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“That’s ratchet”: A Chicana Feminist *Rasquache* Pedagogy as Entryway to Understanding the Material Realities of Contemporary Latinx Elementary-Aged Youth

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ABSTRACT

In line with this special issue’s examination of theories of teaching and learning that are neither determined by nor isolated from restrictive spaces of learning, this essay introduces a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy. A Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy is rooted in the everyday experiences and material realities of Latinx elementary-aged youth, and thus serves as a contribution to educational research and praxis for all students, but particularly students of color. A Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy emerges from the theories in the flesh of Latinx students, and as such, functions from their embodied knowledges and sensibilities rather than operating in collusion with the practices, approaches and ideologies of historically colonizing schooling institutions. The incorporation of a Chicana feminist *rasquache* praxis into K-12 schooling institutions provides humanizing approaches for education as well as for engaging with elementary-aged youth of color as it identifies and validates the radical sensibilities of youth intimately tied to their lived experiences, rather than reprimanding them for their embodied knowledges and creative forms of self-expression.

To be *rasquache* is to posit a bawdy, spunky consciousness, to seek to subvert and turn ruling paradigms upside down. It is a witty, irreverent and impertinent posture that recodes and moves outside established boundaries. To be *rasquache* is to be down, but not out, *fregado pero no jodido*. Responding to a direct relationship with the material level of existence or subsistence is what engenders a *rasquache* attitude of survival and inventiveness. (Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, cited in Crosthwaite, Byrd, & Byrd, 2003, p. 191)

We think ratchet’s, like, kinda Mexican. Like Mexicans using those mole things [Doña María mole¹ glasses] as a [drinking] cup and we’re like, “That’s ratchet!” Like mostly Mexican stuff is ratchet. (Frida, sixth grader)

Inspired by the works of Chicana² cultural studies scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Chicana feminisms, and my collaborative work with fifth and sixth grade Latinx youth in Salt Lake City, Utah, this essay introduces a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy. Rooted in the social conditions and material realities of contemporary Latinx elementary aged youth, a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy centers on and reflects the everyday realities of Latinx youth, recognizing their forms of survival and resistance, as well as their embodied knowledges and daily practices as valuable pedagogical formations, formations that many times function in opposition to the expectations of contemporary schooling institutions (Cohen, 2004; Dixon-Román, 2014). I begin with the introduction of a Chicana feminist *rasquache*

pedagogy, providing context for the literatures on which this pedagogy draws, Chicana/o cultural studies and Chicana feminisms. I then introduce the research study and participants before sharing ethnographic data collected during the 2013–2014 school year that provide insight into a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy. I end with a discussion of the implications of this praxis for educational research and practice, particularly for youth of color.

Ratchet as contemporary *rasquachismo*

This essay begins with theorizations from two important philosophers. The first is a quote taken from Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's 1989 essay on *rasquachismo* where he identifies the radical, creative, and cultural practices and sensibilities of Chicana communities. He offers that these practices, rooted in the everyday, in part reflect and respond to the material realities in which Chicana communities have historically been positioned, specifically as this relates to race and class. *Rasquachismo* represents the strategies and practices Chicana communities develop and deploy to survive their oppression. For example, the creative strategy of recycling objects such as tin cans to reuse as flower planters, or empty sauce jars like Doña Maria mole to reuse as drinking glasses as mentioned by Frida, represents a *rasquache* aesthetic intimately connected to the material realities of Chicana communities who often experience poverty as a result of racism, immigration, and inequitable education (Crosthwaite, Byrd, & Byrd, 2003; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Gaspar de Alba, 1998; Malagón, 2010).

Important to note is that historically, both in Mexico and the U.S., something that is categorized as *rasquache* functions as an insult, as *rasquachismo* reflects working poor and working class sensibilities and is therefore considered low-class (Gaspar de Alba, 1998). In his essay, Ybarra-Frausto dismisses this charge by locating resistance, agency, creativity and art within *rasquachismo* (1989). Ybarra-Frausto offers *rasquachismo* not only serves a particular function, in this case to recycle a tin can into a useful planter in which to pot plants, but also reflects legitimate, creative, and artistic forms of expression embodied by Chicana communities. Therefore, *rasquachismo* reflects Chicana communities' ability to survive, resist, and thrive in the face of multiple oppressions by making do with whatever means are available to them and, in the process, producing legitimate and valuable theory, knowledge, and art (Crosthwaite, Byrd, & Byrd, 2003; Gaspar de Alba, 1998). This is a significant point within this research as identifying the *rasquache* practices, sensibilities, and forms of expression of Latinx students as valuable sites of knowledge production has the potential to transform education, moving away from disciplining students for engaging in behaviors and practices rooted in their material realities and towards valuing their lived experiences in the classroom (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Dixon-Román, 2014; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Elenes, 2010).

