

Motherhood *en Acción*



Gender, *Latinidad*, and Community Action in Pilsen, 1973–1987

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Introduction

“We alienated people by our wildness. We were unconventional. Many of us were not married or [were] divorced or even living with someone. We would hang out in bars, weren’t in church associations. We were feminists. We didn’t fit the mold of stable family life.”¹ This is how María Mangual described the early days of *Mujeres Latinas en Acción* (*Mujeres or MLEA*),² a community organization in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood that she helped found in the early 1970s. From its beginning, *Mujeres* struggled to gain community acceptance because of its reputation for rejecting social norms in its quest for women’s empowerment. Roughly twenty years after the founding of the organization, another *Mujeres* member remembered the obstacles facing a new community organization focused on Latinas, what it had accomplished, and the non-

1. María Mangual quoted in Debra Westlake, “*Mujeres Adelante: The Early History of ‘Mujeres Latinas En Accion,’ 1973–1980*,” 1992, box 1, folder 5, *Mujeres Latinas en Accion Records*, Special Collections and Archives, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois. (Hereafter MLEAR.)

2. *Mujeres Latinas en Acción* is Spanish for “Latin Women in Action.”

conformity of its members:

The first one [is what the]...community expects of us. Because of our name, we carry a lot of negative feelings. Women in Action, yeah, well, so we have problems communicating because they [community members] see us as crazy women, as macho women. Women that encourage divorce or that put ideas in the heads of our wives, our mothers, our sisters, basically the woman population. Two, if I am not mistaken, we are like 22 or 23 years old. We have come a long way. I mean, in the beginning, we had the burning of the agency, a lot of crimes, and [threatening] phone calls [targeting Mujeres members]. I have been working here for ten years and I remember when we started...we had a benefit to get funding for the operations of the agency [and] on the reply card they [community members] said, "I am not going to give you any money because you support abortion" or "because you are evil." You know, they said some awful things.³

Before the establishment of Mujeres, most community organizations in Pilsen focused on issues affecting young men, including gang involvement and violence.⁴ The staff and volunteers of Mujeres strove to make obvious the need for a group that explicitly served Latina women. Mujeres faced a wide range of opposition, from conservative members of the Catholic Church who saw its work as undermining traditional family structures to participants in the Chicano movement for civil rights who thought that the creation of Mujeres was dividing the movement.⁵

3. Unnamed youth and family coordinator quoted in Michelle Teresa García, "A Preliminary Ethnographic Study of a Latin Feminist Grassroots Organization in Chicago," c. 1993, box 1, folder 11, MLEAR.

4. Lilia Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 243–44.

5. *Ibid.*, 241.

As a result, *Mujeres* staff and volunteers had to consider their identities as both Chicanas/Latinas⁶ and women when considering their needs and anticipating how their activism would be perceived. Eventually, *Mujeres* received more community acceptance by framing its work in ways that acknowledged traditional gender roles.

In this thesis, I argue that *Mujeres* broadened the practice of motherhood to involve supporting the entire Latina/o community. *Mujeres*' culturally and historically specific conception of motherhood resonated with traditional ideas of ethnic identity and gender while it engaged in new and sometimes radical practices within Pilsen. Outside of Pilsen, *Mujeres* projected a unified view of the Latina/o community that de-emphasized disagreements about gender and ethnic identity within Pilsen and the Latina/o community. The intersection of gender and ethnic identity in *Mujeres*' work contributes to and complicates the historiography of both women's history and Latina/o history.

Historiography

Women's History

Women's history includes the study of the contributions of women to historical developments and the impact of those developments on women. Much of the work in the field of women's history involves addressing gaps in the historiography where women's experiences have been neglected. This thesis will focus primarily on the women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s and the experiences of Latinas and Chicanas in the United

6. This thesis's terminology reflects the usage of the 1960s–80s. Latina/o was a pan-ethnic term for people in the United States, with origins in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Central America. Depending on context, Chicana/o is a person in the United States with origins in Mexico or a person who participated in the Chicano political movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Generally, I avoid the term Mexican-American, which activists considered derogatory. See "Latina/o History" in the "Historiography" section and the section, "Social Activism and Ethnic Identity in Pilsen," for a further explication of terms.

States. However, Mexican women's history is also relevant, since many of Mujeres' clients were recent migrants from Mexico, and Mexican culture had a strong influence on many of the volunteers and staff members.

Historians of Chicano history and US women's history have understudied the participation of Chicanas in political activism. Historian Vicki L. Ruiz writes that women's participation in the Chicano movement "has been reduced to a cursory discussion of sexism within the movimiento by the authors of the leading monographs on the Chicano movement."⁷ Her work on Mexican American women's history begins to address this gap. She outlines the limited roles available for Chicanas, both symbolically and practically, in the Chicano student movement of the 1960s. The movement drew heavily on Aztec motifs, which generally depicted women as sexual symbols, conquered virgins, or *la Malinche* (a slave given to Hernán Cortés).⁸ Women's participation in the movement and was often limited to typing and cooking.⁹

To address their concerns as both women and Chicanas, some decided to form their own organizations. Historian Virginia Espino details the emergence of the Comisión Femenil and other groups opposed to sterilization abuse in Los Angeles in the early 1970s. Chicano organizations run by men did not see sterilization abuse as a priority, while white women saw sterilization as a consensual right.¹⁰ She writes: "at the same time that Mexican women fell victim to eugenic sterilization, the cultural nationalism of the Chicano movement and the universalist ideology of

7. Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*, 10th Anniversary ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 100.

8. *Ibid.*, 106.

9. *Ibid.*, 108.

10. Virginia Espino, "'Women Sterilized As Gives Birth': Forced Sterilization and Chicana Resistance in the 1970s," in *Las Obreras: Chicana Politics of Work and Family*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Publication, 2000), 71–72.

the women's rights movement subsumed Chicanas into nonpersons."¹¹ As a result, Chicanas began participating in grassroots activism and a class-action suit against the doctors who had performed sterilization procedures without the patients' consent.¹²

Chicana activism should be contextualized within the US women's movement of the 1970s. Historian Ruth Rosen, who studies changes in the American women's movement between the 1950s and 1980s, argues that much of women's activism emerged from women's experiences in the Civil Rights movement, the anti-war movement, and the New Left.¹³ Women involved in activism felt that men underappreciated their needs and contributions. Roth comes to similar conclusions about the origins of Chicana feminist organizing:

Chicana feminism needs to be understood as not a mere variation on white or Black feminism but as a consequence of Chicanas' participation in the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s.... Chicana feminists organized an interstitial politics, in opposition to... antifeminist forces in their parent movement.¹⁴

According to Roth, women involved in Chicana feminist organizing saw their work as supporting the Chicano cause and as part of a tradition of social activism among Mexican women.

Nikki Craske, a scholar of comparative government, highlights how women's activism and gender roles in Mexico had shifting meanings

11. *Ibid.*, 69.

12. *Ibid.*, 67.

13. See Ruth Rosen, "Leaving the Left," in *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

14. Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21.

throughout the twentieth century.¹⁵ For instance, during the regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911), women organized in order to gain increased access to education. Many women claimed a right to education based on their roles as mothers and educators of the next generation.¹⁶ By the 1970s and 1980s, the Mexican state acknowledged the power of women’s political participation, which had been demonstrated through social protest.¹⁷ By the late twentieth century, women had equal political rights but were not able to fully utilize these rights because of their responsibilities for reproductive labor.¹⁸ Twentieth-century Mexican culture idealized women’s domestic and maternal roles. As a result, women who took a more active roles in public life, still acknowledged traditional gender roles and values.

