
REVIEW ESSAYS

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN LAS AMERICAS

Gloria González-López
University of Texas at Austin

VELVET BARRIOS: POPULAR CULTURE & CHICANA/O SEXUALITIES. Edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Pp. 322. \$60.00 cloth, \$26.95 paper.)

HOTEL RITZ—COMPARING MEXICAN AND U.S. STREET PROSTITUTES: FACTORS IN HIV/AIDS TRANSMISSION. By David J. Bellis. (New York: The Haworth Press, 2003. Pp. 128. \$24.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)

CUERPO Y SEXUALIDAD. Edited by Francisco Vidal and Carla Donoso. (Santiago, Chile: FLACSO-Chile, Universidad ARCIS, and VIVO POSITIVO, 2002. Pp. 203.)

In every region of Las Americas, intellectual inquiry is giving birth to fascinating and informative research in gender and sexuality studies across disciplines. During the first *lustr*o of the new century, women and men of Latin American origin decipher *from* popular culture representations and icons of their gendered and sex lives *to* the everyday life experiences shaping their sexualized bodies and social realities. In this intellectual collage, the contributors inform and expand on the state of the art in sexuality research by visiting three geographical locations: cultural communities of Mexican origin in the United States, Mexico, and Chile.

Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture & Chicana/o Sexualities* offers an incisive collection of essays about the ways in which relevant icons of Mexican and Mexican American culture have served as the origin and vehicle of multiple expressions of gender and sexuality. This anthology de-marginalizes and places popular culture of Mexican origin at the center of these examinations. The contributors study culture, gender, and sexuality not from the outside or from the top down but from within and as a respectful, critical, and sensitive examination of *la cultura*. In this anthology, icons are examined as they vanish but also as they are culturally examined and reinvented; at times icons remain intact. The book has five major themes that organize these contributions.

"A Barrio Altar: Heroes & Icons" offers three complex interpretations of gender and sexuality by examining some of their traditional cultural representations. First, both the permanence and the interruption of expressions of femininity of Mexican and Mexican American folklore are examined through Ana Castillo's writings: *locas*, *curanderas*, *lloronas*, *malinches*, and *las vírgenes*. While these are icons, they are also reflected in multiple ways in the everyday lives of the characters, whose nuanced expressions of femininity, sexuality, sexual morality, and religion intertwine. Second, a beautifully written, culturally insightful, and humanizing historical and literary examination looks at what has become one of the most misunderstood and marginalized expressions of Chicano masculinity: Pachuco identities. This contribution enhances our understanding of the struggle for search of manhood from the socioeconomic margins and racial segregation haunting men of Mexican origin living in the most disenfranchised sectors of U.S. society. And third, an examination of indigenous and Chicana/o sexualities emerges from a creative theoretical framework. The four cardinal points east, north, west, and south serve as the orientation to examine the sexualities, femininities, and masculinities of indigenous groups and Chicanos and of sexually marginalized groups traditionally ignored in the literature: *gay indígenas*. In this harmonious theoretical framework, we learn about the intricacies of sexuality and gender within contexts of Catholic hegemonic beliefs, colonization, occupation, cultural genocide, racism, and post-9-11 terrorism. Here the concept of "social Malinche" identifies the activist who is an intellectual and the intellectual who is an activist. "Esta gente en lucha permanente" identifies the indigenous or Chicana/o who strives for community-based and activist self-determination and empowerment, equilibrium, intellectual creativity, self-discovery, affirmation, and dignity, equal human rights, and respect for Chicano and indigenous communities.

"Mythic Barrios, Cultural Myths" offers four intellectual possibilities to demystify cultural expressions of a so-called *mexicanidad* or *cultura mexicana*. First, an in-depth critical analysis of a trio of autobiographical

performances engages in the difficult job of dissecting the ways in which an “authentic” Mexico has been selectively reproduced but also contested. Here we learn how performance may give life to the complex experiences of identity of Mexican border-crossers and Mexicans crossed by borders. These examinations show how identity is performed on stage as Mexico—the mythical land—is revisited, reinvented, rectified, imagined, challenged, deconstructed and ultimately demystified through these performances. Mexico as a necessary invention seems to be important for the cultural imagination, especially as an identity is constructed. Here we are reminded of the elements present at the heart of the fluid identity for those living in the Borderlands (either on stage or in everyday life): the painful contradictions of history, territorial occupation, migration, and dislocation from a mythical and idealized homeland emerging from reconstructed memories, separation, dislocation, and grief.

