took, but to highlight our negotiations with the issues we confront as women of working-class origin who now occupy a space within the academy. It is a well-documented fact that the American professorate draws predominantly from individuals of the well-educated, white Protestant, and middle classes.<sup>4</sup> Discussing the institutionalization of privilege, Baca Zinn et al., have noted, "Institutions are organized to facilitate white middle class men's smooth entry into and mobility in positions of power<sup>5</sup>. These men establish criteria for the entry of others into similar positions, defining success, the ward system, the distribution of resources, and institutional goals and priorities in a way that perpetuates power." The academic institution and its prevailing culture are not exceptions to this characterization. Depending on whose interpretation one adheres to, the academic culture may be depicted as one ruled by the principle of merit, academic freedom, and professional autonomy,<sup>6</sup> or as Adams has suggested, "the Profession" is essentially a "men's club" that is hierarchical and patriarchal in its structure, "terroristic and militaristic," "dictatorial," as "rigid."<sup>7</sup>

In this article, we begin by describing who we were when we first arrived in the sociology department at the University of California, Berkeley in the early 1980s. The remainder of the article proceeds in a chronological narrative using examples from our experiences to make general points about how the intricate web of class, race, and gender relations shaped our experiences in higher education. The first section of the paper examines our point of entry into the graduate program as "scholarship girls." Though we share working-class origins, we describe as well the important differences in our racial and ethnic backgrounds. Like many Chicanas, Gloria grew up in an agricultural area of California; whereas Jennifer came from a declining industrial town in the Southwest.<sup>8</sup> We show how both the similarity and the difference in our class and racialized<sup>9</sup> positions shaped our experiences when we first entered graduate school. The following section explores our persistence through

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the middle years—post-M.A. and pre-dissertation. Using the concept "endurance labor," we consider the means we employed to get through these years in the face of limited institutional forms of support. The third section, "Lifting as We Climb," describes our experiences during our final years in the graduate program when we were completing our dissertations. Here, our focus shifts from an examination of the structures which shaped our lives to our attempts to find our voices in our academic work and resist the very structures which excluded our experiences. Finally, we address the contradictions we continue to face as women of working-class origin in the academy.

### **Point of Entry—Scholarship Girls**

#### ***Gloria:***

As the daughter of a farm laborer and a mother whose work revolved around the home and raising eight children, I grew up in a nurturing, noisy, and lively environment. Originally from the small, agricultural town of Brawley in the Imperial Valley of California, I was the sixth born of my siblings. My trajectory as a "scholarship girl" began very early in my schooling. I was often identified as the "teacher's pet" and selected to help others with schoolwork. Between family life and school days, I received a tremendous amount of positive reinforcement from my parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and neighbors. Hence, in doing well, I experienced a collective sense of ownership and pride in my achievements.

Yet, I also received double messages from my parents about my achievements and their expectations for me as a Mexican woman. On one hand, I was encouraged to excel in school; on the other hand, I was told that if I left home for my higher education, I faced the possibility of being disowned. For two years following my high school graduation, I enrolled at the local community college, taking almost double the number of units required. I used the time to demonstrate to my parents that I was serious about attending a university away from home, and when the letter of acceptance from UC Santa Cruz arrived, my siblings joyously celebrated with me and rallied my parents to permit me to leave home. By the middle of the summer, they reluctantly but proudly granted their approval.

My undergraduate years were truly a special time for me. Largely through the core and my sociology courses, I underwent a politicization process that fed my desire to make connections out of my lived experience. I had countless questions and pursued them with a passion. I discovered sociology because I wanted to understand the "class smells" of my childhood—the eastside smell of cantaloupes and onions that permeated our neighborhoods bordering the packing shed, to the smell of chlorine reeking from the pools of the westside of town where the

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"gabachos" lived. I had entered University of California, Santa Cruz as a polite Mexican American, the "polite timidity" Moraga intimates is "killing us,"<sup>10</sup> and left as a Chicana, determined to utilize education as a way of making a difference.

What I did not realize was that the emphasis placed on interpersonal relationships and the collegiality with faculty, administrators, and college staff was an emphasis unique to the Santa Cruz campus. Moreover, the special focus on students of color and the fostering of a multicultural environment was especially distinctive about Oakes College.<sup>11</sup> I had become accustomed to a sense of community and a nurturing educational environment. Coffee breaks with faculty and staff were a daily part of life. It was common practice for faculty to leave their doors open, inviting students to come in and talk.

I arrived at University of California, Berkeley with expectations that graduate school would far exceed my undergraduate experience. I was to be proven completely amiss in my expectations. When I arrived on the fourth floor of the Barrows Hall at Berkeley, I was physically struck by the fact that every single door was closed. And they remained that way. I remember asking myself, "Is this a *sociology* department?" It would only be a matter of a few months before I would personally label the fourth floor as "the morgue"—because to me, that is what it was, a floor with two hallways and a row of coffins on each side. (By the time I left, I did not feel all that differently). In any case, on my first visit to the department, I walked to the end of one of these long hallways to the office of the graduate secretary (who is no longer there). I handed her a set of papers. She looked at me and her first comments were, "Well, we don't eliminate you here, you eliminate yourself." Those words were my welcome to the Department of Sociology. I walked out of the office knowing this was going to be different.<sup>12</sup>

And different does not begin to describe it. Because I was the only domestic person of color (male or female) enrolled in my cohort of eighteen students, I initially understood the tensions I experienced as racial. In actuality, it was the convergence of race, gender, and class differences between myself and my peers, as well as my lack of "fit" with the prevailing department culture that produced my sense of alienation. It was in graduate school I first became familiar with the existence of private boarding schools, the seven sisters schools, and the ivy league. They would be the ones who set the tone and demarcate the cultural script.