Traditional gender roles also influenced how female activists in the United States framed their public involvement during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Historian Barbara Welter explores how idealized gender roles counterintuitively promoted women’s participation in public life. Welter refers to the attributes that ideal women were supposed to have as True Womanhood: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.¹⁹ Though these traits were encouraged in popular culture, social and economic changes such as westward migration and the Civil War drove women’s increased participation in public life. Welter argues: “the very perfection of True Womanhood, moreover, carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction. For if woman was so very little less than

15. Nikki Craske, “Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Making the Nation: Women and Politics in 20th-Century Mexico,” *Feminist Review* 79 (2005): 116–33.

16. *Ibid.*, 119–22.

17. *Ibid.*, 126.

18. *Ibid.*, 130.

19. Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 152.

the angels, she should surely take a more active part in running the world, especially since men were making such a hash of things.”²⁰ Sociologist Nancy Naples makes similar claims about the community involvement of low-income urban mothers of color in the United States of the late twentieth century. She uses the term “activist mothering” to describe these mothers’ work, which blurred the boundaries between mothering, political activism, and community work.²¹ Like the women Welter studied, these women saw their public participation as an expansion of their traditional maternal and feminine roles. This paper builds on the work of Welter and Naples by offering *Mujeres* as a further example of women framing their activism as an expansion of motherhood, a task that was complicated by the role of ethnic identity.

Latina/o History

An important aspect of Latino history is how Latina/o identity has been constructed and used by external forces, including the US government and the media. Sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut focuses on the role of the US government in creating racialized labels and how ethnic descriptors of populations that would today be considered Latina/o or Hispanic have changed over time. He describes how the census utilized Hispanic as an ethnic category separate from race.²² Additionally, he emphasizes the importance of understanding how these imposed labels affected people’s self-perceptions and self-identification. He argues that race is socially, historically, and spatially constructed because there are variations

20. *Ibid.*, 174.

21. Nancy A. Naples, “Activist Mothering: Cross-Generational Continuity in the Community Work of Women from Low-Income Urban Neighborhoods,” *Gender & Society* 6, no. 3 (Sept. 1992): 448.

22. Rubén G. Rumbaut, “Pigments of Our Imagination: On the Racialization and Racial Identity of ‘Hispanics’ and ‘Latinos,’” in *How the U.S. Racializes Latinos: White Hegemony and Its Consequences*, ed. José A. Cobas, Jorge Duany, and Joe R. Feagin (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009), 9.

in how Hispanic and Latina/o people identify based on where they live, their immigration status, their age, and other factors.²³ Sociologist G. Cristina Mora argues that in order to fully understand the emergence of pan-ethnic labels like Hispanic and Latino in the 1970s, one must appreciate the interactions between the government, the media, and advocacy groups.²⁴ Like Rumbaut, she acknowledges the importance of the Census Bureau and other government agencies.²⁵ However, she emphasizes the role of organizations like the National Council of La Raza and Univision in translating Latino and Hispanic from primarily government categories to personally and culturally relevant categories of identification.²⁶

Historian David A. Badillo posits that the development of Latina/o identity within Chicago was a result of the historical changes experienced by the city's Spanish-speaking community.²⁷ Chicago's Mexican and Puerto Rican populations increased between the 1920s and 1970s, leading to the establishment of organizations serving those communities. He identifies the 1970s as a turning point, because community action activities took place under the "umbrella ethnicity" of Latina/o, instead

23. *Ibid.*, 14.

24. G. Cristina Mora, *Making Hispanics: How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 3–10.

25. See "'The Toughest Question': The US Census Bureau and the Making of Hispanic Data," chap. 3, and "Civil Rights, Brown Power, and the 'Spanish-Speaking' Vote: The Development of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for Spanish Speaking People," chap. 1, in *ibid.*

26. See "The Rise of a Hispanic Lobby: The National Council of La Raza," chap. 2, and "Broadcasting Panethnicity: Univision and the Rise of Hispanic Television," chap. 4, in *ibid.*

27. David A. Badillo, "From La Lucha to Latino: Ethnic Diversity and Political Identity in Chicago," in *La Causa: Civil Rights, Social Justice and the Struggle for Equality in the Midwest*, ed. Gilberto Cárdenas (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2004).

of under the aegis of nationality-based community organizations.²⁸ Historian Lilia Fernández also considers the 1970s a turning point in the history of Latinas/os in Chicago, because of an increase in social activism. She argues that the rapid increase in the city's Spanish-speaking population and rising awareness of the Chicano movement fueled this change.²⁹ Mexican residents of Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood were further motivated to participate in social activism because of municipal neglect and a lack of assistance from Anglo-run social-service agencies: "Mexicans saw themselves racialized in similar ways regardless of their citizenship status, tenure in Chicago, or how far back their immigrant roots originated."³⁰

Early Scholarship on Mujeres Latinas en Acción

Scholarship from the 1990s on Mujeres stressed the extent to which Mujeres challenged gender and family norms. This early scholarship underscores tension surrounding how Mujeres navigated gender-based expectations in Pilsen and class-based expectations in the women's movement in its quest to find an understanding of womanhood that was both culturally meaningful and empowering.

Debra Westlake's paper for a US women's history course at the University of Chicago in 1992 argues that many of Mujeres' founders challenged cultural and social gender norms in their personal behaviors and in the organization's feminist mission.³¹ Mujeres members' visits to local bars after their meetings was highly controversial: this "invasion of male space in a highly traditional and Catholic environment was one of the many

28. *Ibid.*, 52.

29. Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 208–10.

30. *Ibid.*, 225.

31. Debra Westlake, "Mujeres Adelante: The Early History of 'Mujeres Latinas en Acción' 1973–1980," 1992, box 1, folder 5, MLEAR.

factors which led the group to being seen as the ‘bad women’ of Pilsen.”³² Westlake also describes how various Mujeres’ members understood the term *feminist* and came to use it to describe themselves. In contrast, Diana Salazar, in a 1996 student paper, argues that Mujeres did not identify as a feminist organization, because the term had negative connotations and described the needs of middle-class white women, not Latinas: “I agree with the concerns that Latinas have in regards to the Women’s movement [such] as [it] not taking into account those women who do not want to be career women or do not want to give up their roles as wives.”³³ Instead, she argued that Mujeres emphasized how being a wife and mother could be empowering.³⁴

My Intervention

My thesis explores the relationship between gender, activism, and the construction of pan-ethnic identity. I consider how Mujeres Latinas en Acción mobilized ethnic or national identity differently depending on context and how the use of pan-ethnic identifiers did not remove divisions within the Latina/o community. My thesis contributes to the fields of women’s history and Latina/o history by offering Mujeres as an example of a Latina women’s organization in the urban north. Much of Latina/o history has focused on the Southwest and the male-dominated Chicano movement. This thesis addresses the gap in scholarship on Latinas’ community involvement in Chicago. I investigate how traditional gender roles, such as motherhood, complicated the construction of ethnic identities and how those identities were mobilized during activism.

32. Ibid.

33. Diana Salazar, “Mujeres Latinas en Acción: In Action,” 1996, box 1, folder 10, MLEAR.

34. Ibid.

Gender Norms in Pilsen in the 1970s

Typical expectations for women in Pilsen in the 1970s must be reconstructed and understood in order to assess the extent to which the women of *Mujeres* diverged or conformed to social norms related to gender in their cultural context. Some of the most vivid depictions of the strength of patriarchal traditionalism in Pilsen come from the ethnographies of Ruth Horowitz and Gwen Stern.³⁵ Both demonstrate that the most culturally acceptable role for women was to be a mother and that strict, traditional gender roles regulated women's social, sexual, and economic activities.

In Pilsen during the 1970s, young Chicanas³⁶ were socialized to conform to traditional gender roles. Girls often cared for their younger siblings, which allowed them to perform a maternal role vicariously. This role was often seen positively. For instance, Celia, age fifteen, said:

Man, I want my mother to have a kid so I can take care of it. I love babies. I like to baby-sit for the little kid next door, she's so smart.

