

Retrospective: Shifting and Shaping Lesbian/Queer Space Within  
NACCS  
Chicana Caucus Plenary: Demanding Space: Chicana and  
Lesbian/LBMT Caucuses De-centering Patriarchal Heteronormativity  
within NACCS

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A special thank you to the NACCS Chicana Caucus Co-Chairs, Drs. Yvette Saavedra and Isabel Millán, for inviting me to share remarks for the 30th Year Anniversary of the Chicana Caucus with my amazing co-panelists, colleagues, and friends.<sup>1</sup>

It is with great fondness that I remember meeting all the panelist, Drs. Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz, Anita Tijerina Revilla, and Sandy Soto when they were graduate students; today they are professors and academic administrators. So, it is an honor to be on this panel and reassuring to know that the dream we had over 30 years ago to encourage Chicanas and Indigenous women to pursue academic careers has become more of a reality today. Each of the panelists, and others, through their scholarship, teaching, and academic activism are contributing to the shifting and re-shaping of the academy and of NACCS.

Because my life in higher education encompasses over 50 Years, I have had the opportunity to witness the evolution of NACCS almost from its beginning; and

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<sup>1</sup> National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) 2022 Virtual Conference, Chicana Caucus Plenary, “*Demanding Space: Chicana and Lesbian/LBMT Caucuses De-centering Patriarchal Heteronormativity within NACCS*,” April 23, 2022. This plenary was organized as a plática; each speaker shared their initial comments and then panelists were invited to respond to one another.

what a story it has been with the most recent stories and challenges being our surviving of. So, my thanks and gratitude to the NACCS leadership for all they are doing to keep us engaged through the sharing and valuing of our work via this conference.<sup>2</sup>

The challenges of change within NACCS, throughout our history, has tested the very core of this organization. NACCS, though, has survived because we understood, for the most part, the need for this organization to create an inclusive space as a means for broadening the academic discourse. More specifically, the NACCS Chicana and Lesbian Caucuses provided space for the development of our role as Chicana Lesbian scholars, giving us agency to broaden the context of Chicano Studies with the inclusion of Chicana and Queer Chicana scholarship, which was often met with resistance by both NACCS colleagues and our respective campus colleagues.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say, all is perfect now. We know there is still much work to do within NACCS and the academy, as it relates to Chicanas/x and the Chicana/x Queer community.

I do think it is important to note that Chicana/x Queers have been part of NACCS since its inception. The founding of the Chicana Caucus acknowledged formally our existence as scholars because we always created space as an informal caucus in our hotel and dorm rooms, restaurants, bars. In those spaces we discussed how we might address sexism and homophobia within NACCS. While the focus of this panel is “de-centering patriarchal heteronormativity,” we should also remember there was also some resistance among ourselves within the Chicana Caucus. This is part of our history as a Caucus that should not be forgotten and, I would argue,

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<sup>2</sup> With the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-2022 still active, NACCS 2022 was its second online annual conference, Ed.

<sup>3</sup> For historical context on this continuing struggle, see, for example, Castañeda, Antonia Castañeda, Marie “Keta” Miranda, Marisol Moreno, et al., “Ending Heteropatriarchal Institutional Violence in Chicano Studies: A Reflection on Our Path,” *Chicana/Latina Studies* 13, no. 2 (2014): 104–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43941433>. The authors note: “Previously and still, feminist, lesbian, and gay people persist in raising issues of inequalities of gender and sexuality and continue to be silenced in our movement. Charges of “malinchistas,” “traitors,” “vendedoras,” “lesbionage,” and “gringa feminist crap” were/are accompanied with sexual and/or physical violence” (110).

contributed to the growth and development of the Lesbian Caucus as we know it today.<sup>4</sup>

As I was preparing for this presentation, I was reminded of some of my remarks at the opening plenary for the 2016 NACCS Conference that I think still are true and that I would like to share:

I recognize that our paths will sometimes diverge, and our immediate interests collide, even when we share common goals. For Queer Chicanas, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality intersect at the crossroads of a complex multicultural identity. With that, sometimes contested, intersection as our starting point, navigation of the road ahead will be especially complicated, particularly as we encounter roadblocks of homophobia and misogyny constructed not only by the dominant culture but also by our own brothers and sisters.

We can, and must, *never forget* the struggles that brought us to this point in time, and the acts of exclusion and violence that we sometimes endured, like the NACCS conference at Hermosillo (1991) where homophobia was alive and well as the jotos were trying to organize. Along the walls of the hotel were homophobic posters that were quickly removed. Some tried to convince us they were only jokes. All of us queers, regardless of gender, felt threatened at that conference.