Because of perceived and actual differences between myself and my peers, I developed few friendships with whites. In the custom Hurtado depicted, my relational position to white men and women was distinct.<sup>13</sup> The white men did not have a clue as to how to relate to me; because my personal style was not aggressive and argumentative, and I refused to engage in mindless, semantical chest-beating, I was not

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sought out as a "contending force." It was my friendships with two advanced graduate students—a middle-class Jewish woman and a working-class Chicana—who initially decoded many of the cultural and political subtleties for me. Eventually, I became part of a group of Chicana graduate students who came together across the disciplines. Although, at times, this group also proved to be a source of strain, it sustained me through these early years.<sup>14</sup>

As for my white female counterparts, the little experience I did have with them, largely in the context of seminars, only reaffirmed my feelings of difference. While I originally saw them as racial/cultural differences, I eventually recognized them as differences confounded by the simultaneity of race, class, and gender. Like the majority of men, these women appeared to be quite comfortable within the culture of the department.

I remember making several futile attempts to get to know the white women in the department. On these occasions my presence was greeted with a very sloppily hidden and uncomfortable surprise—the kind of greeting one gets when one has not attended church in a long time. It became obvious to me in the course of these gatherings that their friendships and networks were firmly established and that their interest in including me would, at best, be what Uttal has referred to as "inclusion without influence"<sup>15</sup> in capturing the continuing tokenism of women of color by white women. So I walked away from such encounters with a strong sense that the potential to establish networks with "sisters" in the department simply did not exist.

At the same time, I was sensitively attuned to the perceptions of others (including faculty) and knew that the responsibility for my alienated status would rest upon my shoulders. I would be known as the alienated one—I was the "minority" who kept to herself and did not integrate into the collegial dynamics of the department. The other irony here, of course, is that throughout my educational trajectory I had been centrally involved in the culture of academic and student life. What then, was so different at this stage? One possible answer is that, drawing from Pierre Bourdieu<sup>16</sup>, my "cultural capital"—the attributes, possessions, or qualities I brought with me to the academy—was incongruent with that valued by the academic world. All the qualities that had up until this point been sufficient and even regarded, were suddenly in fierce conflict with the dominant cultural capital. The stakes were higher; to attain the status of writer or scholar is powerful in the technocratic, information society we live in. Moreover, the appropriation of the structures of privilege afforded by the reproduction of cultural capital, which brought others to the same location, were structures I had survived but did not necessarily "own" in the same way.<sup>17</sup> Unlike these students, I was the beneficiary of the contradictions of an educational system set up to allow only a few to enter.

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Much later, at a point when I had constructed and solidified the legitimacy of my own values, did I realize that I too had entered with erroneous assumptions about others and about sociology. I had entered sociology presuming others who did so cared passionately about injustice, about human beings, about changing the state of the world we lived in. Instead, I found that the culture I had entered operated on different values and fundamentally different rules. I learned to expect not to be asked questions about who I was and/or where I was from (questions commonly asked in working-class culture), but rather "What school did you graduate from?"; "Whom have you worked for?"; "What gives you special status (if any) in the department—in other words, who do you know, what are your professional connections and what kind of fellowship or reward brought you here?" Questions asked by peers were basically geared toward determining one's cultural capital. It was not long before I slowly drifted to silence to "claim my education."<sup>18</sup> I found myself listening to learn—to absorb, to digest and to internalize the foreign culture I was immersed in. Eventually I did. While my silence might have been perceived as disinterest, silence for me became a mode of self-preservation.

It was my value system surrounding sociology that clashed most fiercely with the individuals I encountered as my peers. In a course on "Social Change and New Nations," I recall the painful absence of certain kinds of questions. Graduate students rarely expressed concern about human lives, about how people survived living conditions in poor and developing countries. Their concern was with theory—and only with theory. I was amazed at how easily they dismissed, or more accurately, how easily they ignored the human element in our weekly discussion.

If there was a human element in graduate school, it displayed itself in the nature of personal complaints. One of my initial observations about the culture of the department—one that I remain disdainful about to this day—was the all too common practice of incessant graduate student complaining. "The department doesn't seem to care about me." "Professors don't pay enough attention to me." How could I tell them I was grateful to be there? How could I share with them that I felt fortunate? For me, complaining meant forgetting the Chicanos and Chicanas from my childhood whose academic achievements had resulted in similar opportunities. How could I explain that back home my achievements were being watched—with implications for others, particularly other Chicanas? That my success was tied to feeding a hope—a hope that those of us raised in the barrio have seen dissipate among family, friends and neighbors? How could I share with them the facts that I felt a responsibility to others besides myself? Such an obligation was simply not part of the graduate student milieu. Neither their language nor their "moral fabric" made allowances for such background noise.

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### ***Jennifer:***

In contrast to Gloria's childhood in the agricultural center of California, I grew up in a declining industrial town at the base of the Rocky Mountains in southern Colorado. In the mid-1970s, the local steel mill shut down from full to one-third capacity, laying off thousands of steel workers, affecting not only the workers and their immediate families, but businesses, schools, and churches which sustained the web of social life in this predominantly working-class community. The decline of the manufacturing sector both locally and nationally meant there were no equivalent manufacturing jobs to replace those which had been lost. Throughout the 1970s unemployment was high.

In this social and historical context, and as the oldest sibling in my family, I had been instilled from an early age with a strong *working-class* work ethic and a sense of pride in a job, any job, well-done. My father taught me that whatever I did in life—whether it was digging ditches or cleaning toilets—it was important to do the very best. "Whatever you do," he would say, "you *will know* you did your very best. No one can take that away from you." This work ethic combined with my family's sense of responsibility to immediate neighbors and community. We not only considered ourselves responsible for our family, but to other people in the neighborhood and in the larger community. These beliefs strongly colored my early schooling and later entry to college as a "scholarship girl."