35. Ruth Horowitz, *Honor and the American Dream: Culture and Identity in a Chicano Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983). Horowitz conducted research in Pilsen between 1971 and 1977 through the Institute for Juvenile Research and the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. She studied primarily violence, conceptions of personal and family honor, and the American Dream. Gwen Louise Stern, "Ethnic Identity and Community Action in El Barrio" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1976). Stern's ethnography was based on participant-observation and interviews conducted between 1970 and 1972. She worked at community organizations in Pilsen, including *Mujeres*.

36. Horowitz referred to all people of Mexican heritage in the United States as Chicanas/os: "while not all those of Mexican ancestry prefer this term, it seems best to embody the varying mixtures of United States and Mexican cultures today in the United States." Horowitz, *Honor and the American Dream*, 237.

Now my mother's *comadre*³⁷ is having a kid so maybe I'll be able to help.³⁸

Gender roles were maintained through same-gender, family-based social activities, such as cooking together or Tupperware parties. One woman said of these activities: "they're lots of fun. We girls get together and play lots of games, talk, laugh a lot, and buy too many things."³⁹ Stern similarly observes that most women socialized with their female relatives, their husbands, or, less commonly, with female friends.⁴⁰ All-female activities were often inter-generational and transmitted expected behavior from women to girls by example. In general, women were expected to be demure, submissive, and motherly. Gender norms also limited the expression of women's sexuality. For instance, one woman named Ramona behaved carefully to ensure a public perception of virginity and loyalty to her boyfriend. She did not express physical affection in public, she primarily spent time with her boyfriend where others could see them, and she did not talk to other men.⁴¹

Women who violated traditional gender norms were treated harshly in attempts to force them to conform. For instance, one woman behaved in a manner perceived as unfeminine because she insulted a man and pulled a knife on him. The man took her knife and punched her until she fell down, even though she was no longer a threat once he had taken the knife. He justified his actions by saying, "I don't like it when girls try

37. *Comadre* describes fictive kinship, specifically the relationship between a child's mother and godmother. The term often had a religious connotation.

38. Horowitz, *Honor and the American Dream*, 72.

39. *Ibid.*, 58.

40. Gwen Louise Stern, "Ethnic Identity and Community Action," 40, 47.

41. Horowitz, *Honor and the American Dream*, 127.

to act like men. If they do, you got to treat them like men.”⁴² According to this perspective, women must behave in a feminine manner in order to “deserve” positive treatment and violence was a legitimate response when women transgressed gender norms. This perspective also informed how men perceived representations of women in popular culture who violated sexual norms:

In one movie, a married woman overtly flirted with another man.... The man with whom the wife had been flirting raped her, which the Lions [gang] thought was a legitimate action to maintain his honor because she was tempting him and acting as though she controlled his life. Raping her was domination of her by dishonoring her husband. Even youths who do not generally subscribe to the code of personal dominance through violence saw the rape as virtuous and honorable.⁴³

Among this peer group, gender norms were intimately tied to personal honor and power and violence against women who transgressed social norms was legitimate. For men who ascribed to such beliefs, individuals or organizations challenging violence against women would be seen as undermining traditional notions of male honor.

Even when men did not respond to women’s violation of gender norms with violence, there was an assumption that a man’s treatment of a woman depended upon her adherence to social expectations. Given the importance of family within the community, marriage and motherhood were critical social milestones, which Horowitz illustrates by a comparing two couples who had children before marriage. Lena was faithful to her husband and was an attentive mother. As a result, her husband often

42. *Ibid.*, 134.

43. *Ibid.*, 83.

spent time with her at home and took her out to dinner.⁴⁴ In contrast, Rita had relationships with other men and did not take good care of her baby; her husband reasserted his dominance in the relationship by seeing other women. Lena and Rita were both judged by ideals of marriage and motherhood. Lena used motherhood to transform how her identity was perceived by being publicly devoted to her child. However, becoming a mother did not change Rita's reputation, since she was seen as not being devoted enough.⁴⁵ Motherhood could change one's identity positively despite having a child out of wedlock, but only if one fulfilled the ideals associated with motherhood.

Male dominance extended beyond social and sexual spheres of life into economic domains. Men were expected to be the primary—or only—breadwinner for their families in order to maintain a dominant position.⁴⁶ One man described this view by saying, “I would never let my wife work while I got this good job, but a lot of guys are getting laid off now and my wife didn't get bad money before we got married.”⁴⁷ In general, women were expected to prioritize family roles over employment. Women's spheres were further limited to the home in cases where they could not drive or did not have the opportunity to learn English.⁴⁸ Pilsen women did work outside the home due to economic necessity, but patriarchal traditionalism frowned on women who used employment as a route to financial independence, which challenged cultural norms and male dominance.

Historian Lilia Fernández highlights how gender traditionalism in Pilsen, like that described by Horowitz, Stern, and Daniels, prevented women from participating in the public life of their community or

44. *Ibid.*, 120.

45. *Ibid.*, 120.

46. *Ibid.*, 60.

47. *Ibid.*, 63.

48. Stern, “Ethnic Identity and Community Action,” 23, 38.

receiving outside assistance during family crises. Gendered divisions of labor prevented women from participating in activities outside of the home like community activism.⁴⁹ For Latinas facing domestic violence, organizations that aided abused women were criticized for undermining male authority and encouraging divorce, despite the Catholic Church's prohibition; these difficulties were often combined with challenges related to the English language, finances, or immigration status, making it even more difficult for women to receive help.⁵⁰ As historian Benita Roth demonstrates, Chicanos sometimes adhered to gender traditionalism as a form of "cultural preservation" that was necessary in the struggle against Anglo domination.⁵¹ Under these circumstances, women who opposed patriarchal traditionalism in Pilsen had to engage in complex, interlocked conversations about culture and ethnic identity in their community and the role of women in the United States in the 1970s.

These traditional gender norms were also noticed in the media. In 1970, *Chicago Tribune* reporter Mary Daniels described male dominance in Chicago's Latino communities, with a focus on Mexican communities.⁵² She highlighted the conflict between traditional gender norms and the economic realities of Chicago, where many Latina/o families were lower income and relied on women's wages: "what happens when a family from a Latin culture, where the man is the undisputed king, comes to live in the United States, where women have more power by the hour?"⁵³ According to Daniels, men were ashamed to have their wives working outside the home, refused welfare assistance out of pride, and engaged in domestic violence. Daniels quoted a priest who said that

49. Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 242.

50. *Ibid.*, 257–59.

51. Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, 139.

52. Mary Daniels, "Machismo Comes to Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1970.

53. *Ibid.*

Mexican women in Chicago were not interested in “liberation” because of their submissive nature, which was “an inborn thing, perhaps because of her Indian racial background.” Though today’s scholars would reject Daniels’s biological essentialism, the *Chicago Tribune’s* coverage of patriarchal traditionalism in Pilsen attested to the reputation of Mexicans as exponents of machismo.

Social Activism and Ethnic Identity in Pilsen

What was the social context of other community organizations into which *Mujeres* entered? How did these organizations mobilize ideas about ethnic identity in their activism? Gwen Stern’s ethnography offers a vivid picture of how community activists in the early 1970s manipulated ideas about ethnic identity in order to achieve their goals.⁵⁴ Community activists in Pilsen used ethnic labels and stereotypes to differentiate themselves from outside professionals and government employees who wanted to intervene in Pilsen. Inside of Pilsen, activists tended to use terms which recognized the diversity of identities and experiences in the neighborhood.

Activists often described themselves as community people in meetings in order to highlight their close connection to and knowledge of Pilsen and to create a dichotomy between themselves and outside experts.⁵⁵ They used Spanish strategically during meetings with outsiders in order to reaffirm differences, to give the perception of community unity, or to allude to the symbolism of the Chicano movement. Activists would also use negative stereotypes to differentiate themselves from experts, especially during adversarial meetings, and to express distrust of the experts’ intentions and ability to understand the nuances of life in Pilsen. For instance, one activist said, “we don’t need professionals to tell us what the problems are.... We’re tired of being guinea pigs for graduate students....

