

VOICING CHICANA FEMINISMS



Young Women Speak Out
on Sexuality and Identity

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women on my mother's side of the family as very strong, doing what they want to do. My mother and my aunts have definitely been a source of empowerment for me.¹

Marissa's reply:

I think my mom is definitely a strong feminist and her views overall are feminist. She's always made me really happy to be a woman and not think of it as a negative thing.

My mom had me when she was in high school. When she graduated, she went to the U of M [the University of Michigan] and got her bachelor's degree. She had to leave me with my grandmother in South Texas for a year to go to U of M and get settled with my dad. After she got her bachelor's, she went to law school and she had me throughout the whole thing. I think that takes a very strong woman. She definitely made a better life for me by going to school.

My grandmother is a strong woman also, my mom's mom. She's had a hard, hard life. When she was twelve her mother died. She was the oldest in her family. Soon after, her brother died and then four days later her father died. She's had a lot of things happen to her. She was a single parent and had to raise four kids. They were migrant farmworkers. Although things were hard, she did the best she could, and I admire her. When she talks, you sit and listen to her. The stuff that she's gone through—Oh my God! I ask myself, would I be strong enough to handle those things? My grandmother is very, very smart. She's always watching the news and she's trying to understand. She's very political and very aware. She takes voting and politics very seriously. I admire her for that because I think a lot of educated people don't.²

Alicia Z. Mactiel's reply:

Once again, I go back to the definition of what is a feminist? My grandmother Otilia, who is my father's mother, and even my grandmother Sara, who's my mother's mother, they both had to survive. I'll use Otilia as an example. Her husband died when she was twenty-five years old, basically my age. She had four kids to raise. She worked by selling *tamals* for a living. So I also consider her an entrepreneur. In that respect, she's very much a femi-

nist. She didn't go to the first man who offered her, "Come, I'll take care of you and the kids." No way. She said, "No, I can do it on my own," and she did. She never remarried, and she was widowed at twenty-five. I consider that feminist.

My grandmother Sara also. She's never ever depended on anybody to take care of her. She has a plot of land in Mexico, and she either does it herself or hires someone to farm the land. She lives off of the wages that come from the land, and that's a feminist to me. She's not waiting for someone to come take care of her. So, in that respect, they have been tremendous role models for me, even though sometimes they might not understand my choices in life or what I'm doing at Harvard Business School. It's all about the same concept of being self-sufficient, taking care of yourself, and tending for yourself instead of being dependent on people and at somebody's mercy.³

Valerie reply:

I have a lot of strong women in my family, but they wouldn't call themselves feminists. They would say, "Well, I'm just standing up for what is right," or "Sexual discrimination isn't fair." I asked my mom whether she was a feminist because I did some readings in college about the concept. She's like, "Oh no!" Like feminist was such a bad word. I'm like, "Well, don't you think women should receive equal pay?" She's like, "Oh yeah! Are you kidding?" So I said, "Then you can be a feminist." So now we talk about issues not in terms of feminism but talking about what real women experience. For example, a woman has a right to be independent if she chooses and women should have the power of choice. So I don't use the word feminist very often.

I also think my father's mother, my nana, is a feminist. She is very independent, because she left my grandpa, and she's always worked, and she hasn't depended on men.⁴

As illustrated above, respondents did not speak of feminism per se. Instead, they spoke eloquently and at great length about the different women in their lives as illustrations of women's strength, courage, independence, intelligence, and, most importantly, ability to survive. They had learned their feminisms through women's (and some men's) lived experience.

Speaking Feminisms through Lived Experience: The Definitional Wars

"Do you consider yourself a feminist?"

"I do. I'm a radical feminist."

—Camila Fuentes, twenty-six-year-old respondent,
Cambridge, Massachusetts

The majority of respondents (51 percent) readily labeled themselves feminist. There were also a sizable number of respondents (33 percent) who ascribed to the label but with reservations, and only a minority did not identify themselves as feminists at all (17 percent). Regardless of their orientation toward feminism, however, all had very definite notions of how their lives were affected by the fact that they were women, marked by their color, judged by their sexuality, and influenced by their class background.