Like many working-class students, University of California, Berkeley was the graduate program I applied to—partly the result of my financial situation and the location of the university itself, but also because I simply did not know any better. No one had suggested that I apply to more than one program. When I first entered the graduate program, I had very low expectations about the department's faculty members. As an undergraduate, my teaching assistants who were sociology graduate students warned me about the benevolent attitude of neglect most faculty members held toward students, and about the structureless nature of the program itself. "It is the graduate students who will help you get through," they told me, "not the professors." However, the majority of the graduate students were very different from me. As a working-class white woman, I discovered early on that I did not fit into the culture of the academy. Quite simply, I did not speak the language. Although I had always done well in school, my academic accomplishments as an undergraduate did not prepare me for my entry into *academe*. As I was to learn, I simply did not possess the "cultural capital" that graduate students from more privileged backgrounds took for granted.<sup>19</sup>

Most of my first year in school, I said very little in seminars. I listened. And what I heard was a language and a style that I was

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unaccustomed to using. When I thought a particular book was bad, I described it that way. Those educated in the Ivy League who held similar views talked about how "the author made problematic assumptions..." Their assessments were cool, aloof, and seemingly "objective." I felt alienated and intimidated by such discussions. My responses to reading felt much more passionate and personal. I did not understand how they could be so detached from what they read. Were they not interested in how sociological theory applied to the real world?<sup>20</sup>

When I finally began to speak, at the end of my first year, I found myself being "corrected" by other graduate students. For example, in one seminar on the sociology of culture, we read Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's book, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*.<sup>21</sup> I passionately criticized Adorno, arguing that his theory left no room for the act of resistance. "He assumes that the masses are stupid and uncritical," I angrily concluded. My response to the book was not purely intellectual, but personal. I reacted against what I felt to be the ignorance and elitism of "highfalutin" theories about the working-class. Another graduate student, a male from Harvard, interrupted me: "As Jennifer has pointed out, the Frankfurt School does not adequately theorize the problem of human agency." As he continued to lead the discussion to another topic, a topic reflecting his own interest and expertise, I sat dumbfounded, thinking, "The problem of human agency! What happened to the people? Doesn't anyone care about real people?"

Later, in the same seminar, he interrupted me again, by rephrasing another criticism I had made of the book. This time I did not sit passively, but said, "Do you realize that this is the second time you have interrupted me?" Then I let go of my anger with full force: "Don't interrupt me again. And don't you ever tell me what I said—I said what I said. This is my criticism. Speak for yourself!" The classroom became silent—a long, embarrassed silence. Unwittingly, I had broken an academic norm by showing strong emotion in an intellectual discussion. And, in fact, I was told later by the professor, a professed leftist, that I had been "too hard" on this graduate student. He added that he was disappointed in me because I had disrupted the discussion and made people feel uncomfortable. "What about my feelings?" I wanted to say. "What about the fact that every comment I have made in this seminar has been ignored or overlooked?" But I said nothing. At the time, I was unable to fully articulate the nature of the problem I encountered.

Later that spring, in a graduate student women's group, a group of white women, we discussed the ways our male colleagues discounted and discredited our contributions to seminars. Several observed that men typically interrupted women or restated women's ideas as if they were their own. Although this gave me some insight into my own experience, I still had a nagging doubt about the accuracy of the criticism. Many of these women who complained about being interrupted by men, con-



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stantly interrupted me. When I made this observation, I was met by a flurry of criticism: "You can't be much of a feminist *if you are so quick to criticize* other women." "Feminists are supposed to *support* other women." While it was true that some of the women did support me and later became close friends, I still had lingering doubts about the others.

These other women, who were often from the Ivy League, did not seem all that different from the "Harvard white male." They spoke with a self-assurance and, at times, arrogance. They assumed they would be taken seriously and they appeared to be comfortable using what I considered to be the "male academic style," that is, "a way of standing, or sitting, or tilting one's head and saying in a doubtful yet serious tone, 'We don't know. The data are not in yet'..."<sup>22</sup> I began to realize that gender explained only a part of my uneasiness and discomfort. Although we shared similar experiences as women, there were differences among us—class differences. And what I saw in their attitude of confidence and self-assurance was a class privilege—one that they were unwilling to acknowledge.

What I began to learn from these experiences was that in entering the academy I not only encountered a male-dominated world, but an upper-middle-class milieu. My experience as a white working-class woman in graduate school could not only be understood in terms of my gender, but in context of race, class, and gender. White women from the appropriate class background had less difficulty than I did understanding the norms of academic discourse. This lesson continued to play itself out not only in seminars and student meetings, but in my very material needs for financial support.

Gloria and I first got to know one another while working at University of California, Berkeley's Survey Research Center. The pay for this job was minimal, the hours, long—we worked weekdays as well as weekends—and the work, boring and monotonous. In recalling this incident recently, we both laughed about how awful the job had been. During eight-hour shifts, we were simultaneously plugged into a computer terminal and a telephone headset so that we could interview people over the phone while typing their responses on the keyboard. We were not even able to stand up and stretch while "plugged in" because the headset cords were too short. Productivity was measured by our response rates, that is, the percentage of people we were able to convince to participate in the survey. (Those interviewers with low response rates did not last at the "survey factory.") To add to this factory-like environment, our supervisor, much like a quality control expert, "listened in" on our phone conversations to ensure that our interviews were performed in precisely the same way. And finally, Gloria, the token Chicana on the project, was expected to translate interviews into Spanish for Spanish-speaking respondents—an additional, highly skilled task for which she was not paid a higher hourly wage. Suffice it to say, we did not

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have much control over the labor process.<sup>23</sup>

Supposedly, both of us had taken the job to get experience doing survey research. However, in retrospect, we have acknowledged that we had also taken this job because we desperately needed the money. Neither of us can recall a time in graduate school when we were not worried about money. Every year I scrambled to get a teaching assistantship for the following year. And every spring, I worried about what kind of job or jobs I could piece together for the summer. The type of work did not matter as much as the fact that I somehow managed to get a job—for without one, I could not pay rent, much less tuition.