54. Stern, “Ethnic Identity and Community Action,” 80–111.

55. *Ibid.*, 143.

We've been 'social-worked' to death."⁵⁶ Another activist said, "White people are so stuck-up.... You can't trust White people."⁵⁷ In these instances, activists stereotyped experts and white people to express their distrust of outsiders intentions and ability to understand the nuances of life in Pilsen.

When interacting with nonprofit employees and government officials, activists emphasized the size of their constituency and certain aspects of their community, while minimizing others. Activists broaden their potential constituency beyond Mexicans, the primary population in Pilsen, by referring to themselves as Latinos almost exclusively when interacting with representatives of outside institutions.⁵⁸ Latino was a more neutral term than Mexican, which could have negative connotations, or Chicano, which could imply political leanings. Less commonly, activists would use the term Spanish-speaking for its neutral connotations, although this term was mainly used by outside officials.⁵⁹ Activists also sometimes used the term bilingual-bicultural.

Among themselves in Pilsen, activists would use different terms that emphasized intra-ethnic differences, instead of community unity and shared values. Terms like *brazero* (from *bracero*), or *recién venido* defined people by their length of residence in the United States and were often associated with stereotypes.⁶⁰ Traditional described a person who was religious, superstitious, and adhered to strict gender roles.⁶¹ Other terms

56. *Ibid.*, 143.

57. *Ibid.*, 150.

58. *Ibid.*, 159.

59. *Ibid.*, 161.

60. *Bracero* is Spanish for "laborer" and *recién venido* is Spanish for "recently arrived [person]." Stereotypically, *brazeros* only spoke Spanish and were heavy drinkers. See, Stern, "Ethnic Identity and Community Action," 163–64.

61. *Ibid.*, 165.

described a person's place of origin, such as Mexican or *Tejano* (Texan).⁶² Political divisions adhered to the terms Chicano and Mexican-American, which both described people of Mexican heritage who were born and raised in the United States. Chicano was linked to the Chicano movement and opposition to Anglo domination, whereas activists used Mexican-American as a derogatory term to describe people who were politically conservative, successful in the Anglo world, and overly sympathetic to the interests of Anglos.⁶³ Activists used other offensive terms for Pilsen residents such as Tico Taco, *vendido*, or coconut.⁶⁴ According to Stern, a Tico Taco is equivalent to an Uncle Tom; a *vendido*, Spanish for sell-out, has sided with Anglos for personal gain, betraying his or her presumed ethnic community in the process; and a coconut, "Brown on the outside but White on the inside," is Mexican in appearance but Anglo in values and behavior.⁶⁵ Questions about representation necessarily included debates about authenticity and identity. In general, the use of these offensive terms reflected the tensions and divisions inside Pilsen and, for activists, implied disagreements over who had the right to represent Pilsen in interactions with the outside community.

Whether speaking among themselves or with outsiders, activists used terms that centered around ethnic identity, not gender. Gender did not play a large role in community descriptions, given the small number of women activists. An estimated fifty to seventy people were involved in community activism in leadership positions in Pilsen in the early 1970s.⁶⁶ However, only ten to twenty women were active at this level; most were in their thirties, had children in elementary or high schools, and were active

62. *Ibid.*, 167. A *Tejano* was stereotypically considered unsophisticated.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, 168.

65. *Ibid.*, 168–69.

66. *Ibid.*, 115.

in education, such as in parents' organizations.⁶⁷ As Stern observes: "all heads of agencies in the community are males, and the majority of all staffs are male."⁶⁸ As a result, men often represented Pilsen when interacting with outside institutions. This calls into question if issues that affected women in Pilsen were priorities in these meetings and activism.

Founding of Mujeres and Their Pseudo-Maternal Role

Inspiration for the founding of *Mujeres Latinas en Acción* came from "La Mujer Despierta: Latina Women's Education Awareness Conference," which was hosted on June 9, 1973, at El Centro de la Causa, an established community organization in Pilsen.⁶⁹ Even though Pilsen was a primarily Mexican neighborhood, the conference organizers consciously used the term Latina to indicate their pan-ethnic focus. Conference organizers and attendants had both Mexican and Puerto Rican backgrounds.⁷⁰ According to an internal *Mujeres* document, a small group of women in Pilsen, many of whom had attended "La Mujer Despierta," founded *Mujeres Latinas en Acción* in the summer of 1973. They wanted to form a women's organization that would fulfill the lack of adequate services for Latinas:

Even community-based organizations have not delivered programs for women that take into consideration the needs and problems of women emerging in non-traditional roles, which are a reality in Chicago. Women seem to participate mainly in crisis-oriented services such as counseling, crisis intervention, but there are few

67. *Ibid.*, 123–24.

68. *Ibid.*, 124.

69. Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 248.

70. *Ibid.*

services providing alternatives to life styles, such as manpower training, educational and recreational programs, and advocacy. Moreover, the staffing of non-counseling services tends even in community organizations to be predominantly male.⁷¹

By the fall of the 1973, *Mujeres* was hosting twelve educational workshops for women in the community.⁷² Its goal in organizing these workshops, and later other social services, was to

effect the necessary changes in the social and organization structures within the community in such a way as to guarantee greater and more significant participation of the Latino female leadership in the decision-making processes that affect the community.⁷³

Female leadership could have posed a challenge to the existing power structure of other Pilsen organizations, which were dominated by males. However, the radical nature of this goal was tempered by suggesting that supporting women was a method of helping the larger Latina/o community, as opposed to a gendered goal in of itself:

We believe that working toward the fulfillment of our mission and main purpose is one of the greatest and lasting contributions M.L.E.A. can make to the welfare of the Latino Community in Chicago.⁷⁴

71. "Mujeres Latinas en Accion, Inc.: Plans for FY 1976-77 and Tentative Plans for FY 1977-78," 1976, box 7, folder 8, MLEAR.

72. Ibid.

73. "What is Latin Women in Action?" 1977, box 7, folder 8, MLEAR.

74. Ibid.

This appeasement strategy is consistent with historian Benita Roth's argument that "early Chicana feminist organizing was characterized by the express desire to stay linked to men and existing Chicano organizations while promoting a greater role from women in service to the Chicano cause."⁷⁵ Chicana feminists challenged the belief that gender traditionalism was necessary to preserve Chicano culture by arguing that more egalitarian families would help in the fight against Anglo dominance.⁷⁶ As a result, many Chicana feminist organizations emphasized the importance of maintaining family unity,⁷⁷ a priority *Mujeres* would also come to emphasize.

Mujeres contracted with El Centro de la Causa to use its two-story building as a women's center beginning in the winter of 1973.⁷⁸ During the next year, one of *Mujeres*' main priorities was to expand day care in the neighborhood by working with a community day-care center.⁷⁹ Helping mothers allowed the organization's women to participate in activities outside of the home in a way that would be nonconfrontational to conservative members of the neighborhood.

Mujeres experienced a setback in the fall of 1974 when the Centro de la Causa building burned down.⁸⁰ Historians Lilia Fernández and Martha Zurita have linked the fire to the hostility *Mujeres* faced because of its opposition to patriarchal traditionalism. Fernández's evidence indicates that a local gang may have set the fire, because they had used the location

75. Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*, 12, 139.

76. *Ibid.*, 163.