Many respondents had problems answering the question of whether they considered themselves feminists and inevitably answered, "It depends what you mean by feminist." When I replied that it was up to them to define it, a long discussion often ensued about the war of definitions, rather than the essential goals of feminism. Most respondents felt that feminism, as currently defined, applied to middle-class, educated, white women and was not pertinent to the complexity of their lives. As Rosario stated, "I guess the term 'feminist' confuses me so much because you have such different perceptions of what a feminist is. I guess I am, in the sense that I am pursuing a doctorate in education, I'm out working, I do have a family."⁵ On the other hand, although she and her husband "talk about everything and we make all decisions together," she still saw "him as the head of the household and ultimately he has the final say." Rosario did not "have a problem with that, because I know that we are both equals." Rosario knew that on the surface there was an apparent contradiction and that some might construe her adaptation as adhering to an ideology of "machismo," but she felt that although her husband was of Mexican descent, "he isn't that type of person because his family doesn't have that background."

Many respondents made a distinction between their subjective definitions of feminism and others' assessments of their behavior. Many times respondents asserted, "I'm not a feminist," immediately followed by "but others think I am." Conchita explained that she "supported women's

rights."⁶ At the same time, she "supported the old ways. I like having a gentleman around. I like chivalry." She concluded that because of these contradictions, "I don't really think I am a feminist." However, Conchita was quick to point out that if "you ask my roommate, he'll tell you I am a feminist. He's a little bit chauvinistic but he does it supposedly jokingly. Like he'll tell me to do something for him and I'll tell him no! You've got two legs; do it yourself." Conchita's assertiveness was "part of the reason why he thinks I am a feminist." Her roommate was not the only one who thought Conchita was a feminist. "Other people think that I am because of the way that I support women's issues."

The concern over definitions of feminism often led to the issue of whether respondents had any feminists in their families. Respondents often gave examples of what they considered to be *feminist behavior* but with the caveat that many of the women they were describing would not call themselves feminists and perhaps even other feminists would not define them as such. They explained how these strong women fought for equal treatment in the family and in the workplace; they spoke of women's heroic efforts to raise large families without the support of a husband or men in the family and of working, often several jobs, to support their families. After listing the reasons they considered these women strong, respondents often said, "I guess they are feminists, but they wouldn't call themselves one."

Regardless of their identification, most respondents expressed reservations about a "white" definition of feminism, which, from their perspective, entailed either distancing themselves from men (several referred to "man hating") or having to forsake the gendered etiquette that many enjoyed, such as having men open doors for them or paying for them on dates. In other words, respondents' reservations about labeling themselves feminists stemmed in part from wanting what they called the "benefits of being a woman." The value they placed on chivalrous behavior in no way diminished their advocacy of equality and economic independence, nor their intolerance of physical abuse. The core of these young women's feminisms lay in what they variously called "independence," "the right to decide," and having "control." At issue was not so much the assignment of gendered tasks, like cooking or cleaning, but the right to decide whether they wanted such assignments, rejecting the *expectation* that the tasks were their responsibility simply because they were women. This was key for most of my respondents. No doubt there were also respondents who did

not want to do these gendered tasks under *any circumstances*, but these were the exception rather than the rule.

The concern over how to define feminism and whether they themselves fit existing definitions was best summarized by Alicia Z. Maciel. I asked whether she considered herself a feminist.

I think, in many ways, but it depends how you define a feminist. I'm someone who believes in being very independent and does not need a man to take care of her. Financially, I think, is one way in which I don't need a man. But emotionally I love to have my husband there for me, and I fully take advantage of that gift. I can be a little girl around him. In that respect, people would say, "Oh, my God, she's not a feminist! She needs all this love and attention." And I do. But, at the same time, if I don't have a boyfriend or husband, I'm not going to fall apart, and I'll enjoy life by myself. So I can go either way. I like to be very feminine in the way I dress. In other ways, I'm a feminist in that I really, really stand up for women's rights and that I believe that I can survive on my own and fend for myself and that the man doesn't have to be the one to earn more money. I feel very comfortable saying, "Well, you can stay home with the kids. I'll go to work."

Mapping a Feminist Consciousness: Women's Struggles and Triumphs as Feminist Lessons

A favorite activity among many of my respondents was to listen to women in their families tell them stories about their lives. Mothers related how they met their husbands, how grandmothers traveled alone great distances to provide a better life for their families, and how women sometimes let passions overrule their better sense. There were also stories about women's *triumphs* (triumphs) over adversity. There were many other themes, but the central purpose of the storytelling was to teach respondents how to avoid repeating other women's mistakes and to relish women's resilience.