I vividly remember sitting in a graduate seminar one spring quarter listening to Professor X who advised us, in the course of his discussion, that we should all be reading books from his reading list during our summer vacation, assuming of course, that we all had the summer off to do nothing but read. I already knew what I would be doing that summer—I had lined up a paralegal job with a law firm in San Francisco. And, I knew that I would be working 40-50 hours a week at the law firm, just as I had the previous summer. Nevertheless, I unwittingly took his suggestion to heart.

When I came home at night from my job in the summer, I was too tired to read, too tired to think, too tired to do much of anything but flop down in front of the television. But what made this summer different is that every time I sat down in front of the TV, I felt guilty about not doing my academic work. I tried to rationalize my behavior—I was too busy, I was working full-time, I just didn't have the time—but I kept hearing Professor X's voice in the back of my head. Furthermore, I knew that some of my graduate student colleagues who did *not have to work* were in reading groups over the summer. As a consequence, in addition to the guilt I experienced, I felt angry and resentful that they had the luxury of spending their summers in this way and I did not.

The following fall, I met again with Professor X. He jokingly chided me for not doing my summer reading. I explained that I had worked full-time during the summer. "Why did you work full-time?" he asked, sincerely puzzled by this seemingly anomalous behavior. Somewhat defensively, I explained that I needed to work to make money for tuition. An embarrassed silence followed. He eventually changed the subject and the issue was dropped. But at the time, I too felt embarrassed, partly because his question made me feel "different" because I *had* to work and partly because his assumptions about my background rendered my experience as a white working-class woman *invisible*. Although I had begun to articulate the reasons for my feelings of marginality and alienation as a working-class woman in the academy, experiences such as this forced me to realize why it was so difficult to do so. When my experiences were brought to light, they were treated not only as if they were invisible, but as if they were something taboo, something to be

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silenced.

### **The Middle Years—Endurance Labor**

In spite of our feelings of discomfort and alienation, we continued to plod through the graduate program. We self-consciously chose the word "plod" not only to capture our feeling—it felt like we were plodding—but because neither of us was ever labeled a "star" graduate student, meaning a student who received tangible awards such as university fellowships or intangible ones such as attention of faculty members. Gloria termed our ability to persist despite the odds—five out of every ten entering graduate students drop out—"endurance labor."<sup>24</sup> By this, she meant the relentless drive to persist, in spite of adversity, and many times, because of adversity.

Endurance labor contrasts with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital.<sup>25</sup> Cultural capital is available to and transmitted by those who have control over linguistic and cultural competence in society; in other words, the upper classes. By contrast, endurance labor arises from those who have little control over these regimes of power, but who create, nevertheless, an inner and collective strength to struggle against the very structures that disempower them. Thus, endurance labor does not reproduce inequality, but pushes against these configurations of power.

#### ***Jennifer:***

In addition to its cognitive dimension, endurance capital also contains an emotional and more personal dimension, that is, the "fantasies we have about ourselves to help keep us going."<sup>26</sup> My fantasies revolved around the promise an academic job held—academic freedom, autonomy and the joys of teaching. I loved teaching. I strongly identified with the students of color and white students whose backgrounds were similar to my own. In retrospect, I realize that I gave them the encouragement and nurturance that I did not receive as a graduate student. In turn, their enthusiasm and success nurtured me. In addition to the appeal teaching held, my experiences in the work world pushed me back into the academy. Having worked for many years in boring, dead-end, 8-5 jobs, I was well aware of the limited autonomy, low pay, and lack of social meaning inherent in such positions. Obtaining a Ph.D. represented the means of escaping such jobs.

Such a dream is hardly a middle-class fantasy. Middle-class children expect to gain prestige, status, and social meaning from their jobs/careers, whereas working-class people often do not.<sup>27</sup> Fantasies about escaping the drudgery of work are the stuff working-class dreams are made of. However, I did not carry these dreams without ambivalence. Becoming upwardly mobile meant entering one world and leaving another behind. For me, such a departure sometimes felt like betrayal. By obtaining a Ph.D., I not only surpassed the class background of my

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parents, but joined the ranks of those who mocked and rejected my class origins.<sup>28</sup> Not surprisingly, as sociologists Richard Sennett and Jonathon Cobb observe, working-class men who enter middle-class professions never feel a part of the world they have entered. Instead they experience a profound sense of marginality.<sup>29</sup>

Despite my personal feelings of marginality and ambivalence, I persisted. Year after year I applied for university fellowships. And, year after year, I was nominated, but did not actually receive one. I was typically an "alternate," a designation which matched my own sense of being alternate, being different, the student at the end of the line who did not make the first cut. By the time I actually received a fellowship—quite late in my graduate career—I had learned to shoulder disappointment and rejection by sustaining myself with my own personal dreams and a strong sense of anger. I had come to understand how such decisions were made. Our graduate program, like the other educational institutions, though based on the ideology of meritocracy, was by no means meritocratic.<sup>30</sup> The graduate students who were awarded fellowships were typically those from the upper-middle class who attended Ivy League schools. Fellowship decisions, like most department decisions, were based on politics, not on personal merit. When my dreams failed to sustain me, my anger supported me. As Black feminist poet Audre Lorde has written, "a well-stocked arsenal of anger can be a useful tool against the personal and institutional forces which brought it into being."<sup>31</sup>

My well-stocked arsenal of anger and my dreams continued to sustain me as I slowly began to gain recognition for my academic work. I received an award for outstanding teaching as a teaching assistant the same year that I was awarded the Gertrude Jagger prize from the department of sociology for a paper I had written for my qualifying exams. And finally, after many years of being "alternate," I received a Regents University Fellowship. Though very late in coming, these awards and honors helped to keep me going through the slow and laborious middle years of Berkeley's graduate program.