77. *Ibid.*, 164

78. "Mujeres Latinas en Accion, Inc.: Plans for FY 1976–77 and Tentative Plans for FY 1977–78," 1976, box 7, folder 8, MLEAR.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*

previously to deal drugs and did not believe Mujeres' use of the space was legitimate.⁸¹ Zurita considers the fire part of a larger trend of opposition and violence against the women of Mujeres: Mujeres members had been receiving suspicious phone calls in the weeks before the fire, and one member was physically assaulted by gang members while at a local bar.⁸² Zurita argues that these threats support the theory that community members opposed to the organization had set the fire intentionally.⁸³ Regardless of the exact details surrounding the fire, it is clear that there was an environment of opposition and intimidation towards Mujeres. The organization supported women's independence, which some in the community found threatening to traditional gender roles and the patriarchal status quo. Patriarchal traditionalism, as described by Horowitz, created an environment where threats and violence were seen as appropriate ways to try to restore male dominance.

Despite the fire and opposition from some parts of the community, Mujeres acquired another space, which opened on April 1, 1975.⁸⁴ It established an informal, yet supervised drop-in center for young women to socialize among themselves, to receive support, and to participate in recreational and educational activities.⁸⁵ Mujeres considered the gender norms of the community when creating the programs at the drop-in center: a staff member noted that "because of certain cultural values many

81. Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 251.

82. Martha Zurita, "Mujeres Latinas en Acción: A Case Study of Latina Civil Rights," in *La Causa: Civil Rights, Social Justice, and the Struggle for Equality in the Midwest*, ed. Gilberto Cárdenas (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2004), 180.

83. *Ibid.*, 180.

84. "Mujeres Latinas en Accion, Inc.: Plans for FY 1976–77 and Tentative Plans for FY 1977–78," 1976, box 7, folder 8, MLEAR.

85. "Mujeres Latinas en Accion," 1976, box 1, folder 1, MLEAR.

young girls are not allowed out unless their parents are sure they will be adequately chaperoned.”⁸⁶

One of the aims of the drop-in center was to allow volunteers and staff members to intervene if young women were experiencing a crisis. All *Mujeres* members working with the drop-in center had completed a six-week counseling course through the Institute for Juvenile Research.⁸⁷ *Mujeres* also referred girls to more specialized services, and *Mujeres* volunteers or staff members would accompany the young woman to the other agency and do any necessary follow-up.⁸⁸ The relationships between the girls and *Mujeres* staff and volunteers were long-term and social and offered emotional support. By accompanying young women to appointments with other agencies, the staff and volunteers went beyond just counseling and referrals—they acted like mothers or sisters. The drop-in center became like a second home that was an appropriate place for young women to spend time without challenging social norms. It allowed *Mujeres* to empower women in Pilsen in a way that did not alienate traditional members of the community.

Mujeres’ Work with Runaway Girls: Expansion of Motherhood

In May 1975, *Mujeres* proposed the creation of services for runaway girls, in response to growing rates of runaways in Pilsen. In 1974, the 12th Police District (which included the neighborhoods of Pilsen and Heart of Chicago) recorded ninety-one cases of runaway girls: *Mujeres* noted: “in view of the traditionally tight-knit Latino family, and the chaperoning of young girls, we feel that 91 runaways in one year constitutes an

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.*

alarmingly high rate.”⁸⁹ Mujeres attributed girls’ decisions to run away to dysfunction in the household, such as disagreement with a parent or domestic abuse. However, running away often led girls to face other challenges, like petty theft, homelessness, rape, or drug and alcohol use.⁹⁰ For Mujeres, drugs or alcohol were a symptom of gender-based discrimination, and it was dedicated to addressing the root causes that drove girls to run away: “we feel that a primary goal of the program is to keep families intact when possible and involve parents in the treatment plan.”⁹¹ Mujeres implemented the program for runaway girls in 1977, offering temporary housing to on average of nine runaways a month in two homes in Pilsen, in addition to other services.⁹²

Both Mujeres’ field workers and the foster parents acted as maternal figures for runaway girls. The field workers recruited new foster families, ensured the proper licensing of foster homes, and met directly with the girls in order to provide services.⁹³ The field workers were responsible for creating schedules for the runaway girls once they were in the program, such as schooling and recreational activities.⁹⁴ The field workers also handled activities, such as girls’ medical emergencies and accompanied

89. “Program Proposal: Runaway Services at the Drop-In Center in the Pilsen Community,” May 1975, box 7, folder 10, MLEAR. Chicago’s Human Services counted ninety-one runaways who came into contact with the police or other authorities and probably underestimated the actual number of runaways in the 12th District.

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Ibid.*

92. “List of Activities/Events Sponsored by Mujeres Latinas en Accion 1975–77,” c. 1977, box 7, folder 8, MLEAR.

93. “What is Latin Women in Action?” 1977, box 1, folder 3, MLEAR.

94. Lourdes Sullivan, “Guidelines for Youth Placement,” memorandum to David Reed, executive director, Chicago Area Project. Apr. 23, 1985, box 20, folder 8, MLEAR.

them to appointments, which would normally be the prerogatives of the girls' parents. The field workers also tried to maintain contact with the runaway girls' biological parents in order to see if reunification would be possible and what support the parents needed. Though the field workers were temporarily fulfilling maternal roles, their ultimate goal was to maintain family unity.

The field workers placed the girls into foster homes only when the girls could not be reunited immediately with their biological families. This underscored their commitment to family as an important social and cultural unit. Through their programs for runaway girls, *Mujeres'* use of domestic places and feminine practices positioned women as uniquely capable of solving a community problem. Traditionalism in Pilsen honored women's maternal practices and domesticity. The *Mujeres'* field workers and staff reimagined the possibilities for these respected traits and expanded what was considered part of the domestic sphere to include girls who were not their biological daughters and, more generally, the entire community.

Foster parents extended their domestic spaces to include those who were not biological family members by opening their homes to runaway girls on a temporary basis until they could be reunited with their parents or found safe alternative housing.⁹⁵ Foster parents integrated runaway girls into their household routines, blurring the boundary between the home (motherhood and household labor) and the world (professional/volunteer work and community service). This is consistent with what sociologist Nancy Naples calls "activist mothering" to describe women's work that combines traditional mothering and community activism.⁹⁶

Foster parents' mothering extended beyond providing a place for girls to sleep. They provided a link to runaway girls' culture and language,

95. Lourdes Sullivan, "Length of Placement with Temporary Housing Program," memorandum to Lilian Cruz, supervisor, Pilsen Team, Apr. 16, 1985, box 20, folder 8, MLEAR.

96. Naples, "Activist Mothering," 441–63.

which *Mujeres* saw as closely related to ideas of ethnic identity: “we hope that by providing bilingual staff and volunteers that our runaway service could accept referrals of Latinas from other areas of the city where services are not available and placement in a Latin family is preferable.”⁹⁷ Though the program proposal is not explicit about why a “Latin family” would be preferable, several are implied. First, having foster parents fluent in both Spanish and English would be ideal since the runaway girl and her biological parents might not be proficient in both languages. Second, Latina/o foster parents would have been better equipped to understand the cultural context, place of origin, and gender norms that may have affected the girl’s decision to run away:

One area where the diversity of the population is clear is with runaways. Since many families in the community have migrated here from Texas or Mexico, there are often still ties there and girls may run away to Texas or Mexico. The traffic also works in the reverse, when families move back to Texas or Mexico, and the girls return alone to Chicago.⁹⁸

In general, Pilsen residents had diverse international and domestic migration experiences, as some were recent arrivals and others were long-time Chicagoans. *Mujeres* may have believed these personal experiences of migration, cultural adjustment, and shared knowledge of Spanish would make it easier for foster parents to relate to the girls and uniquely positioned them to be ideal foster parents for runaway Latina girls.⁹⁹

97. “Program Proposal: Runaway Services at the Drop-In Center in the Pilsen Community,” May 1975, box 7, folder 10, MLEAR.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Mujeres*’ efforts in the mid-seventies coincided with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services’ violation of the civil rights of Latino families whose children were in the foster-care system. See, *Burgos v. DCFS*, 1:75-cv-03974 (N.D. IL 1975). The subsequent consent decree required placement of

Mujeres' emphasis on the importance of families revealed a degree of underlying conservatism, despite its reputation for nonconformity in Pilsen. In placing runaway girls with families, Mujeres reinforced norms about the ideal household, such as the importance of the relationship between parents and children. None of its publicity or internal documents about the foster family program mentioned nontraditional families, such as households headed by single women or same-sex couples. This silence allowed traditional families norms to remain unchallenged, and its foster family program could have reinforced certain hierarchies and orthodoxies related to gender roles and parental authority.