Through these stories of success and struggle my respondents gained a deep understanding that talent, drive, and discipline alone were not sufficient to gain independence and have a "life of one's own." Respondents heard stories of women who tried to go to school, have a profession, and live alone but had few opportunities to do so. The historical time was not

propitious for women's independence. At the same time, many had come to terms with their lives and instead of living in regret, they tried to build families and provide their daughters a different life than their own. Sofia's mother illustrated this lesson well.⁷ Sofia's mother fought hard until her late twenties to build an independent life that did not include marriage and children. She began by rebelling against her father's requirement that she work in his store and went back to *la secundaria* (high school) at the age of seventeen. She was a reentry student when there was no such concept in Mexico. She had dreams of pursuing an education and having a career. According to Sofia, her mother "had things that she wanted for herself, but because of circumstances in her life, she wasn't able to really fully accomplish what she probably could have if she had had other opportunities." Nonetheless, Sofia's mother persisted as long as she could, including delaying marriage until she was twenty-nine. Instead of marrying early, which was the norm in her community in Mexico, Sofia's mother finished high school and "did two years of secretarial school in Mexico. She worked at a county office. She tried to do her thing; she didn't want to get married." The main motivation for resisting marriage was seeing "her mom with fourteen kids. Her older sister had nine. The one sister right below her had eight. I don't think she wanted that for herself. She always challenged what she saw around her, but at the same time, like I said, in some ways you could see her also as a traditional mom."

Respondents often related stories that verged on the mythical about the accomplishments of strong women in their families. These stories, however exaggerated, inspired my respondents in multiple ways. For Conchita it was her paternal grandmother, whom she barely knew, that inspired her. Conchita's father told her "stories about how she stopped a runaway carriage by walking on the bar that they put between the horses; she walked the bar and held the reins and pulled the horse back. Stories like that kind of make me feel maybe she was a little bit of a feminist."

Many of my respondents mentioned watching the women in their lives, taking note of the characteristics worth emulating. Unlike the notion of "role models," however, respondents saw both women's strengths and weaknesses and actively chose which characteristics to cultivate. Magdalena felt that different aspects of herself were related to the three significant women in her life—her mother, her grandmother, and her aunt.⁸

From her mother Magdalena felt she "got my strength, my willpower to do things with or without help." In contrast, from her grandmother she got "the homemaker," and "I get the outgoing part from my aunt who has always been really *loca* [crazy]. So I always think I got the best of the three women in my life if you put them together."

Respondents told countless other stories about women around them who showed them what it was like to live as a woman of Color in this society. My respondents used these women's lived experiences to define their feminisms.

Feminism in the Body: Sensuality and Pleasure

My mom taught me about the value of laughter when you're in pain.

—Sonya K. Smith, twenty-four-year-old respondent,

Ann Arbor, Michigan

Although many of my respondents undoubtedly experienced harsh times, they also spoke about their families' sensuality around food, music, relationships, celebrations, and, above all, humor. Irma Martínez's father, before he died prematurely at the age of sixty-four, enjoyed music and other pleasures like eating well.⁹ This was a lesson she learned from him and one she treasured. Before his untimely death, Irma's father had a series of complications related to his diabetes that hospitalized him several times. During one of his hospital stays, he advised her on a more healthy and joyous lifestyle. He told her, "*Hija cándida. No te mal pases, no te desvelas.*" (My daughter, take care of yourself. Don't skip any meals and get your sleep.) Irma's father had a special love for folkloric music and religiously listened to the radio. Whenever a special song played, he asked his wife, "*Oye vieja, quién canta esa canción?*" (Hey, old lady, who is singing that song?) And she would say, "*Oh, yo no sé.*" (I don't know). "*Ay, ¡No sabes nada!*" (You don't know anything!), he would say playfully. Irma recalled that her father "knew every song and songwriter and what date the record was released and what he was doing when it came out. Every Sunday morning he loved playing one of his records, a trio or some kind of music." Irma also had inherited her father's love of food. "He loved to eat. I love eating. I think that's something that is not very [U.S.] American. I love having a nice meal and he did too."

Another aspect of many women's sensuality was the pride they took in their looks. Christine Granados's mother was famous in her family for maintaining her appearance.¹⁰ Christine stated, "My mother was *la reina* [the queen] of the house. She enjoyed being the center of attention because of what she wore or the way she looked. She loved compliments." At fifty-seven she was still a "looker" and very "beautiful."