The second quote featured at the beginning of this paper is from Frida, a sixth grader who participated in my dissertation research project. During our time together in an Introduction to Chicana/o studies afterschool class during the 2013–2014 school year, Frida, along with her peers, regularly used the word “ratchet” to refer to themselves, their behavior, the type of music they listened to, and their style of dress. Ratchet, a genre of music and aesthetic responding to a history of respectability politics within Black communities, is explored in the scholarship of Black feminist scholars like Brittany Cooper (2012) and Treva Lindsey (2012). Similar to *rasquachismo*, although rooted in divergent histories, ratchet reflects the material realities and complex sensibilities of working poor and working class Black communities (Lindsey, 2012). The fifth and sixth grade Latinx students' appropriation of ratchet in their everyday lives reflects larger and more complex issues related to the appropriation and mass consumption of Black culture within popular culture and media (Brown & Young, 2015; Lindsey, 2012). However, I offer that the ways in which the students explain they understood ratchet reflects their recognition of shared experiences with Black communities in regards to oppositional politics that address the social conditions of their lives related to race, class, and gender, as evidenced by Frida's quote of “mostly Mexican stuff” as ratchet.

As such, I understand the students' use of the word ratchet to reflect a contemporary version of *rasquachismo* and use Ybarra-Frausto's theorization of *rasquachismo* to understand the pedagogical formations that co-developed between myself as a Chicana instructor, and the fifth and sixth grade Latinx

students³. Drawing from Ybarra-Frausto, in combination with Chicana feminisms, specifically philosopher Gloria E. Anzaldúa, to theorize on a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy is purposeful and useful in examining the pedagogical formations, sensibilities, and practices embodied and created by working poor and working class Latinx youth. As taken from Crosthwaite, Byrd, & Byrd (2003), Tomás Ybarra-Frausto offers:

In an environment always on the edge of coming apart (the car, the job, the toilet), things are held together with spit, grit and *movidas*. *Movidas* are the coping strategies you use to gain time, to make options, to retain hope. *Rasquachismo* is a compendium of all the *movidas* employed in immediate, day-to-day living. Resilience at hand, *hacer render las cosas*. This use of available resources engenders hybridization, juxtaposition and integration. *Rasquachismo* is a sensibility attuned to mixtures and confluence, preferring communion over purity ... *Rasquachismo* draws its essence within the world of the tattered, shattered and broken: *lo remendado* (stitched together). (p. 191)

Similarly, I recognized my engagement and praxis with the youth as “*rasquache*,” in terms of the embodied knowledges, practices, and forms of expression they brought into the classroom, as well as our collaborative exchanges with one another. Ybarra-Frausto’s description of *movidas*, “the strategies you use to gain time, to make options, to retain hope” provides a lens of analysis in which to understand the pedagogical formations that developed in the afterschool Chicana/o studies course as a result of the students’ embodied knowledges as raced/classed/sexed/aged beings. The students entered the classroom with life experiences and “theory in the flesh” that reflected their material realities as Mexican/Chicanx/Latinx youth (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). My response as an educator and classroom facilitator to the students’ *movidas*, their resilient strategies connected to the material realities of their lives, helped to create a space in which the students were not reprimanded for developing practices and exhibiting forms of expression rooted in their social conditions, and instead utilized those experiences and knowledges as a way to inform teaching and learning.

A Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy

A Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy, although certainly neither definitive nor prescriptive, is rooted in the following foundational guiding principles: It (1) centers the material realities of Chicanx/Latinx students; (2) is aware of the history of inequitable schooling institutions and practices, especially for Chicanx/Latinx communities; (3) is committed to not reproducing oppressive schooling practices against any student, but especially students of color; (4) is under the firm belief that students are creators and holders of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2001); (5) actively seeks to locate and understand the material realities and creative *rasquache* practices/knowledges of Chicanx/Latinx youth and incorporate these knowledges into the classroom; (6) is grounded in *cariño* (Valenzuela, 1999), which involves going against traditional best practices enforced in teacher education programs and encouraging students to exercise control over their own learning; (7) and, although it is applicable to all Chicanx/Latinx students, a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy is particularly invested in K-12 students of color who are often policed in regards to their behaviors and forms of expression within schooling institutions (Dixon-Román, 2014; Ginwright, 2008).

These principles are rooted in knowing and understanding the material realities of Chicanx/Latinx students, which requires a commitment to learning about the social conditions of young peoples’ lives. This is key within a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy, and why I draw so heavily from Ybarra-Frausto and Gloria Anzaldúa. Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983) identify the body as a source of knowledge production, coining the term “theory in the flesh” (p. 23) to recognize the ways in which our bodies hold histories and produce knowledge. This is particularly useful in research on Latinx youth, as their bodies are often viewed as juvenile, delinquent, still developing, and in need of constant surveillance and control—especially within schools (Ginwright, 2008; Grossberg, 2005; Quijada, 2008). As such, the knowledges and life experiences of young people of color are diminished, overlooked, or reprimanded by adults within and outside of schooling institutions, as their bodies, experiences, and beings are not considered valid sources of knowledge production.

This social construction of youth as juvenile, delinquent, in process, and as being incomplete human beings unaware of the social conditions of their lives impacts not only policies enacted in schools that aim to police youth, but also larger governmental policies that severely affect young people's quality of life. The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) reports that more than 16 million children in the U.S.—22% of all children—live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level, which is around \$23,550 for a family of four. From this, Black, Latinx, and American Indian children make up the highest child poverty rates (Robins, Stagman, & Smith, 2012). Sixty-five percent of Latinx children live in low income families, compared to 31% of White children. Further, children of foreign-born parents are more likely to be low income than those of native-born parents (Lyon, 2008).

The NCCP states overall poverty is the single greatest threat to a child's well-being. Grossberg (2005) offers that young people today face unprecedented levels of poverty and violence and make up the fastest growing and largest percentage of homeless within the U.S. Dimitriadis (2008) adds that 75% of all violent deaths among youth in the industrialized world occur in the U.S., with one out of every three such violent deaths caused by an adult. During the process of collecting data for this research, the murders of two Brown youth made the news. Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American youth living in Florida and Andy Lopez Cruz, a 13-year-old Mexican American youth from California were shot and killed by adult law enforcement officers.

The justified lynching of Black and Brown young men and women by police officers continued throughout the process of completing this research, adding a sense of *coraje* to this project. The deaths of these youth of color extend Grossberg's (2001, p. 112) assertion that there is a war being waged on youth in U.S. society, highlighting the intensity of this hate for young Black and Brown bodies in particular. The deaths of these young people of color highlights how young Brown bodies are read, how they have otherness and deviance inscribed upon their bodies, thus validating violent attacks against them through statewide and national policies, schooling practices, the criminal justice system, and through literal attacks against their very beings and bodies (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cruz, 2001; Fanon, 2008; Malagón, 2010).

For this reason, Chicana feminisms, and Anzaldúan thought in particular, offer a framework in which to understand, address, and incorporate the material realities and embodied knowledges of youth of color in the classroom, providing a space for young people of color to reflect on the social conditions of their lives, to make connections among their everyday lived experiences and the structures of oppression, and to theorize from their bodies and their lived experiences as raced/classed/sexed and aged beings. Chicana feminisms, and Anzaldúan thought specifically, offer a recognition of the historic and continued oppression of Chicana/Latinx communities, which helps to understand Chicana/Latinx youth, particularly elementary aged, as multiply marginalized and therefore *nepantlerxs*.

For Anzaldúa (2002), a *nepantlera* is a threshold person, someone who is neither completely here nor there, who has a foot in two worlds, occupying a space of liminality that is confusing, painful, but also potentially transformative, as occupying this in-between space allows for the ability to cultivate a perspective that can see beneath the surface of social constructions towards other realities and ways of being in the world. Understanding Chicana/Latinx students as *nepantlerxs* is significant because it recognizes the colonizing histories inscribed on their bodies that dehumanizes them, while also acknowledging the agency and resistance these young people embody to transform their worlds and their education. Engaging in conversations with youth of color about their lived experiences or theories in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) can contribute to an upheaval, to undoing deficit ideologies of youth of color (Tuck & Yang, 2011) and moving towards understanding and learning from, with, and through a *rasquache* praxis that reflects the everyday lives of Chicana/Latinx youth.