Mujeres' services to runaway girls illustrated how the organization extended its practices of motherhood outside of biological families and expanded practices associated with domesticity and femininity to include the entire community. This conferred an important pseudo-maternal identity on its staff and volunteers. In Pilsen, becoming a mother was a significant change in status, and even the transgression of becoming pregnant outside of marriage could be transcended by becoming a devoted mother.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps Mujeres members believed that emphasizing the maternal aspects of their work would allow the organization to achieve a similar transformation. In founding an organization dedicated to women's empowerment and women's participation in public life, they transgressed gender norms in Pilsen associated with patriarchal traditionalism. The organization's members tempered this transgression by becoming "mothers" to the community, whose maternal devotion to runaway girls and the community more broadly allowed Mujeres to situate its work into a culturally appropriate framework.

The work of Mujeres volunteers and foster families is reminiscent of historian Barbara Welter's argument that the association between femininity

Spanish-speaking children with Spanish-speaking foster parents, the use of bilingual consent forms, and the hiring of bilingual staff.

100. Horowitz, *Honor and the American Dream*, 120.

and moral goodness allowed nineteenth-century women to justify their involvement in public life. Society supposed that women would participate only in “morally uplifting tasks,” such as teaching children or caring for the sick.¹⁰¹ Welter identifies social changes, such as westward migration and industrialism, that propelled women into new roles, and, in response to these changes, some women “tried to keep the virtues [associated with traditional women’s roles] and enlarge the scope of womanhood.”¹⁰² Though separated by a century and influenced by different demographic conditions, *Mujeres* volunteers and foster mothers used similar strategies. They justified their public involvement by describing it as an expansion of motherhood and traditional women’s roles, such as caring for children. Social changes, like migration and drug abuse, made these new roles necessary to maintain community well-being. In both cases, women used language and imagery associated with the ideals of womanhood to expand public roles for themselves in the face of social changes.

Mujeres’ Use of Ethnic Identity in Pilsen-based Programs

Ethnic identity and ethnic pride permeated *Mujeres*’ programming at two levels. First, its use of ethnic identity distinguished its services from those offered by women’s groups outside of Pilsen. *Mujeres* believed that outside groups were not adequately providing services to the Latina community, because they disregarded factors specific to that community, like language and cultural norms. Second, *Mujeres*’ programs supported the transmission of culture between generations based on an idea of shared ethnic identity and history. This cultural transmission mimicked what may normally be expected to happen within a family. The relatively recent arrival of many families to Pilsen would have heightened the need

101. Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 164.

102. *Ibid.*, 174.

for this inter-generational cultural transmission in the face of cultural adaptation and integration. *Mujeres* emphasized the importance of supporting cultural transmission in order to give clients a positive sense of self, which could empower them.

In public documents describing its services, *Mujeres* highlighted the organization's ability to integrate ethnic identity into its work. *Mujeres* argued that social-service organizations in Pilsen run by outsiders operated "without appropriate consideration of cultural differences," whereas *Mujeres* and other "Latino organizations in Pilsen provide services that are more accessible because of having staff and boards with cultural backgrounds similar to the client populations, and who live in the community."¹⁰³ *Mujeres* acknowledged its clients' cultural backgrounds by celebrating and raising awareness about Latina/o culture. *Mujeres*' executive director, Luz Maria Prieto, listed organizing cultural awareness workshops as a goal for the 1976–1977 financial year in an internal planning document.¹⁰⁴ *Mujeres* also offered classes about gender and Latina/o culture, such as "Women and Culture," that explored "Latin women as seen in this culture through music, literature, and art [and] our changing roles."¹⁰⁵ The reference to "changing roles" hinted that the course would do more than summarize the cultural contributions of Latinas by offering a framework for empowerment that took into account culture and gender, the immigrant experience, and integration into American culture.

Mujeres' partnerships within Pilsen demonstrate the importance it placed on ethnic identity. Members of *Mujeres* helped with the planning and implementation of the Latino Drug Intervention Program, a program not run by *Mujeres* that offered culturally informed counseling, informational outreach in the community, and educational and vocational

103. "What is Latin Women in Action?" 1977, box 1, folder 3, MLEAR.

104. Luz Prieto, "Action Steps, Organization Unit: Social Services Component," c. 1976, box 7, folder 8, MLEAR.

105. "What is Latin Women in Action?" 1977, box 1, folder 3, MLEAR.

classes.¹⁰⁶ Though the program had the pan-ethnic term Latino in its name, most of its everyday programming emphasized Chicano culture and Mexican heritage. During a Latino Youth Drug Intervention Program staff meeting in early 1974, Ruth Horowitz and Mauro Castro gave a presentation about incorporating Chicano culture into counseling sessions. In general, counselors were supposed to create a trusting relationship with clients, to identify how clients' values and beliefs affected how the clients saw their life and their difficulties, and to support the clients in using their values to solve problems.¹⁰⁷ The staff of the Latino Youth Drug Intervention Program understood Chicano culture as influencing all aspects of this therapeutic process:

The Chicano culture of Pilsen–Heart of Chicago differs from the Anglo culture in many ways. The nature of family relationships is different, the social character and traditions of the community are different and the ethnic identity is different. This necessitates development of a counseling system and set of alternatives which are adaptive to the Chicano population we are dealing with.¹⁰⁸

The agenda also noted that counseling must consider the importance of “sex roles” in Chicano culture: “because of the rigid separation of sex roles and the man’s role as dominant, it is essential that the client and his or her counselor be of the same sex.”¹⁰⁹ This adherence to cultural and gender norms did not address how strict patriarchal traditionalism may

106. “Proposed Second Week Agenda—Latino Youth Drug Intervention Program’s Training Information Cycle,” 1974, box 20, folder 14, MLEAR. Staff members of the Latino Drug Intervention Program met with groups of girls at Mujeres’ drop-in center, further demonstrating their close working relationship.

107. *Ibid.*

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*

have been the underlying cause of some community difficulties, such as the unique vulnerability of runaway girls that led some to abuse drugs. As a result, individual counselors, especially in all-female settings, may have challenged gender norms more than this official policy indicated.

The Latino Youth Drug Intervention Program embraced ethnic identity through its educational and cultural programming. It offered classes on Chicano history, perceptions of Latinas/os in the dominant culture, inter-ethnic conflict, and the relationship between city services and the Latina/o community.¹¹⁰ As implied by these class topics, the Latino Youth Drug Intervention Program had a politicized understanding of ethnic identity and linked Chicano identity to issues of structural inequality and discrimination, which it outlined in a planning document: “classes in Chicano awareness will help both the staff and the youth involved in the program discover who they are, where they are coming from and where they are going.”¹¹¹ Its goals linked learning about Chicano identity to fostering political and cultural solidarity within the community and a positive self-image. It believed that this positive self-image would motivate clients to make more constructive choices in their personal lives and give back to the community, such as a plan for the youth to organize celebrations in honor of Mexican Independence Day and the *Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe*.¹¹²

The Latino Youth Drug Intervention Program emphasized the importance of having staff members from the community to whom the clients could more easily relate and, perhaps, so clients could have role models of their ethnic background. Gwen Stern and Maria Heinz interviewed fifteen Latino Youth Drug Intervention Program staff members in January

110. “Proposed 3rd Week Agenda—Latino Youth Drug Intervention Program Training & Information Cycle,” 1974, box 20, folder 15, MLEAR.