### ***Gloria:***

The Berkeley Sociology Department is considered one of the more progressive departments in the country. What is not asked amidst this "folk understanding" of its place in the broader scheme of things is progressive by whose definition? Scholars of color have long called into question the Left's definition of progressive, especially in the light of the Left's persistent neglect of racism.<sup>32</sup> Given our "astute insights" as sociologists into the sources and ramifications of stratification in society, is it progressive to cavalierly endorse a "sink or swim" policy for graduate student retention? Is it progressive to have zero women of color on the faculty?<sup>33</sup>

I am reminded of the time when a group of us, as Chicanas, got

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together and decided to meet with the Chair about affirmative action within the department, especially as it pertained to Chicanos and Chicanas. We were inadvertently scolded and accused of "ghettoizing" ourselves in relation to our areas and for working with the same faculty year after year. Of course, our explanations about why we inevitably ended up working with the same handful of faculty went unheard. In fact, since Chicanos and Chicanas were first admitted into the department in the late 1960s, the signatures of the same four or five faculty members continued to appear on the cover pages of our respective dissertations. Is it progressive, then, to accuse students of color of ghettoization when the composition of our faculty (in ethnic, gender, and political terms) is limited in its ability to meet different needs?

Such experiences taught me that there were assumptions about who I was that I had no control over. It became most obvious in relation to exchanges about fellowships. As a recipient of a Danforth Fellowship, I quickly learned not to share such information when queried and to avoid discussions about fellowships, detecting from my interactions with my peers that at least two assumptions about my status prevailed: I was in graduate school simply because I was a "minority" woman—"an affirmative action case"—and the monies provided were sufficient that I did not have to find additional work. On both accounts they were wrong. As a recipient of affirmative action policies and programs in higher education, I have benefitted from the space such policies have made available for individuals like myself. Yet, like the fellow members of my department, I met all the standard criteria required for admission and graduation. Contrary to the disdain for affirmative action espoused by authors such as Shelby Steele<sup>34</sup> Richard Rodriguez<sup>35</sup>, a slate of other neo-conservatives who surfaced during the 1980s, I recognize the importance and the difference such programs made in my ability to advance through higher education.

Their intervention, via the financial, academic, and social support, had aided my retention on the scholarship path. By performing well academically, I was rewarded with fellowships. In spite of the assistance, like Jennifer, I cannot recall a time when I did not simultaneously work at least one job, and depending on the extent of the stipend, sometimes two or three part-time jobs to remain self-sufficient. I also worked as a strategy to find my niche within the culture of the academy. Such a strategy worked in part, however, because one of the most imperative connections to make in graduate school is with faculty. Developing meaningful relationships with faculty is critical for a successful graduate student experience; it is they who will invest in you and look after you. Although I was integrated into a research institute and involved with the governmental body for graduate students, I was not centrally based in my department. I felt disconnected and burnt out from trying to connect. I decided I needed to take a break and took one. I left graduate school after completing my

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post-M.A. coursework, but before taking my qualifying exams.

Ultimately, my endurance labor prevailed. I went home to the Imperial Valley, not sure if I would return to graduate school. In discussing working-class women's writings, Zandy suggests beginning with the home—to think of it as an "inner geography where the ache finally quits, where there is no sense of 'otherness,' where there is, at last, a community."<sup>36</sup> For a year, I re-energized with my family and gave serious thought to leaving graduate school. In going home, I once again experienced the feeling of belonging. I realized that my mother's women friends, as my old friends, and the neighbors I had grown up with wanted to know that I was successful at my goals. They wanted to be able to say to their children, "See, I want you to go to college like she did." Going back home helped me put things into perspective again, and I decided to return to the general vicinity and ease my way back into graduate school. In doing so, I was fortunate to meet and work for a Chicana faculty member at another campus, whose unconditional acceptance and confidence in me supported my interest to return. Thus, when I returned to the department, I did so with a decidedly different frame of mind, reflective of a consciousness Chela Sandoval has called the "differential mode of consciousness." She suggests that such a mode requires "grace, flexibility and strength of identity," and

...requires a flexible and mobile form of subjectivity in order to function, one capable of reading the current situation of power and of self-consciously adopting the ideological form best suited to push against its configurations...a form of consciousness well known to oppressed peoples.<sup>37</sup>

Upon returning, I sought out faculty members in my department who had demonstrated their intellectual and personal support of me in the past and whose expertise would compliment my research interest in a dissertation topic.<sup>38</sup> I picked up where I had left off. I also returned at a time when the declining number of African Americans and the stasis in representation of Chicanos/Latinos in graduate and professional education across the country grew as an issue of concern among those interested in increasing faculty diversity at institutions of higher education.<sup>39</sup> My impression, in contrast to the early 1980s, was that because of our declining numbers there was a renewed interest in providing academic and monetary support to retain graduate students of color. My participation in two summer research programs designed specifically for Latinos further cemented my commitment to the academic track.<sup>40</sup> Later, at the dissertation stage, I benefitted from a project designed to provide support during the final stage of the dissertation.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the combination

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of interested faculty mentors, support programs, and my own consciousness and resolution to accept the situational and political complexities that would define my life in the academy resulted in a renewed commitment to scholarship.<sup>42</sup>

### **Lifting As We Climb**

African American women developed the phrase, "lifting as we climb," to describe their personal and collective experiences in the civil rights movement.<sup>43</sup> In the course of the movement, these women not only lifted themselves up, they lifted others with them as they climbed. We use this phrase to describe our final years in graduate school.<sup>44</sup> In the middle years, "endurance labor" was crucial to our survival in a hostile and unfriendly environment. But in the final years, as we began to work on our dissertations, we found it necessary to work with others, and to lift as we climbed.