Introduction to Chicana/o studies with *nepantlerx* youth

In working with Chicana/Latinx elementary aged youth throughout the entirety of my doctoral program, I would often think of my own path of *conocimiento* through the work of Anzaldúa and other Chicana feminist scholars (Anzaldúa, 1999, 2002; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez

Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2001, 2002; Elenes, 2011; Villenas, 1996). I wondered what it would mean for these elementary-aged youth of color to engage with Anzaldúan philosophy within an educational setting as a way to facilitate conversations about their lives. It seemed to me the youth desired meaningful relationships with people they felt they could trust and talk to. Oftentimes the students would open up about their personal experiences and the content they shared was intense, usually related to poverty, immigration, sexuality/desire, friendships, heartbreak, or grief. I wondered if faculty at the elementary school were aware of the material realities of these youth of color and, if they were, would they approach these students differently?

During the 2013–2014 school year, I set out to explore these questions through a dissertation research project focusing on an afterschool introduction to Chicana/o studies class with 12–15 fifth and sixth grade Chicana/Latinx youth. The class was centered on Anzaldúa's borderlands theory and modeled introductory Chicana/o studies, ethnic studies, and borderlands college level courses. In line with Anzaldúan thought, the class focused on ontology, or more specifically the question: Who am I?

Nepantlerxs

Initially, the plan was to invite ten students to participate in the afterschool introduction to Chicana/o studies class, but by the end of the school year, the class fluctuated from 12 to 15 students. The *nepantlerxs* were fifth and sixth grade students who identified as Mexican, Chicana, or Latinx. The majority of the class was comprised of young girls, with a total of seven boys, of which two were the younger siblings of older students in the class.

Class design

Classes were initially held after school twice a week for one hour each. This schedule remained throughout the fall term but as the students had other afterschool commitments during the spring semester such as soccer and basketball, our schedule changed to every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Each class meeting began with an initial icebreaker or team-building activity, and included writing or drawing activities in combination with class discussion and journaling. Class content and lesson plans relied heavily on YouTube videos, music videos, news reports, cartoons, film trailers, and movie clips. At least ten minutes of class time was reserved for recess each meeting.

Data collection

The data collected for this dissertation included recorded class discussions from each class meeting, field notes, memos, journals, analyses of student work, and group and individual *pláticas* with the youth that took place during the spring 2014 semester, which were transcribed by myself. Field notes were collected and saved in a password protected online drive. Data collection took place over the course of eight months throughout the 2013–2014 academic school year.

Methods

The Chicana feminist method of *pláticas* informs this research project. Chabram-Dernersesian and de la Torre (2008) argue that *pláticas* tap into Chicana/Latina unique epistemologies and pedagogies that acknowledge the positionality of women of color in society, revealing a collective identity and shared experiences. They offer,

Pláticas—conversations that allow us to self-discover who we are in relationship to others—are embedded within Latino culture. *Pláticas, charlas, chisme*: we Latinas are immersed in an oral tradition since childhood. Our *abuelas, tías, madres, primas*, and *compañeras* surround us with the syncopated sounds of *carcajadas, gritos*, and, *murmuras*, cloaking us in a cocoon of our cultural traditions. (p. 44)

As such, the act of *platicando* serves as a unique way of knowing, teaching, and learning for Chicans/Latinxs and, as a qualitative research method, reflects a cultural practice embedded within our personal spaces and relationships. This type of relationship and engagement involved in a *plática* is in contrast to traditional dominant research approaches valued in higher education. Specifically, qualitative research interviews, as outlined by traditional research methodologies, have a tendency to feel distant, cold, and calculated, and reproduce power dynamics between researchers and the researched (Delgado Bernal, 2001).