Although Christine's mother was very liberal in all other respects and very egalitarian in how she treated her daughters and her sons, personal appearance was the only area where there was a pronounced gender difference. Christine's mother had emphasized to her daughters to "wear lipstick, eyeshadow, makeup," and directly told them if she thought they "looked frumpy." Christine concluded with a laugh, "My mother would die if she saw what I was wearing now. She would be appalled if my purse didn't match my shoes." Christine did not necessarily agree with her mother's opinions but nonetheless was influenced by her views as she recognized that she had "a lot of her in me. I notice if a woman's shoes are not impeccable. If the heel is worn then I know that she doesn't care about the way she looks. I have that in my head."

Humor was also central in many of my respondents' families, as several commented that they had inherited their "outrageous senses of humor" from various family members, including their mothers. Many times seeing the comical aspects of a situation served the purpose of fending off racist and sexist attacks, safeguarding them against pain. Sonya K. Smith, whose father was white and whose mother was of Mexican descent, did not resemble her mother.¹¹ So much so, that when Sonya was young she thought she was "adopted because everybody said, You don't look like your mom." Her mother knew that Sonya would confront these attitudes the rest of her life, so she taught Sonya to be "tough" and to "be true" to herself, to always listen to her "gut" and not rely on others' judgments of her. Sonya's mother gave her the fortitude to follow her dreams and not be curtailed by others' views of her mixed heritage by teaching her "the value of laughter when you're in pain." For example, when Sonya and her mother went to grocery stores or malls, they would "be tagged and followed by security guards." They worked out a routine, which they "started by cracking jokes really loud. 'Oh yes, my little Mexican maid and I'm the rich girl,'" and Sonya knew to tell the guards, "Oh, she's my nanny. She's not my mom." According to Sonya, they were "just kind of saying, 'Fuck you!' to everybody

around us who is watching us." Similarly, when Sonya's mother visited her in the Midwest where Sonya was attending graduate school, she remembered, "We were riding the city bus because I didn't have a car and my mom would outright tell people who were staring at us, 'Haven't you ever seen a Mexican before?' So she taught me to be feisty and think of creative coping strategies. Humor definitely was a must."

Underground Feminisms, or "The Mouse Will Play while the Cat Is Away"

Several women were unable to assert their sensuality in the presence of the men in their families, either because they wanted to avoid the men's negative judgments or because the men prohibited them from experiencing pleasure through such activities as listening to music and *platicando* (chatting) with other women. Respondents told stories of the women in their families circumventing male authority by asserting their preferences while men were away. Mistry's grandmother held a certain amount of authority in the family, because although Mistry's grandfather "made the money, as soon as he got the paycheck he brought it home to my grandmother. And she divided it up, the first cut went directly to the church and the rest went to feed the kids."¹² Nonetheless, Mistry's grandfather "was very controlling. As soon as he would leave the house, I remember she'd put on the Mexican records. [*Laughing.*] That was her joy. She knew when he would be coming home, and she turn them off." After Mistry's grandfather died, her grandmother "lived on her own, learned how to drive a car, and visited people." As it did for Mistry's grandmother, sometimes ultimate freedom for many women came after their spouses died.

Victoria lived in a female-dominated household until her father came home and changed the atmosphere dramatically.¹³ Even though Victoria had been raised by both parents and they had been married for twenty-four years, she "never really had a lot of direct contact with my dad" because of his emotional distance. Everybody in Victoria's family was "very afraid of my father. We would hear the car drive up, we'd hear his keys, and we would say oh God! Everything changed whenever my dad came home; we would always go to our rooms and be really quiet."

Many respondents had witnessed women's struggles to create a space of their own. Sometimes it happened at the death of a spouse, as it did for

Mistry's grandmother. Other times it happened after women left abusive relationships and they blossomed, or after women had raised their children and they had more time and space. After all the children left for college, Camilla Fuentes's mother began by making her husband "do his own laundry" and telling him "*ya no voy a andar detrás de ti limpiando!*" (I'm not going to be behind you cleaning up!)¹⁴ Then she took over her children's bedrooms after they moved out and used each one for her "different pleasures"—one bedroom became her "makeup room," and the other bedroom became her "reading room."

Making Women into Feminists

I definitely think I'm a feminist. My mom raised me to be one.