I remember the conference in New Mexico when Chicanas came together at a workshop to discuss the proposal for a Chicana Caucus. The gathering generated so much interest that the room was overflowing with many sitting on the floors, standing against the wall, Chicanas at the door and hallway who could not enter. There was an excitement in the room for change as well as tension because not

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<sup>4</sup> The Lesbian Caucus changed its name to the Lesbian, Bi Mujeres, Trans (LBMT) Caucus. See Anita Revilla, “The Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship: A Movimiento for Queer Chicana/os and Latina/os,” *Aztlán* 39 no. (2014): 253-259; José Manuel Santillana Blanco, “Chicana Feminism,” in the *Encyclopedia of Queer Studies in Education*, eds. Kamden Strunk and Stephanie Anne Shelton (Boston: Brill, 2021), 84.

everyone was “out” and not everyone agreed there should be a Chicana Caucus, let alone a Lesbian Caucus.<sup>5</sup>

Frankly, I do not recall any men being present at the New Mexico NACCS Conference. We should remember, that for the most part “Transgender” was not part of the discussion at that point in our history but that is not to say it was not on the fringes of our conversations.

The leaders discussing the proposal were challenged by individuals who pointed out the proposal did not include lesbians and why that might be important. This led to cheers from those of us who identified as lesbians, as well as from allies; but it also included resistance by those who felt the Chicana Caucus naturally included lesbians. It was the same argument Chicanos raised as to why was there a need for a Chicana Caucus when NACCS has included Chicanas since its inception.

In 1998, at the NACCS Conference in Mexico City, the Lesbian Caucus/Jotos proposed representation on plenaries, and/or a plenary focusing on queers and more workshops about sexuality. It created quite a robust conversation in the hallways, over meals and more. When it came time to discuss the resolution at the business meeting, I was left alone as the only queer advocate since all the NACCS queers along with others went to participate in the Gay March in Mexico City. However, I learned more about the importance of allies at that meeting because, at that meeting, allies stood up for our proposal alongside of me.

And even within the Lesbian Caucus there have been struggles during the last 30 years as members of the Caucus called for us to be more inclusive of bisexual, transgender identities and more in the face of some resistance by membership. The conversations were often spirited and disrespectful. It became clear to me that, due to our fear of the unknown, change is difficult for us all.

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<sup>5</sup> For a timeline that places the caucus in this larger history of struggle, see William Calvo-Quirós with Antonia Castañeda, “How did We Get Here? A Short Timeline... a Long Tradition,” *News from Nepantla: UCSB Chicana and Chicano Studies Newsletter*, Fall 2012, <https://escholarship.org/content/qt3zb2t8k3/qt3zb2t8k3.pdf>.

When we have prevailed in spite of challenges, it is in part because we understood, at least intellectually, the importance of working together without denying individual group identity. Given the time in which we live, I am aware our struggles and our gains are reminders of how hard we will need to work together in the years ahead to sustain what we have achieved and to continue to grow our work.

This is especially important when so many ethnic studies programs are being challenged by anti-critical race theory advocates. Indeed, everything we have fought for and achieved is at risk as our institutions are being challenged about race, ethnicity, and sexuality.<sup>6</sup>

From the beginning, we understood that we had a responsibility to change the academic discourse as we made our way into NACCS and the academy. We challenged NACCS and our institutions to be more just and inclusive and sometimes paid a price for it. But we also created a new kind of academy and a new kind of NACCS that is still evolving.

I often shared with groups that Chicana/Queer voices have emerged in NACCS helping to shape today's interrogations of race, gender, and sexuality. These voices are creating our future in the academy and beyond...opening up new conversations in unexplored and new terrain.

The message I leave for NACCS, that I have shared in the past, is that we need to rethink and reshape what and who we aspire to be as an organization and how we will move forward as a community of scholars that is cohesive and inclusive.

Finally, we should not walk away when there are disagreements creating tensions—even if we feel unsafe. When anyone of us give up, we all lose.

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<sup>6</sup> For discussions of this backlash, see Ethan Chang, “Curricular Counter-movements: How White Parents Mounted a Popular Challenge to Ethnic Studies,” *Harvard Educational Review* 92, no. 2 (2022): 157–314; Augustine F. Romero, “At War with the State in Order to Save the Lives of Our Children: The Battle to Save Ethnic Studies in Arizona,” *Black Scholar* 40, no. 4 (2010): 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2010.11413528>; Conrado L. Gómez, and Salvador A. Gabaldon, “A Legacy of Memory: The Debate over Ethnic Studies in Arizona Public Schools.” *Aztlán* 38, no. 2 (2013): 163–74.

We've spent our lives and careers challenging the status quo, dismantling systems of exclusion and bias, and building something new. And now we are challenged as never before to find new ways to sustain our work and our gains over the long term. My belief is that this Chicana Caucus and the LBMT Caucus, with NACCS, will have a key role in this effort the next 30 years.

Thank you and I look forward to seeing all of you at the popular Queer NACCS dance that brings us all together next year.

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