As a contribution to qualitative research by naming our own research approaches, Chicana feminist scholars have chosen to incorporate *plática* as a qualitative research method to blur power dynamics through reciprocity (Chabram-Dernersesian & de la Torre, 2008; Flores Carmona, 2014; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008; Saavedra & Pérez, 2012). In sharing our own stories and making ourselves vulnerable with our participants, Chicana feminist researchers are engaging in reciprocity in that the research process is not one way, with the researcher extracting knowledge from the community. Through *pláticas*, knowledge production is an exchange, and information about the lives of women of color is centered and shared.

Further, the researcher is not viewed as the expert, but rather the participants, through their stories and lived experiences, serve as the experts of their own lives. *Pláticas* serve as a way to uncover the knowledge and theories embedded within communities of color (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cruz, 2011, 2012, 2013; Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2001, 2002; Pérez, 1999; Saavedra, 2011; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008; Villenas, 1996). As such, the Chicana feminist method of *plática* is not only an extension of cultural practices within Chicana/Mexican/Mexicana communities, but also steeped in the belief that these communities are experts embodying knowledge and theory to offer the world that is worthy of academic scholarship and research (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002). *Pláticas* serve as an approach that is not only in line with cultural practices and traditions but also recognizes young people of color as experts of their lives. However, much like Chicana feminist scholarship as whole, *pláticas* do not take into account the positionalities, experiences, or realities of engaging in research with Chicana elementary-aged youth.

For this study, *pláticas* relied on existing relationships with youth and were adapted to account for elementary-aged youths' desire to own the *plática* and discuss what was important and meaningful to them when they felt like sharing. In this way, the research method of *plática* also was *rasquache* because of my engagement with Chicana/Latinx youth: The *pláticas* had to be done when and where the students were available, whether they remembered our scheduled interviews, or had to reschedule because they needed to watch their younger siblings, or had catechism classes that evening. Like our praxis, the Chicana feminist method of *plática* also was rooted in the material realities of these students' lives and reflected their *rasquache* forms of self-expression.

Many times the students requested to be interviewed in pairs and groups where they could collaboratively share stories about events that happened to them, tell jokes, exchange gossip, and ask for advice. These activities were luxuries for the youth who found themselves policed and silenced throughout their entire school days. The *pláticas*, both individual and group, typically lasted from 45 minutes to one hour and were audio recorded and transcribed by myself.

Data analysis

I approached data analysis using what Calderón (2010) refers to as modified grounded theory. Based on my interactions with the youth in class, our classroom *pláticas*, and individual *pláticas*, there were certain themes I was expecting to emerge but I remained open to the youth expressing new ideas and information they felt were relevant. After data were collected at the end of the eight months, I used HyperResearch, a qualitative research software program, to organize my field notes, transcripts, memos, journal interview, *pláticas*, student work, and photos. After organizing the data, I used the software to begin a line-by-line analysis for an initial round of open coding, locating mostly descriptor codes and structure and processes codes (Saldaña, 2009). For subsequent cycles of coding, I employed axial coding to break down initial themes into categories. According to Saldaña (2009), axial coding “describes a category’s properties and dimensions and explores how the categories and subcategories relate to each other” (p. 151).

After both rounds of coding, I organized emergent themes into postcards on the wall to further make connections among the data. This allowed me to visually see how students' responses to my interview questions were connected to my larger research questions. This then prompted me to return to all of my physical data, meaning returning to hard copies of transcribed *pláticas*, field notes, memos, journals, and student work to further immerse myself in the data and to visually and physically be closer and back into the text. Despite having coded using qualitative research data, I wanted to be back in the students' voices by revisiting, rereading, and reanalyzing the data they provided. This involved rereading and engaging in line-by-line analysis of data by hand to locate data sources that connected with the emergent themes and categories I identified using HyperResearch.

A Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy in practice

One of the major findings of this research project was the co-construction of a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy. The students and I co-constructed a pedagogical praxis that was grounded in their material realities and everyday lived experiences. This not only resulted as a finding, but also methodologically, as this praxis needed to occur throughout the research process in order for the students to feel comfortable, open up, and trust me as the teacher and researcher. This happened in my recognition and appreciation of their *rasquache* forms of self-expression and refusal to reprimand them for engaging in ways that was reflective of their environments.