—Gloria, twenty-seven-year-old respondent,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Many of my respondents learned about feminism by observing women's lives. But they also received very direct messages about two core issues: to refuse abuse from men and to become economically self-sufficient at all costs, mainly by obtaining an education. In many women's minds, these two issues were interrelated. They could not escape abuse unless they could stand on their own feet economically. Some were told directly by their mothers that they were "making them into feminists" without necessarily using the word but by describing what my respondents later labeled feminist. Gloria's mother told her not to get married and to generally avoid men at all costs. "My mother always told me that boys only wanted one thing from you and that men in general were evil. 'You don't want to get married. You want to have an education, you want to be able to support yourself, and if you can do that, why do you need a husband? You'd only be somebody's *criada* [servant].'"

Gloria's mother applied the same standard to her own marriage and told Gloria, "The only reason I got married was because I wanted children and I didn't have an education and I wanted to leave Mexico and your dad came along." He was a "U.S. citizen and she wanted to leave. She was older, she got married when she was twenty-eight, which is very old for Mexican standards. My dad was nearly thirty-nine. They're eleven years apart." Furthermore, according to Gloria,

My mom always raised us with the notion that you're equal or better than men. You don't need a man in your life for anything and you shouldn't count on a man. My mom always told us you should have your own money. You should get a degree so that if you want to get married it's your choice. But if the guy's a jerk, you can leave him. So she always kind of instilled that attitude in me.

Gloria understood the difference between her mother's admonishments about men in general and her assessments of her own marriage. Gloria felt that "my parents have a good relationship, but my mom's just a big talker."

Similarly, Marissa's mother told her to "enjoy yourself," to "take advantage of the freedom of being single," and to "travel as much as she could before getting attached to a man." Marissa's mother was especially adamant because of her own experience of getting pregnant before finishing high school. She went on to attend college, and graduated from one of the top law schools in the country while she was raising Marissa. Her mother also defended Marissa against her relatives' query, "When is Marissa getting married?" Her mother inevitably replied, "Hopefully not anytime soon!"

Women's Contradictions: "Live as I Say, Not as I Do"

My mom is probably the closest thing to a feminist, even though she didn't want to stand up to my dad. She told us, "Don't get married when you're young. Live your life; do what you want to do; don't be dependent on a man"—even though she never took her own advice.

—Victoria, twenty-four-year-old respondent, Santa Cruz, California

Many respondents noted the contradictions between their mothers' admonishments against men and the examples from their mothers' own lives. In Carolina's extended family, most could be considered "feminists," if the term is defined as someone who believes in "the equality between the sexes, women having equal rights, and women having as equal an access to opportunity as men."¹⁵ Both men and women in Carolina's family held these beliefs. However, Carolina thought, "At the same time there's a big difference between my mother and her younger sisters. My mom is the old-

est of eight kids. Most of her five sisters are ten years or more younger than her (with the youngest being my age!). I think this contributes to the generation gap." Her parents got married in 1968 when Carolina's mother was twenty, and even though Carolina thought that her father was "very Americanized, born in the United States and his parents were also born in the United States, he's still very old school." Carolina's "father would not even dream of washing a dish or doing laundry." Carolina's mother justified not sharing household chores with her husband by claiming that his job driving a truck and moving things into storage was very "hard physical labor." According to Carolina "letting my dad get away with doing nothing in the house was the fact that she found taking care of a husband and one baby quite easy compared with taking care of her father and her brood of younger brothers and sisters!" Carolina's grandmother "was mentally ill and in and out of mental hospitals. My mother had to do everything in the house—cook, clean, all of it. She says she missed so much school because there was always something to do, another crisis to manage."

Regardless of her mother's contradictions, Carolina thought, "My mother is my feminist conscience voice because she has been very vocal about things." Carolina's parents had been married for thirty years and their patterns of behavior were so well set that, according to Carolina, "How can you teach an old dog new tricks?" During weekends, her mother caught up on household chores, while Carolina's father had "lazy-hazy Sunday, watching football all day." Most recently, however, Carolina's mother had "started making him fold his laundry, so he's there folding his underwear."

Collaborative Feminisms: The Centrality of Women in Respondents' Lives

I love my sister more than my husband.

—Cristina, twenty-year-old respondent, McAllen, Texas

My respondents inhabited a world filled with women—mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, and women friends. Most of their primary relationships (aside from the lovers of heterosexual women) were with women. Most respondents were not completely conscious of this fact because men (fathers, brothers, lovers, male relatives) were a constant meta-presence

(although most in "virtual" form) in their lives. That is, what men thought and did affected respondents in a constant way, but the people they talked to, they spent time with, and they depended on, and who returned much of what they gave, were women. It was from this female-dominated context that my respondents drew their map of feminisms "in the flesh" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, xix).