Second, a monolithic and frequently idealized social institution is examined: *la familia*. Through the complex relationships among the characters in *Rag and Bone* (2001),¹ the reader is exposed to the emotionally challenging ways in which family life reproduces power and control dynamics, complex relationships, and homophobia and bi-phobia. The detailed examinations of this narrative invite the reader to become a creative social critic who is able to celebrate some aspects of family life but is also vigilant of its pains and challenges. Here we are invited to imagine refreshing ways to construct familias, new and renovated family structures and supportive relations that are no longer homophobic and oppressive for insiders and outsiders. Las familias may ultimately build larger and stronger communities and national configurations.

Third, an in-depth examination of the bolero offers a cultural revelation of gender and sexual politics as experienced by young women and men living in East Los Angeles in the 1960s and early 1970s. The lyrics of melodious romance and despair are interconnected with sexual, racial, gender, and class complexities shaping young Chicana women’s heterosexual romantic relationships, family life, and community organizing. These women’s active engagement in both the reproduction and contestation of many gendered social processes includes mainstream ideals of female beauty versus racialized femininities; the complexities of acculturation versus el Movimiento, social struggle and political organization; and sexist racism and sexism within their communities. The Chicanas exposed to them become what could be translated as *agentes provocadoras* who can find ways to resist in the process.

Fourth, also with a melodic but contrasting tune, an examination of Chicano rap and hip hop explains how ethnic and community identities

1. Michael Nava, *Rag and Bone* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2002).

emerge: the image of *la familia* and national empowerment become synonymous. But many complexities are intertwined as these expressions of popular culture are uncovered: cultural poetry and politics; heterosexual male Chicano masculinities including the pachuco experiences; marginality and working-class consciousness; multiethnic musical crossing and production; intra- and interethnic division; the heteronormative familia; “*la familia-la raza*” interactions of ethnic self-empowerment and resistance; and the challenge of hegemonic and dominant ideologies. Chicano rap and hip hop become a popular culture mechanism to resist and to cope with oppression, and a process of ethnic identity formation, racial consciousness, and cultural pride.

In “Barrio Rites: Popular Rituals,” through four cultural windows, we look at how and why both femininity and masculinity are constructed as part of everyday life barrio performances. First, an important contribution examines a topic rarely discussed in the men and masculinities’ studies literature: men of Mexican origin, sports, and a political economy. Here the political, racial, and economic tensions shaping the life experiences of Chicano families who inhabited the Chavez Ravine neighborhood are at the core of an icon of masculinity: Dodger Stadium. Baseball, however, was not new to men of Mexican origin who were familiar with this sport before migrating. For immigrants and future generations of Chicanos, baseball helped reaffirm ethnic identity and masculinity, amidst political and economic tensions and the emerging Spanish-speaking media. A symbol for both oppression and resistance, Dodger Stadium becomes not only an icon of masculinity but also a site for contestation for Mexican Americans who are victims of economic and political marginality as well as agents of social change. Second, a feminist anthropological examination of *la quinceañera* addresses the methodological reflections of a scholar who is both an “outsider” and an “insider” who studies Mexican women living in the United States. In this essay, she studies cultural expressions of ethnicity, religion, and social constructions of heteronormative femininity. This examination unpacks the informative paradoxes and contradictions that emerge when one looks at the same event through the contrasting narratives of those involved: the Church, the families, and the quinceañeras themselves. This analysis is a refreshing and critical examination of a patriarchal rite of passage into Mexicana heterosexual womanhood, an expression of Catholic popular religiosity, and a financially expensive cultural tradition in the midst of struggle for ethnic self-definition. Third, a thought-provoking examination of the internationally acclaimed novel and movie *Like Water for Chocolate* invites the reader to consider a queer alternative to look at the metaphors that emerge when both culinary appetites and human passions are cooked in fire. This essay revisits this literary and cinematographic production by looking at it thorough

a combination of a psychoanalytical lens and queer subtexts. The main characters give life to a triangle of love, hate, confusion, anger, rejection, fear, hope, and despair: Mamá Elena becomes the masculinized and controlling mother of Tita; Tita is transformed into a woman who “subconsciously desires her mother” (172) and is not allowed by her to marry Pedro; and Pedro is perceived as an effeminate man. The eroticization of cooking and eating situates Tita as the main character of a movie in which she “penetrate[s] her loved ones thorough food” (175). This provocative analysis transforms the intense and painful emotional tensions of this mother-daughter relationship into a “queer issue”: the unresolved issues between both women are driven by lesbian desire.