The everyday social and cultural practices of these Latinx elementary aged youth: talking out of turn; cussing; code-switching; storytelling; incorporating slang; sharing jokes and humorous stories; standing up, walking around, or dancing during class; speaking loudly; requesting music during class; cutting each other down; "calling" each other out, are examples of a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogical praxis in that these practices are dismissed and looked down upon within traditional educational research and praxis, yet because they are steeped in the social practices and material realities of Latinx youth, they proved highly effective in the Chicana/o studies afterschool class (Dixon-Roman, 2014). Often I found myself thinking if a traditional classroom teacher were to walk into the space, they would conceive of the course and my praxis as a complete failure as it seemed as if the students had control of the class. In many ways, the students did have control of the class in that they, their energy, and their *rasquache* practices often determined the classroom content and discussion. As a result, our discussions were a success, in that the students engaged with the content outlined in the curriculum in ways that were meaningful and useful to them.

I conceive of this praxis as *rasquache* as it reflects Ybarra-Frausto's conceptualization of *rasquachismo* as embedded within the social and cultural practices of Latinx youth who are "down, but not out, *fregado pero no jodido*." In this way, Ybarra-Frausto's *rasquachismo* validates and centers the material realities of raced/classed youth who are expected to leave these realities and life experiences at the door upon entering their classrooms. Despite being constructed as too young to understand complex issues, I found Latinx elementary aged youth desired engaging in conversations about the material realities of their lives related, but not limited to, immigration, poverty, sexuality, violence—topics deemed inappropriate for youth (Ginwright, 2010; Quijada, 2008, 2009; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Because of limitations placed on them as elementary-aged youth, they develop *movidas* to navigate their positionalities to speak on and theorize about their lives, revealing their resilience and brilliance. This *rasquache* sensibility, then, is useful within educative spaces with youth as it engenders hybridization, juxtaposition, and integration, pedagogical devices that help to center the experiences of Latina/o elementary-aged youth in schools and contribute to the development of new narratives of youth of color as well as humanizing curricula.

A Chicana feminist *rasquache* praxis contributed to the co-construction of a space where the youth felt comfortable sharing intimate details of their lives, which facilitated teaching and learning in the classroom space through *pláticas*, media, problem solving, critical thinking, and *rasquachismo* (Quijada, 2008, 2009; Tijerina Revilla, 2004). Although each class had lesson plans and themes outlined for class discussion for that particular class day, these topics often served as triggers for the Latinx elementary-aged youth and they would respond with seemingly tangential life stories, taking control of class discussion and their own learning.

The youth revealed their awareness that a Chicana feminist pedagogy allowed for ownership and a sense of control over classroom content. They exhibited an awareness that what they experienced in their lives and what they had to say mattered in this classroom space. The following field note provides a glimpse into the ebbs and flows and energy of a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy in a K-12 classroom.

Saturday, March 1, 2013

The subject for class discussion on this day was gender and identity. We⁴ explained to the students that we would cover gender as a social construction that created differences between how people understood what it meant to be a boy or a girl, to which one fifth-grade boy replied, “Gross! That’s nasty.” Once the students settled down, we pulled up our PowerPoint presentation. The students read the title out loud—Gender Identity. As we started to talk, sixth-grader Chela said that she had a comment and shared that she used to be on a soccer team with someone who was a girl but dressed like a guy. I found it interesting that just from reading the words gender identity, Chela thought of and shared a story about another young person who chose to express her gender identity in opposition to what was socially constructed for her. When introduced to theoretical concepts, the students came back with a personal story the concept triggered in their mind, revealing the ways in which they bridge and make connections via their lived experiences, showing how they understand theory and produce knowledge.

We showed the students two YouTube videos both of young boys close to their age dancing to Lady Gaga and Beyoncé. For the most part, the students seem unaffected by the clips, remarking that it was normal for both boys and girls to like to dance. At other times, they reproduced gender norms with comments such as, “Boys shouldn’t move their hips too much.” Gael shared that the boys dancing in the video are having fun and it doesn’t matter what other people say. Gael used to be a dancer and even participated in a talent show the previous school year where he and other students performed a dance routine. Gael offered that everybody dances. Selena added that girls dance more than boys. We asked, “Is it more acceptable for girls to dance than it is for boys?” Gael and Julio offered that boys are expected to compete in sports, although Gael offered that dancing is a sport.