After a five-year interlude, we met again in a graduate seminar designed specifically to serve the needs of dissertation students. In the intervening years, each of us had developed confidence in our voices as academics and in our own research. We were no longer silent—we spoke up and, in bell hooks' phrase, "talked back."<sup>45</sup> We no longer cared what graduate students or professors thought and we had come to value our passion and commitment to our research.

Though we had not seen one another in years, we felt an immediate connection. Both of us had chosen a dissertation topic that was "close to home," something that spoke to our own experience, something that we felt passionate about. The seminar further centered our growing friendship. We found one another's work interesting and exciting. We supported one another intellectually and emotionally. Although we supported each other's ideas, we were always critical and hard-hitting in our comments. In Adrienne Rich's sense of the phrase, we took each other seriously.<sup>46</sup>

#### ***Gloria:***

I arrived at the seminar with a very focused objective—to get feedback on the dissertation. It is crystal clear to me now that the constant confrontation with privilege continues to gall my better senses. Privilege can be such an amorphous phenomenon; yet privilege is most often defined and recognized from the point of view of the "other."

As an example of such privilege I recount the following story: One seminar member submitted a rather lengthy chapter on her particular topic. I took a considerable amount of time to review the manuscript and provide her with a set of lengthy comments. It appeared to me that a critical gap in her research was a consideration of the impact of the history and racial structures in her analysis. Other seminar members made

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similar observations about her work. While she acknowledged its importance, she nevertheless stated that she would not integrate it into her final work. At the next seminar, she announced that she would not be joining the group because she was under a strict deadline to complete her dissertation. Aside from feeling cheated of feedback she might have provided for our upcoming work, I was angry at her cavalier dismissal of race as well as her position of privilege that allowed her to do so without any consequences or any sense of accountability. I recall thinking, "What would be the repercussions be if I were to ignore race?" Not that I would. But the point still stands. The nature of our existence—as individuals who on a daily basis negotiate to survive the structures we study—situates us in a vastly different relationship to the "isms." The issue of accountability for why and what we study defines our existence in the academy, but it remains a matter of choice for those from more privileged backgrounds.

### *Jennifer:*

Like Gloria, I was also acutely aware of the workings of privilege in this seminar. An incident which I found particularly offensive involved an upper-middle class white woman's ethnographic account of a white working-class community. Her descriptions of the people she studied reminded me of those made by nineteenth century colonizers about the "exotic" people they "discovered" in the New World. For her, white working-class women and men were strange, shocking, almost alien beings. She was greatly surprised, for example, to find overtly racist comments scattered throughout their discussions of otherwise positive interactions with people of color. She opined in class: "I just can't believe anyone would say these things (racial slurs). I never knew anyone who said things like that..."

From my standpoint, her naive "surprise" smacked of racism and class privilege. From the ensuing class discussion it became apparent that she had not read anything about the sociology of white racism<sup>47</sup> or the history of race relations in the United States. Studying this phenomenon without doing background reading on prejudice or race relations struck me as presumptuous and arrogant. It was as if she, like the early colonizers, considered herself to be the one who discovered this "new" intellectual terrain. In addition, her implicit judgement about the use of derogatory language—*they* say racist things and *I* do not—belied her own unexamined position in the structure of race relations. Though her upper-middle class, liberal upbringing had socialized her to suppress "impolite" racist remarks, it also encouraged her to develop racially homogeneous friendships and relationships. Despite her espoused liberal ideology, her closest circle of friends were upper-middle class people like herself and her own political energies went into a predominantly white middle-class social movement. Like many white leftists, she did not, as graduate



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student Alexandra Goulding characterizes such behavior, "walk the talk."<sup>48</sup>

The student found us to be unsupportive and "overly critical." Rather than listening to our comments, she made imploring remarks: "It seems like you don't like what I'm doing. Isn't there anything you like?... Well, I told you before this is only a draft." She later complained to the professor—but not to us—that she felt we had been too hard on her, and she eventually dropped out of the seminar. While it was true that we had been quite critical of her work, I more so than others, we had used that critical lens for all the work we read that quarter.

What is striking about this incident is how much I had changed from my first year in graduate school. I no longer accepted the scholarly norms of "objectivity" and detachment. I subjected the work of students and faculty to my standards. Racism and class privilege were only part of the problem I saw with this particular student and her work. What was even more disturbing to me was her complete lack of personal commitment to the intellectual project. For her, it was simply an intellectual exercise, a game to be practiced on an objectified and repellent Other. There was no personal investment or passion in her study. Moreover, because I was no longer the lone working-class voice in this upper-middle class environment, my criticisms were no longer met with embarrassed silence. I had found allies among the graduate students who supported rather than rejected my views.