Many of my respondents demonstrated their connection to women in their lives by encouraging them to go back to school or change jobs that were better suited for them. Other times they helped women in their families to leave relationships, sometimes with their fathers or stepfathers. Sisters often helped each other, the oldest usually counseling the youngest about such things as going into higher education or handling their parents when they had conflicts. Whatever the issue, there was an exchange of roles in which the daughter played the role of supportive friend nudging the mother to take action on her own behalf, or the sister acted as a mentor, teacher, or mother to the other. Aunts and grandmothers also took part in this woman-circle that facilitated much of my respondents' success and happiness.

Cristina considered herself a feminist largely because of the influence her older sister Anna had had throughout her life.¹⁶ Cristina felt that Anna had taught her "everything. She's been in charge, she just, I'm getting emotional." Cristina began crying, overwhelmed by how much she loved her older sister and how much she had learned from her.

[*Crying*] She's just everything. She's totally supportive. [*Whispering and crying*] Without my sister, I don't think I would be alive. She motivates me to strive as much as I can. I hardly had a mother, she was sick [her mother was diagnosed as schizophrenic]. But Anna's been everything—my mom, my best friend, everything. I love her more than my husband.

Anna had been especially helpful when Cristina got married at the age of fourteen and had a child at fifteen. Cristina was expecting her second child and was a junior in college majoring in occupational therapy. Throughout her difficulties, Anna had always supported and encouraged Cristina to continue in school. Anna was only six years older than Cristina and was in her last year of medical school. Cristina took inspiration from Anna's accomplishments and planned to pursue a career in the medical field after finishing her degree and when her kids were older. Cristina's dream of "even-

tually pursuing a medical degree" came directly from Anna's belief that Cristina "could do it and I see her and she is so happy. I've always wanted to be like my big sister. She's great. She's really motivated me."

Besides pursuing education, often women also helped each other leave destructive relationships. Maritza C. Resendez's mother had taught her daughters not to put up with abusive men.¹⁷ "I see how some of my mom's sisters put up with their husbands. My mom's always been there for them. One time she even hit my uncle on the back with a broom because he was trying to hit her sister. She wasn't going to accept that." Maritza's mother told her brother-in-law, "You don't hurt my family in front of me." Maritza felt that her mother had "always been very protective of her family and the people she loves and real strong about that. I can't be like her, but I learn from her, and I try to be like her. They're good survival skills."

Several other respondents spoke of their mothers and grandmothers taking the metaphorical "broom" to some man's back to defend a woman. Sandra Saenz's mother physically fought with her husband to let Sandra continue with her education.¹⁸ Kim Rivera-Figueroa's grandmother, at the age of fifteen, threw her own father out of their home because he was an abuser.¹⁹ All these women were creating a circle of solidarity against abuse, neglect, and humiliation. They never called it feminist, they simply were defending women out of a sense of empathy and identification with their plight.

The Role of Men in Respondents' Lives

Feminist Men

Mi padre el filósofo
El que nunca fue a la escuela
pero sabe mucho
Al que le hicieron daño y perdonó
El que dañó y se perdonó a sí mismo
El que coneció hijos y se alegró

[My father the philosopher
The one who never attended school
but has wisdom
The one who was harmed and forgave

*The one who caused harm and forgave himself
The one who conceived children and rejoiced.]*

—Hurrido 1986

A main impetus behind feminist organizing and theorizing is to mitigate the deleterious effects of patriarchy on women's lives. Many Chicana feminists have analyzed the specific workings of patriarchy, which my respondents experienced in a myriad of ways: from sexual abuse by fathers, to abandonment by fathers, to sexual harassment by male professors. Also present in my data, and much less discussed in feminist writings, are the positive effects men can have in women developing a feminist consciousness. My respondents spoke with passion about their fathers, lovers, brothers, uncles, male colleagues, and male professors who helped them become independent women and embrace their full potential—men who were important in “making them feminists.”

Many of my respondents described relationships that they considered healthy egalitarian relationships with men. Even in these relationships, however, respondents acknowledged that these men were still capable of sexist behavior. Many respondents who were married or engaged described their relationships as very egalitarian. Gloria, who was engaged to be married, recounted that she had never considered changing her name, but “my fiancé suggested that we both hyphenate our name. It never occurred to me that he would do that, and it took a while for me to come around to it. But I think it's a good thing, so we're both hyphenating our name.” Regardless of his non-sexist behavior that included Gloria's fiancé's willingness to “help around the house,” according to Gloria, “There's still some points of contention where I think he's slacking on some things. But I think we have a very equal relationship and he knows what I expect.” Gloria had explicitly negotiated with her fiancé the circumstances under which she would have children.