We followed up with a video of a young boy dancing to Beyoncé. Chela quickly raised her hand and said, “I have a connection with this.” She then shared a story where a young boy in her family was shamed for dancing too femininely. We mentioned that some parents were upset and offended by this video of a young boy dancing to Beyoncé and asked the students why they thought that was. Selena answered immediately and said, “It is because the kid is not acting how he is supposed to, like a boy.” Gael offered that the parents are going to be like, “Are you gay or something?” Junot said the same thing, “They’re gonna say you’re gay.” Selena agreed, offering that acting outside of your expected gender norms could offend your parents. Junot added that doing so could embarrass your family. Selena shared a story about her cousin upsetting her parents because of her choice to dress outside of dominant gender norms. We asked the students, “How do you learn to be a boy or a girl?” Julio offered from parents, from going around the city wherever you live, seeing people, seeing girls dancing, seeing boys play sports. Selena added that parents “choose the right path” on how to raise boys and girls.

Gael mentioned a former student named Kevin who used to cross his legs while sitting in class. Selena said, “Girls sit like that—boys usually don’t.” Gael adds that he heard Kevin’s parents were bisexual or lesbians. Another student confirmed this, offering that the students’ parents are lesbians and that they gave a speech at the capitol in favor of gay marriage. Gael expressed confusion over Kevin’s younger brother, curious as to how two moms had children together, but not asking about this directly.

We asked the students if they knew the difference between gender and sex. Selena shared that her mother’s I.D. lists female for sex. Socorro followed up with a discussion of gender as socially constructed. I asked the students if they knew what socially constructed means. Julio offered, “It’s not for real, but you started thinking boys have to do this and they can’t do that and in real life that’s not really how it is, but it’s only in your mind and you make that up—that you have to do certain things.” Gael offered a scenario, telling first Julio then Junot to pretend they were female. “No offense,” he added. He continued asking

them to imagine “different sexes and there’s boys and girls and there’s no problem talking to each other.” I ask, “Like a different world from this one?” He says, “Yea.”

Selena offered that this is normal and real life for them now because they engaged with the boys in their class so frequently. Gael thought about it then concedes, offering that the boys and girls in school do know each other well and basically hang out with each other all the time. Socorro asked if they thought these friendships and relationships would change. Gael said he thinks so because new people will come into their lives. Julio said, “I don’t see why you would stop talking to them if you’ve known them.” Junot agreed. This topic seemed immediately relevant, as the youth were getting ready to transition out of elementary school into middle school.

We continued the conversation by explaining that sex usually refers to biological traits associated with men and women, for example, women developing breasts. The students gasped at this admission, although they recognized it as true. We asked the students if they understood what biological meant. The students referred to biological in terms of family—such as biological father. Julio said if your parents get divorced, you have a biological father and stepfather. Junot explained a biological family has the same genes as you. Gael offered another hypothetical, “Imagine two parents, they get divorced. The father has a baby with a new mom [pauses] ... The brother isn’t going to have the same genes,” he surmised.

Junot shared that he has a stepbrother. The students talked about outliers or extenuating circumstances such as men who got pregnant or men who developed breasts. Julio brought up a disease that makes men grow breasts. Socorro and I stayed quiet. We were unsure how to proceed with the thoughts and ideas the students were bringing up. Finally, we conceded that, yes, it is difficult to generalize across the board with gender and biology. Regarding the man with the disease that made him grow breasts, Julio offered it happened because the mother drank and smoked while pregnant.

As a response to this, Gael shared a story about the family members in his family who smoked cigarettes. Gael said he tells these family members to stop smoking because of the risk of cancer or “getting a circle right here” [points to his throat]. He shared that his uncle switched to smoking electronic cigarettes. The students then jumped into a conversation about electronic cigarettes, hookah, and flavored tobacco. Chela shared she is afraid because she felt like her grandpa is going to die soon because he has been smoking since before her mom was born. Gael said he was once standing next to someone who was smoking and that when this person breathed out smoke came out of his mouth. Julio informed Gael that this is called a shotgun. He added that he holds his breath when he is around people that are smoking. Gael said he worried about his family going to jail for bad habits. Junot added he worried about his family’s health—especially his grandpa who had a heart attack and is not supposed to smoke any more but still does.