From this dissertation seminar, Gloria and I and two other graduate students went on to form our own informal dissertation group. As Mary Kelsey<sup>49</sup> was fond of pointing out, it was no accident that the four of us had come together—we all came from some sort of public school background. We continued to meet in each other's apartments, shared home-made meals, and took two to three hours a week reviewing each other's work. It was in this group that I found true colleagues: people who read my work seriously and critically; people who pushed me to do my very best. But, even more importantly, people who shared the same values that I did about teaching, doing research, and being a sociologist. Here, I practiced my job talk, shared my anxieties about the job market, and finally finished my dissertation. It was in this group that we lifted as we climbed.

## **Conclusion**

We began our essay by describing our experiences as "scholarship girls." To conclude we would like to describe briefly where we are today as scholarship women and to outline the conditions of the university setting that continue to influence our lives and our struggles in creating a more inclusive and accountable academy.

Compared to many other graduate students in our respective

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cohorts, we have been among the fortunate few. In a time of serious fiscal cutbacks in colleges and universities across the country, we were able to complete our dissertations and to obtain tenure-track positions. Jennifer recently accepted a job in Sociology at a large public university. After completing a post-doctoral fellowship, Gloria accepted a position in American Studies at a public university.

Our success is not meant to be read as a happy ending, however. In these new positions, we face many of the same problems we experienced as graduate students. Although money is no longer a problem and we have managed to acquire some "cultural capital," we still find ourselves encountering institutionalized racism, classism, and sexism. Moreover, because we are located in the few token positions created for "women and minorities," the demands we face from students, colleagues, administrators, and our communities are tremendous. As the "woman" and the "minority," we are asked time and time again to give lectures and talks on multicultural issues, to assume responsibility for minority or working-class students, to sit on every university committee that requires a token white woman or person of color, to counsel students about sexual harassment, to read papers on multicultural issues, to make appearances on local television and radio, and to act as the bridge for the guilt of our supposedly progressive colleagues and students.

These issues are still considered "our" responsibility: white men (and some white women) rarely receive such requests, much less grant them. At the same time, we are expected to do our research, to "publish or perish," and to meet our teaching obligations. The personal and psychological costs of doing all this work are immense. Because of our ideological and political commitments, it becomes difficult to say "no" to the ever-increasing list of requests. When we say "no" to our students, we are no longer considered part of the struggle. When we say "yes," our department chairs and program directors tell us that we are doing too much service work, which in turn might hurt our chances for tenure and promotion.

Despite the conflicting messages we receive, we continue to speak out, "talk back," and most importantly, work collectively in our respective settings and across them. We have learned that we must pick our battles more carefully. Struggle involves a great deal of time and emotional energy—resources that have become increasingly precious and scarce in our lives as academics. We must continually weigh two questions against one another: 1) What can we do now, knowing that if we do not do something, nothing about the academy will ever change? and 2) Can we retain and act upon our commitments and remain in academic settings?

The answers to these questions are never easy, but the rewards do come. At one level are the institutionalized rewards—those rewards that signify recognition by legitimized, validated bodies—most often

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represented in the mainstream of the academy by grants, teaching awards, and so forth. And then there are the rewards that nurture our souls and the meaning of our place in the academy. They consist of the piles of notes and cards from students, expressing thanks and gratitude for the difference we made in their thoughts, their perspectives, and their educations. They come in the form of statements such as, "Your class changed my life." Moreover, they come in the form of updates from our students, informing us of their latest accomplishments, letting us know how they are now making a difference for others. Or, they come via coverage in the newspaper, as their leadership and work lives unfold.

Regardless of where we go as we pursue our lives as academics, we recognize the structural constraints, the competing demands, and the pressing needs that will continue to come to our attention because of who we are. As women from working-class backgrounds, but different ethnic backgrounds, we have learned to embrace our differences, recognize our similarities, and grapple with our complexities. We recognize that unless we come together for the purpose of addressing and acting upon broader issues, we will not challenge the reproduction of inequality. Our ability to collaborate defies the racism and classism institutionalized in the American educational system. This process is never an easy one, yet we continue to take one another seriously and to move forward the process of institutional change.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life, With Special Reference to Publications and Entertainment* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957).

<sup>2</sup> Examples of the "uprootedness and anxiousness" may be found in texts such as Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory* (Boston: David R. Godine Publishers, 1982); Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Random House, 1967); and Budd Schulberg, *What Makes Sammy Run?* (New York: The Modern Library, 1952).

<sup>3</sup> Aida Hurtado, "Relating to Privilege: Seduction and Rejection in the Subordination of White Women and Women of Color," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (1989): 833-855.

<sup>4</sup> Martin J. Finkelstein, *The American Academic Professorate* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984); see also E.C. Ladd and S. M. Lipset, *The Divided Academy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975).

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<sup>5</sup> Maxine Baca Zinn, L.W. Cannon, E. Higginbotham, and B.T. Dill, "The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11 (1986): 290-303.

<sup>6</sup> Martin J. Finkelstein, *The American Academic Professorate* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Harriet F. Adams, "Work in the Interstices: Woman in Academe," *Women's Studies International Forum* 6 (1983): 135-141; see also Sandra Acker, "Women, the Other Academics," *Women's Studies International Forum* 6 (1983): 191-201.

<sup>8</sup> This agricultural/industrial economic sector division in our experiences is confirmed by research comparing the historical experiences of people of color and white working-class people in the United States. In his book, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), Robert Blauner demonstrates that people of color are more likely than white working-class people to labor in agricultural settings.

<sup>9</sup> "Whiteness," though often conceived of as a neutral or invisible racial status in the United States, is a racialized social category. For an excellent discussion of how race shapes the lives of white women, see Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Cherrie Moraga, *Loving in the War Years* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 59.