He knows that I'm a very demanding person and if we have children it's because we both want them. If there is a chance he's not going to be around, I won't have children. I refuse to do the single mom thing. I'd end up killing the child and probably myself. [Laughs.] I'm not patient. I also don't think that all women should have children. I think it should be your choice. I don't

think that just because I was born with a uterus, I have to bear a child.
[Laughs.]

Victoria and Rafael came from very traditional families, but they made a decision to make their marriage “fifty-fifty.” Victoria and her husband both attended college, and they were very happy about how they divided household chores and decision making. “When I hurt my back, Rafael did all the housework, and it wasn't an issue. He picked up my half of it, ‘cause we have it split down the middle. So I am very lucky in that way. Any decision we make, we make as a team.” Victoria also believed that she would not have married Rafael “if our relationship had been otherwise.”

Several respondents were married to men who were not as educated as they were, but for the majority of them, this disparity was not an issue. In fact, many of the spouses were extremely supportive and proud of my respondents' accomplishments. Kim Rivera-Figueroa's husband was the director of a boys' and girls' club at the Hellot River Reservation and “loved kids. That's part of his job.” He had been very willing to postpone having a family until Kim graduated, which was finally happening in June. “We are going to have our family finally, so he'll be happy. His family has been praying for a grandchild since we got married. So they're happy.” Overall, Kim felt that her husband “loves that I'm going to school, because I love school a lot. He supports everything I do.”

At times, my respondents' partners were the ones to nudge them to accomplish as much as possible, even when respondents were reluctant to take risks themselves. After Maria Villa had her baby she wanted to stay home, but her husband said “No.” And He made me go take those entrance exams” and “he kind of gave me that little push.”²⁰ When Maria found herself procrastinating, her husband told her, “You gotta go study. Go! Go study.” Overall, Maria felt that her husband was “really committed to both of us finishing school.” Whereas Kim Rivera-Figueroa's husband had less education than she did, Maria Villa's husband was also attending the university.

There were only a few respondents whose partners were ambivalent about my respondents' educational achievements and their feminist views. When I asked Cristina whether her being a feminist caused difficulties in her marriage, she replied, “Yeah. Yeah, that's why we had all our problems

in the beginning [of her six-year marriage].” The values with which Cristina had been raised clashed with the values Mario’s U.S.-born parents had instilled in him. According to Cristina, Mario came “from a family where his mom thinks that you should be barefoot and pregnant. And if your husband beats you, or hits you, or whatever, then you have to take it.” Mario apparently accepted these views because his father “was very abusive towards his mother and it was terrible. She was like a maid to them. She still acts like it. She wanted me to be that way and I was never treated that way in my family.” Cristina said, “Mother never really told me, Oh you have to make *tortillas de harina* [flour tortillas]. You have to wash. And when I got married my mother-in-law wanted me to do everything for Mario. She wanted me to be on my hands and knees for him and I couldn’t, I wouldn’t do it.” Cristina’s lack of compliance led to her mother-in-law accusing her of being “the laziest person in the world. I was like, That’s not fair. I go to school. I work. I take care of Rina. Then I have to come home and cook, clean, and wash? I said, That’s not fair! So, yeah, we had a lot of problems.” Mario slowly became more sensitive to Cristina’s needs, a change largely prompted by the fact that Cristina separated from him for a short period of time. Most recently, when Cristina did not feel like cooking, “He takes us out. He helps me out with Rina. He’s a lot more patient. He’s starting to realize that if he wants our marriage to work, he’s going to have to give in some of the time.”

Fathering Feminists

Fathers were also important in making their daughters feminists. Ironically, they created feminists by raising their daughters like boys rather than girls. That is, they approved, encouraged, or simply did not obstruct their daughters’ gender transgressions. Some of the respondents talked about being both their father’s son and daughter, either because there were no boys in the family or their father related better to daughters than sons. Lucinda considered herself a tomboy who had always been involved in sports.²¹ Even though she had a younger brother, “Cutting the lawn became my responsibility because it was switching the gender roles between my brother and I because I was older. I was the one doing the chores that normally my brother should probably be doing.” Although Lucinda’s fa-

ther wanted his son to do these chores, he neither made him do them nor prevented Lucinda from taking on these “manly man” tasks.