In this field note, I illuminate what a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy looks like in practice in the afterschool Chicana/o studies class. The Latinx youth recognized that what was meaningful and relevant to their lives was allowed in our classroom space and, as a result, they shared their thoughts during class discussion, snowballing off our initial subject for the day. In this way, a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy contributes to youths’ development in that it allows them to reflect on and share the material realities in which they are positioned and, further, provides the space for these youth to heal from these realities while developing critical thinking and problem solving skills (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tijerina Revilla, 2004).

In this particular field note, the youth used personal stories, hypotheticals, and questions not only with us the instructors, but with each other, as a way to produce knowledge via their lived experiences and through critical dialogue with each other (Tijerina Revilla, 2004). Within this short class discussion, the youth covered gender and identity, gender and sex, gender norms, social constructions, sexuality, sexuality and family, gay marriage, friendships and relationships, traditional nuclear family expectations versus nonnuclear families, sex and biology, health in their families, and tobacco use by adult family members. The youth reflected and dialogued on issues immediately relevant to them, revealing their desires to speak from their positionalities as *nepantlerxs*, as threshold people who typically are not allowed to theorize openly about such subjects deemed inappropriate for them or beyond their realm of comprehension (Anzaldúa, 1999; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983).

In this way, the students had control of class discussion and the curriculum to process what they felt was immediately relevant to them and their lives. Had we facilitated this discussion using traditional best practices promoted in teacher education programs, the entirety of this conversation would be viewed as a failure, as the students dominated the class discussion and content, spoke without raising their hands, offered seemingly tangential stories, and openly discussed inappropriate classroom content, especially for elementary aged youth. We did not reprimand or discipline the students for talking about such issues and, instead, exercised *cariño* by showing genuine interest in their everyday lives and theorizations that came from their experiences. In this way, a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy builds trusts, exhibits *cariño*, centers Chicana/Latinx youth and their experiences, and refuses to participate in silencing practices, exhibiting a willingness to lose control of the classroom by allowing students ownership of their education.

As it stands, there are very few spaces for Latinx elementary-aged youth to access information or spaces where they can reflect and theorize around gender, sexuality, dating, and health, especially through an anti-oppressive, feminist, and social justice lens (Cruz, 2012; Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Ginwright, 2010; Malagón, 2010; Tijerina Revilla, 2004). A Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy serves as an intervention within educative spaces to begin having conversations that are critical, humanizing, and healing for Latinx elementary-aged youth. A Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy presents opportunities for youth to temporarily unravel colonizing constructions of themselves as well as undo colonizing schooling practices. In this way, adults and youth work together to transform schools and larger society through a Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy that is holistic, humanizing, and rooted within Latinx youth's paradigms.

This is of extreme importance in a time where students of color are being pushed out of their schooling institutions, are graduating at lower rates than their White counterparts, and are being targeted by law enforcement officers in the streets (Malagón, 2010). Altering the ways in which we conceive of youth of color, in and out of schools, is a matter of life and death for contemporary young people. Recognizing the material realities of their lives is necessary in thinking of transforming education. Rather than attempting to socialize students into a vision of education that does not match their material realities historically or contemporarily, educators and schools should become familiar with the social conditions of their students' lives. A Chicana feminist *rasquache* pedagogy addresses these realities and centers them within the classroom, thus transforming teaching and learning. It purposefully avoids reproducing oppressive schooling practices; recognizes students as creators and holders of knowledge; locates, values, and incorporates students' unique *rasquache* sensibilities and forms of expression; and exhibits a commitment to Chicana/Latinx youth by expressing *cariño*. This creates an environment that is humanizing for Chicana/Latinx, and all students, in that the sensibilities, practices, knowledges, and forms of expression youth embody are recognized as legitimate sources of knowledge as well as transformative pedagogical formations.

Notes

1. Doña María mole is a popular brand of mole sauce used in Mexican dishes and sold in grocery stores, usually in a glass container that can be reused as a drinking glass.
2. In this article, I use Chicana and Latinx to honor the fluidity of gender and sexuality within communities of color. I use Chicana/Latina and feminist/feminisms to reference specific fields of academic scholarship.
3. The similarities and divergences between ratchet and *rasquachismo* provide an opportunity to examine, comparatively, Black and Chicana/Latinx communities and to contribute to research on coalition building and social justice education, which will be explored in a forthcoming article.
4. The introduction to Chicana/o studies course was co-developed and co-taught by myself and my *colega* and *comadre*, Socorro Morales. I collected, organized, and analyzed all the research, and wrote this article.

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