<sup>11</sup> It was under the leadership of J. Herman Blake, Provost of Oakes College at University of California, Santa Cruz, that such a positive educational environment was provided. For his discussion of the programmatic approach undertaken, see J. Herman Blake, "Approaching Minority Students as Assets," *Academe* (1985).

<sup>12</sup> In an article on graduate education at University of California, Berkeley, Troy Duster notes that the sociology department's informal culture is characterized by "arrogance and anxiety." Unlike many departments, it is further described as having "negotiated and consultative" relationships with faculty members. Troy Duster, "Graduate Education at Berkeley," *The American Sociologist* 22 (Spring 1987): 83-87.

<sup>13</sup> Hurtado.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Zavella speaks to some of these differences that produced strain and conflict in our group in her article, "Reflections Upon Diversity

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Among Chicanas," *Frontiers* 12 (1991): 73-85.

<sup>15</sup> Lynet Uttal, "Inclusion Without Influence: The Continuing Tokenism of Women of Color," in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: An Aunt Lute Foundation Book, 1990): 42-45.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Power and Ideology*, eds. Jerry Karabel and A.H. Halsey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 487-511.

<sup>17</sup> This insight surfaced during a lengthy and invaluable conversation with Julia Curry-Rodriguez, spring, 1992. Also, see Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Representation," 487-511.

<sup>18</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Lies, Secrets, and Silences* (New York: Norton, 1978).

<sup>19</sup> Bourdieu, 488.

<sup>20</sup> Feminist scholars have long noted the division between "objective" or masculine science and "subjective" or feminine emotions. For example, see Arlie Hochschild, 1975. "The Sociology of Feeling and Emotion: Selected Possibilities," in Rosabeth Moss Kanter and Marcia Millman, eds., *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives in Social Life and Social Science* (Garden City, NJ: Anchor Press), pp. 280-307; and Hilary Rose, "Hand, Brain and Heart: Feminist Epistemology in the Natural Sciences," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9:1 (1983): 73-90. More recently, Patricia Hill Collins has argued that an emphasis on passion and emotions is the convergence of Afro-centric tradition and feminist thought in her book, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1990). From my own standpoint, I see such an emphasis as the convergence of feminist thought and a historically specific white working-class tradition.

<sup>21</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Heider, 1944).

<sup>22</sup> Susan Krieger, *Social Science and the Self: Personal Essays on an Art Forum* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

<sup>24</sup> Thanks to sociologist Ann Leffler for helping us to develop this conceptual tool.

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<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu.

<sup>26</sup> Kreiger.

<sup>27</sup> Lillian Rubin, *Worlds of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Richard Sennett and Jonathon Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).

<sup>28</sup> Many scholars have written about the experiences of working-class men who became upwardly mobile. In relation to the academy, see for example, Jake Ryan and C. Sackrey, *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class* (Boston: South End Press, 1984). Until recently, little attention was paid to the experiences of working-class women. See Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay, *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> Sennett and Cobb.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

<sup>31</sup> Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 124-133.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> In 1991, the graduate program at Berkeley hired its first woman of color.

<sup>34</sup> Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory* (Boston: David R. Godine Publishers, 1982).

<sup>36</sup> Janet Zandy, *Calling Home: Working Class Women's Writings* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> Chela Sandoval, "Feminist Theory Under Postmodern Conditions: Toward a Theory of Oppositional Consciousness," *Subversions* (Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> I should mention that the faculty member who chaired my dissertation

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was not among those considered to be in the "faculty ghetto," although other members of my committee would have been considered "guilty" by the Chair at the time.

<sup>39</sup> Michael W. Hirschorn, "Doctorates Earned by Blacks Decline 26.5 Percent in Decade," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, (February 3, 1988):1; See also, Beatriz Chu Clewell, *Retention of Black and Hispanic Doctoral Students*, (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1987); Gail Thomas, *The Access and Success of Blacks and Hispanics in U.S. Graduate and Professional Education*, (Working Paper, National Research Council, Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1986).

<sup>40</sup> I was a participant in two programs sponsored by the Inter-University Program, Social Science Research Council on Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methodologies and Latino Issues.

<sup>41</sup> The Tomas Rivera Center, sponsored largely by the P.E.W. Foundation, has hosted the Manuscript Completion Project since 1985. I also benefitted from a dissertation/teaching fellowship while a Scholar-in-Residence at the Colorado College, sponsored by the Consortium for a Strong Minority Presence at Liberal Arts Colleges. Both were excellent opportunities to progress on one's work and to network with other scholars.

<sup>42</sup> Laura Rendon expresses a similar view in her essay, "From Barrio to the Academy; Revelations of a Mexican American 'Scholarship Girl'," *New Directions for Community Colleges* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1992): 55-64. She argues that "institutions must consider past experience, language, and culture as strengths to be respected and woven into the fabric of knowledge production and dissemination, not as deficits that must be devalued, silenced, and overcome." As in the position I eventually came to embrace, Rendon concludes, "I do not hunger for the past; it is always with me."

<sup>43</sup> Theresa Ammott and Julie Mathaei, "We specialize In the Wholly Impossible: African American Women," in *Race, Gender and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 141-192.

<sup>44</sup> This phrase was originally used to describe grassroots organizing in the civil rights movement. We recognize that the university represents a much more privileged setting; however, we argue that the issues of racism, classism, and sexism continue to prevail, even in this more privileged context.

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<sup>45</sup> bell hooks, *Talking Back* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

<sup>46</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Taking Women Students Seriously," in *Lies, Secrets and Silence* (New York: Norton, 1978) 237-246.

<sup>47</sup> For example, see David Wellman, *Portraits of White Racism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>48</sup> Alexandra Goulding, personal communication, 1994.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Kelsey, personal communication, 1990.