Several respondents thought they had closer relationships with their fathers than with their mothers and spoke about the companionship and mentorship that their fathers provided. Bianca’s father taught her “to be hardworking, to save, and to be political.”²² She took great pride in her civic participation through “voting and being a good citizen.” Her father told her,

“You need to access information in any way that you can.” My dad is very knowledgeable about things. He loves to travel. I’ve learned to be a worldly person. But more importantly, from my dad I learned to debate and to analyze things. As far as I can remember, we watched *60 Minutes* and *20/20* together. He’d talk and talk and I’d talk and we’d converse [*vic*] back and forth.

Bianca felt that the greatest lesson she learned from her dad was to “ask questions, speak up.” Bianca’s father belonged to the San Francisco Union for Lithographers and took Bianca to union meetings since “I was six. There were two hundred men smoking and drinking and I’d be the only girl there.” These experiences led Bianca to feel that no matter what “room I’m in, I’ll stand up and ask questions, and I’ll tell them what I feel. I’ll write letters to the editor and I’m not afraid to do it. I learned that from my dad, not from my mom.”

Fathers also pushed education hard on their daughters. Several of them told their daughters to “forgo boys” until they finished their degrees. They were especially wary of their daughters marrying early. Misy’s father raised her not to “question that you go to college. My dad provided a huge push. Forget all the men, all your fun. You need to get your degree and then you can worry about that.”

Jennifer Trujillo’s father, a high school principal, was very involved in her education.²³ Their relationship was not smooth: “We are both so stubborn but he would sit up at night with me and help me write my college essays or even in fourth grade, my speech contest. He’s the one who taught me how to write and I think I am a fairly good writer now.” Jennifer’s father was also very invested in “toughening” her up, so she could handle a difficult profession. Jennifer went to a very prestigious college,

where she was a pre-medicine major. According to Jennifer, her father “would yell at me and if I cried, he would be like, ‘Don’t cry. I was just telling you what to do!’” He taught her, “Don’t act like a girly-girl and start crying. You handle the situation and you deal with it.” Jennifer was “thankful that he was hard on me, even though at the time I didn’t appreciate it. But it’s made me a stronger person.” In addition to teaching Jennifer academic skills, her father and her mother also instilled in her the desire “to give back to the community.”

Several respondents’ grandfathers had also contributed to their feminism. Irma Martínez commented, “My grandfather was a feminist.” Irma came to this conclusion after she was trying to figure out how the women in her family mostly her aunts had survived such tough times and realized that “Ultimately my grandfather is the person who helped all this happen.” Irma’s family’s accomplishments began with her grandfather’s facilitating her mother’s immigration to the United States while leaving her two older children behind. According to Irma, her grandfather told her mother,

“*Hija, si quieres irte para allá, tus hijos se quedan con nosotros y van a estar bien cuidados.*” [My daughter, if you want to go over there, your children can stay with us and they will be well taken care of.] It wasn’t like this horrible thing she was doing. He never made her feel guilty about leaving them. My mother had chosen to come to the States to help provide for her children after she’d realized that their father would not be taking responsibility for them. She also knew there was no work she could do in Mexico that would help her provide for them. He allowed her to do what she thought was right and she’s done the same thing with us. The whole thing about studying and doing well in school.

Irma’s mother continued her own father’s tradition. When it was Irma’s turn to leave East Los Angeles for Princeton University,

She never gave me a fight like some other moms who are like, You have to live here at home. I know where it comes from but it is so narrow-minded. She just wasn’t like that. So I think she is a feminist. Maybe even my grandfather was a feminist. Maybe that’s what allowed her to be a little more daring even though she’s very, I call her *santita* [saintly], very quiet.

Lucha’s Womenworld

Although Lucha did not feel “comfortable with the label” feminist, hers had been an existence in a predominantly female environment. Unlike my other respondents, Lucha did not have a father, brother, or uncle to help her understand life’s struggles. She had only her sister to assist her in her womanly transitions, from understanding menstruation to flirting with her first boyfriend. Lucha’s world was one of women—her sister, her friends, and female lovers. She ventured out of this womenworld when she took on male lovers and even a fiancé, but ultimately she always returned to the only safety she had ever known—the womencircle that ultimately had been her salvation.