111. *Ibid.*

112. *Ibid.*

1975 about their background, including their ethnic identity.¹¹³ Stern was a volunteer with Mujeres and Mangual, whose married name was Maria Heinz,¹¹⁴ helped found Mujeres. The interviews revealed that staff were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-six and that five out of fifteen staff members were women.¹¹⁵ Stern and Heinz considered eleven staff members Latino, but noted that the term Latino was used by the researchers even when the staff members used different words to describe themselves: “the category ‘Latino’ was used by the researchers to include anyone with one or both parents of Mexican descent.”¹¹⁶ Staff members self-identified as Mexican, Mexican-Norwegian, Chicano, and Mexican-American.¹¹⁷ Staff members also discussed their language ability, place of birth, and residence during the interviews. Most indicated that they were somewhat or completely bilingual in English and Spanish and were long-term residents of Chicago or born in the city: “nine staff members were born in Chicago, which is 60% of the staff. This indicates that at least 60% of the staff is second or third generation in terms of migration to Chicago from Mexico” (emphasis in the original).¹¹⁸ This emphasis on length of residence in Chicago demonstrates that concerns about ethnicity, national identity, and cultural adaptation remained relevant, even for those with no personal experience of migration. The Latino Youth Drug Intervention Program’s staff statistics may not be similar to other community organizations in Pilsen, as the program wanted to recruit staff who could easily relate to the clients. This may have also led the program

113. “Staff Interviews,” Jan. 1975, box 20, folder 17, MLEAR.

114. Trevor Jensen, “Maria T. Mangual: 1944–2007,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 24, 2007.

115. “Staff Interviews,” Jan. 1975, box 20, folder 17, MLEAR.

116. *Ibid.*

117. *Ibid.*

118. *Ibid.*

to hire younger staff. However, the types of questions asked during the interviews reveal what community organizations like Mujeres found important: ethnic identity, language skills, immigration history, and length of residence in Chicago.

In its partnership with other Pilsen organizations, Mujeres demonstrated a nuanced understanding of identity within the Latina/o community (by national origin, pan-ethnicity, political engagement, length of residencies in Chicago, etc.), and it was open to allowing client to self-identify as they saw fit. This is consistent with Stern's claim that the most salient identity labels within Pilsen were the ones which indicated distinctions within Pilsen's Latina/o community.

Mujeres' Use of Ethnic Identity Beyond Pilsen

Mujeres had to make choices about how to utilize ethnic identity when interacting with organizations outside of Pilsen. When interacting with a Latino group, like National Council of La Raza, Mujeres (and other Pilsen community organizations) often used a broad ethnic label to emphasize size and importance; when interacting with a non-Latino group, like Planned Parenthood, Mujeres de-emphasized ethnic identity; and when interacting with a radical feminist group, like Committee to End Sterilization Abuse, it used a combined and complex approach.

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) was founded in 1968 as a regional Chicano organization in Phoenix, Arizona, which went by the name Southwest Council of La Raza (SWCLR).¹¹⁹ According to sociologist G. Cristina Mora, the organization's founders chose the term *la raza*,¹²⁰ because they believed labels like "Spanish-speaking" or "Spanish-

119. Mora, *Making Hispanics*, 54.

120. *La raza* is Spanish for "the race." The term was embraced by participants in the Chicano movement and was often used as a synonym for Hispanic or Latina/o people.

surnamed” excluded many people who ought to be included.¹²¹ Initially, SWCLR focused on funding projects initiated by its member organizations. However, by the time Mujeres began working with the organization in 1987, it had changed names to National Council of La Raza, moved to Washington, DC, broadened its focus from regional to national issues, and emphasized Hispanic pan-ethnicity.¹²² The NCLR’s definition of Hispanic was inclusive, but ambiguous, based on the idea that different groups were connected by a shared culture and experiences of socioeconomic disadvantage.¹²³

In its 1987 application for affiliation with the National Council of La Raza, Mujeres requested assistance with resource development, planning and goal-setting, financial management, and working with the private sector.¹²⁴ (This reflected the NCLR’s shift from direct financial assistance to offering technical and other support after its move to Washington, DC, in 1970.) The application’s statement of purpose clearly communicated the role of ethnic identity and Spanish to Mujeres’ mission, which was “to provide social services to Latinas (most of whom have multi-problem families and are mono-lingual, Spanish-speaking).”¹²⁵ In response to the application’s question about the ethnic background of its board, Mujeres answered that four out of seven board members were Hispanic and that its goal was to increase the size of the board to twelve to eighteen members total, with at least ten Hispanic members.¹²⁶ Mujeres also responded that approximately 85 percent of its clients were Hispanic.

121. Mora, *Making Hispanics*, 54.

122. *Ibid.*, 58, 60–61.

123. *Ibid.*, 67–69.

124. “National Council of La Raza Affiliate Network Application for Affiliation,” 1987, box 20, folder 19, MLEAR.

125. *Ibid.*

126. *Ibid.*

The NCLR Board of Directors approved Mujeres' affiliation request unanimously on April 10, 1987.¹²⁷

Through its affiliation with the NCLR, Mujeres became part of a national network of organizations that advocated for a Latina/o pan-ethnic constituency. The NCLR did have affiliate members that represented specific national groups as there was no requirement for affiliates to represent or serve pan-ethnic constituencies.¹²⁸ Its communications often used the terms Hispanic, Latino, and *la raza* interchangeably.¹²⁹ In a letter from the NCLR's president, Raul Yzaguirre, to Mujeres, he refers to Mujeres' clients as "Latinas" and "Hispanic women"—both labels acknowledged gender and a sense of pan-ethnicity.¹³⁰ However, the fact that Mujeres joined the NCLR as an affiliate does not imply that it used the same definition of Hispanic/Latina/o pan-ethnicity as the NCLR. Despite using "Latinas" in its name, Mujeres remained focused on the women and girls of Pilsen, who were primarily of Mexican descent.

Mujeres did not stress ethnic identity in its collaboration with Planned Parenthood and initially placed a white woman, Gwen Stern, on Planned Parenthood's Chicago board. According to Fernández, this was a "strategic" decision, which helped Mujeres distance itself from an organization that supported abortion.¹³¹ Mujeres never publicly promoted abortion, which would have alienated opponents to abortion in Pilsen.¹³² It was also difficult to reconcile the right to abortion (and other feminist radical options) with Mujeres' somewhat conservative image as symbolic "mothers" of the Pilsen community.

127. Letter from Raul Yzaguirre, Apr. 13, 1987, box 20, folder 19, MLEAR.

128. Mora, *Making Hispanics*, 81.

129. *Ibid.*, 79–82.

130. Letter from Raul Yzaguirre, Nov. 17, 1987, box 20, folder 20, MLEAR.

131. Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 346–47.

132. *Ibid.*, 256.

In 1976, Planned Parenthood of Chicago unanimously elected Luz Maria Prieto, *Mujeres'* executive director, to its Board of Directors.¹³³ Prieto served as board secretary¹³⁴ and represented *Mujeres* on the Planned Parenthood Association Chicago Area Client Services and Volunteer Committee in 1977 and 1978.¹³⁵ Prieto attended Client Services and Volunteer committee meetings and provided feedback and recommendations on existing Planned Parenthood programming, such as pregnancy counseling programs and recruiting volunteers.¹³⁶ According to the committee meeting minutes for April 1977, most of Prieto's contributions focused on event logistics and planning: "Luz Prieto suggested that arrangements be made with host organizations for provision of baby-sitting services. This is used at other agencies to stimulate attendance."¹³⁷ Meeting minutes for the next month recorded that Prieto was involved in organizing events for youth.¹³⁸

The Client Services and Volunteer Committee meeting minutes did not record Prieto mentioning ethnic identity. It is possible that Prieto did mention ethnic identity, but in more subtle ways that were not recorded by the meeting minutes. Prieto, as a Latina, may have felt secure in her role representing a Latina organization and did not need to establish her dedication or legitimacy. The absence of Latina issues may also reflect the limits of coalitional politics in the 1970s, which had yet to

133. Letter from David C. Hilliard, July 1976, box 21, folder 9, MLEAR.

134. Letter from Luz Maria Prieto, Feb. 14, 1978, box 21, folder 9, MLEAR.

135. Planned Parenthood Association/Chicago Area Client Services and Volunteer Committee 1977–78 Contact List, box 21, folder 8, MLEAR.

136. Jean Nielsen, Direct Services Committee Meeting Minutes, Nov. 10, 1976, box 21, folder 8, MLEAR.

137. Jean Nielsen, Direct Services Committee Meeting Notes, Apr. 14, 1977, box 21, folder 8, MLEAR.

138. Jean Nielsen, Direct Services Committee Meeting Minutes, June 8, 1977, box 21, folder 8, MLEAR.

integrate a diversity of perspectives, including ethnic identity. Regardless, the very presence of Prieto on the board and at Client Services and Volunteer Committee meetings reflected a change in how *Mujeres* engaged with outside organizations, which advocated for policies that some more conservative members of the Pilsen community might have found objectionable.

The Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CESA) arose from the work of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU) in the 1970s. CWLU, a socialist, second-wave feminist organization, promoted many women's issues, including abortion and women's health more broadly.¹³⁹ Maritza Arrastia of New York CESA came to Chicago in July 1975 to discuss efforts to end sterilization abuse in Puerto Rico and population control in general.¹⁴⁰ Community groups in Chicago, including CWLU, became interested in learning about sterilization in Chicago hospitals and the local prevalence of sterilization abuse.¹⁴¹

Mujeres' interactions with CESA highlight the complexity of *Mujeres*' position in the 1970s. While CESA's concerns about sterilization aligned with the church's anti-contraception efforts, CWLU's radical feminism misaligned with Pilsen's religious and macho cultures. *Mujeres* was a feminist organization that helped Latina women and girls outside of the traditional family structure. Its members describe themselves metaphorically as mothers of the community and their work as a continuation, not

139. CWLU Herstory Project, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.cwluherstory.org/>.

140. Author unknown, CESA meeting minutes, Sept. 15, 1975, and Sept. 22, 1975, box 4, folder 5, Jenny Knauss Collection, Manuscript Series XCIII, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Library.

141. *Ibid.* Activists defined sterilization abuse as sterilizations that occurred without free and informed consent, including medical professionals requesting consent in a language that the patient did not understand or government officials threatening the loss of welfare benefits to a woman who refused sterilization.

a disruption, of the family. This strategic tactic reduced antagonism from religious and gender traditionalists in Pilsen and allowed Mujeres to expand programming and associate with local and national groups. Given these circumstances, Mujeres had to maintain a careful balancing act in its association with CESA.

Mary Tully represented Mujeres at CESA's September 1975 meetings. Tully was a white progressive, active in community organizations in Pilsen.¹⁴² Fernández argues that having white women represent Mujeres distanced it from the more radical aspects of CESA's work.¹⁴³ But white representation was a double-edged sword that prevented Mujeres' Latina members from gaining direct experience in coalitional politics and limited Mujeres' options for activism outside of the neighborhood. The double-edged nature of Tully's representation of Mujeres is demonstrated in one disagreement between Mirtha N. Font and Tully at a CESA meeting on September 15, 1975:

From the floor, Mirtha N. Font bought up the issue of "focus" in presenting the work of C.E.S.A. to the public.... Font mentioned that it was important to consider that an audience of "poor whites," for example, might not see sterilization as their problem if presented as a U.S. tool to control Puerto Ricans, but might recognize their position as victims if other aspects of sterilization are also emphasized.¹⁴⁴

Tully responded "that poor whites and others could respond to the issue of imperialism and that she wouldn't like to see the problem of sterilization presented in a fragmented fashion."¹⁴⁵ Tully did contradict Font's

142. Fernández, *Brown in the Windy City*, 253.

143. Ibid.

144. Ibid.

145. Ibid.

hypothetical argument that poor white women might not make the connection between sterilization and US imperialism, but Tully's "poor whites and others" does not make it clear who these "others" are—a significant omission for the representative of a Latina organization.

After this exchange, someone not identify by name suggested that the group should finish discussing updates before debating goals and strategy. Interestingly, Puerto Rico was not explicitly discussed again—even during the section dedicated to goals and strategy: "1) consciousness raising through health education," "2) action—focusing primarily on enforcing, reforming, or changing regulations," and "3) Building community organization for an alternative health care system."¹⁴⁶ Population control and imperialist policies were only mentioned as a subpart of the first goal, consciousness-raising.

Conclusion

Members of *Mujeres Latinas en Acción* expanded the practices associated with motherhood to include caring for all of Pilsen, with a focus on helping young Latinas. The meanings associated with motherhood were influenced by both ethnic identity and the gender traditionalism that existed in Pilsen during the 1970s and 1980s. *Mujeres* members acted as "mothers" for young women by creating a pseudo-domestic space in the drop-in center and through its foster program. By embracing certain practices associated with motherhood, *Mujeres* members gained increased community acceptance while still engaging in radical practices, such as entering previously male-dominated spaces, leading community organizations, and forming coalitions with city and national groups—in short, participating in public life. Just as becoming a mother could transform the status of an individual woman, *Mujeres*' embrace of mothering practices changed the organization's institutional identity to become more acceptable to the community, despite its work challenging gender

146. *Ibid.*

traditionalism and male dominance. However, its choice to prioritize its reputation within Pilsen limited its ability to engage in certain types of activism outside of the neighborhood, such as having Latina members represent the organization in certain situations. Instead, it sought to create working relationships with organizations outside of Pilsen in a manner that avoided controversy and projected a unified view of the Latina/o community, despite disagreements within Pilsen about gender and ethnic identity.

Mujeres members justified their participation in activism as an expansion of their traditional feminine roles, which is reminiscent of Welter's argument about women's participation in public life in the nineteenth century. In both cases, larger social forces motivated women's entrance into public life. For Mujeres' members, the male-dominated Chicano movement did not address the needs of Latina women, and this context influenced how they constructed and mobilized a pan-ethnic identity to fulfill their goals as both women and Latinas inside and outside of Pilsen.

Today, Mujeres is proud to be the "longest-standing Latina organization in the country, serving to empower Latinas through services which reflect their values and culture."¹⁴⁷ In March 2018, Mujeres celebrated forty-five years of service to Chicago's Latina community. As the organization continues its work and looks to the future, it echoed the words of one of its founders, María Mangual: "our fighting days are not behind us—but once again ahead of us. It will require cross-generational efforts.... We need to ensure that we remain vigilant to protect the rights of our daughters and granddaughters."¹⁴⁸ Mujeres continues to use the language of motherhood to frame its activism.

Mujeres' choice to engage in practices associated with motherhood influenced the possibilities associated with coalitional politics both inside and outside of Pilsen. This strategy provided it a means to gain community

147. "Our History," *Mujeres Latinas en Acción: Empowering Latinas and Their Families*, accessed Mar. 3, 2018, <https://mujereslatinasenaccion.org/history/>.

148. *Ibid.*

support despite the strength of gender traditionalism in Pilsen. As a result, Mujeres collaborated successfully with community organizations, formed coalitions around its shared interest in issues affecting Latina/o Chicagoans, and ensured that gender was considered in programmatic decisions. Mujeres members also worked with feminist organizations outside the neighborhood, highlighting the perspectives and priorities of Latina communities. In these situations, their maternal practices played less of a role, but still gave them the authority to speak on behalf of their community. Mujeres strove to create a new version of motherhood and family, one free of patriarchy and inequality. Mujeres' success offers an important example for others engaged in coalitional activism that reaches across borders of ethnicity and gender to create new spaces that embrace a person's whole identity. ○

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