This provocative examination sexualizes a painfully complex mother-daughter relationship. Unfortunately, at times, it does it at the risk of reproducing gender stereotypes. For example, the mother who is authoritarian and controlling and who states at some point that “men aren’t that important in this life” (170) becomes a masculinized queer character; a young woman “subconsciously desires her mother” because the latter has “the strong qualities” her boyfriend does not have (172); and a man with a soft and gentle presence becomes “effeminate.” The essay, however, also offers informative reflections of a novel and movie that expose patriarchal family values and heterosexual love, and the ways in which women across generations resist and/or comply in the process. Finally, a colorful examination gives the reader an insightful ride through the multiple dimensions interconnecting *Low Rider* magazine, capitalism, masculinity, and sexuality: the culture of cars and consumption as part of popular culture, the history of low riding and Chicano male identity formation, the historical and cultural evolution of the magazine, and the honest exchanges between readers and the producers of this publication. In this engaging and informative feminist examination of the originally Chicano-owned magazine concerned about cultural politics and identity, the author exposes the ways in which the objectification and exploitation of women’s bodies became central but also the site of tension in the marketing of the magazine. Chicano masculine formation and pride were created at the expense of sexist reproduction of images of Chicana women. The publication of Chicano pride images became vulnerable to globalization, marketing strategies, and commercial profit: a large corporation bought it in 1997.

“Border Barrios: A Tradition of Long Walks” helps us understand how femininities and masculinities have been projected onto the big screen and other spaces. First, we have a multidimensional dialogue with the movie *Born in East L.A.* and its protagonists. In this engaging page-turner essay, we learn about the story of Rudy Robles, a U.S. citizen born in East L.A. (the quintessential Mexican barrio of Los Angeles) who experiences “cultural schizophrenia.” The latter refers to an individually experienced

but collectively shared state of cognitive confusion that U.S.-born citizens of Mexican descent (Chicanos) cannot escape and which is a consequence of colonization. “If not a citizen or an alien, what is a Chicano/a?” (201) poses the author as a question to herself as she assembles answers through her analysis of both the horizontal and vertical narratives that the filmmaker and protagonist offer in a comedy that reveals colorful symbols and painful Chicano and Mexican experiences. History of colonization, citizenship status, racial, linguistic, cultural, and dislocated personal realities shape the lives of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants in commonly shared but also in distinctive ways. The painful process of cultural schizophrenia is made of paradoxes and ambiguities shaped by racism, sexism, homophobia, and colonization but it may eventually lead Rudy Robles to a cognitive state that is not only liberating but also empowering: border consciousness. Paulo Freire’s groundbreaking conceptualization of *conscientização* keeps coming to my mind as these marginalized “legal” citizens of the United States go through an identity crisis that may hopefully evolve into *la conscientización fronteriza*.² With the expression “*El pueblo que pierde su memoria pierde su destino*,” the author concludes, as she invites the reader to reflect about the history of occupied “America” (the United States) and the invisible borders between U.S. Latino America and Latin America.

In “Border Barrios,” a second contribution engages the reader in a critique of the absence of sophisticated examinations of Chicana sexualities and subjectivities in the Chicana aesthetic landscape. “To be critical of one’s culture is not to betray that culture” (225), the author cites Moraga’s words as she revisits and critiques the acclaimed work of Latina/o writers and performers (i.e., Gómez-Peña, Fusco, Culture Clash, and Sandra Cisneros). The author explores an alternative intellectual route beyond the search for Aztlán, a borderspace she identifies as *fronterótica*. *Fronterótica* seems to be more inclusive of historical, political, and economic evolution; it is the place that is real, that is topographic, that is *poetic*. This framework invites us to explore new, refreshing possibilities for self-examination, definition, criticism of gender and sexuality in the borderlands.

Lastly, La Llorona—the iconic legend of Chicano folklore—is at the center of a nuanced analysis that looks at how she has become represented in both Chicano and mainstream contemporary cinema. This contribution offers a feminist informed cultural lens to examine a series of films while looking at the ways some of the Chicana characters experience various expressions of “lost-ness”—La Llorona experience (e.g., losing children, being abandoned, challenging

2. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogía del oprimido*, 1st ed. (México: Siglo XXI Editores SA de CV, 1970).

emotional states of grief and pain). This essay reflects the ways in which filmmakers continue reproducing forms of colonization, as well as ways to decolonize the filmmaking industry and explore cinematic avenues leading to self-representation beyond racist, sexist, classist, and cultural stereotypes.

"Velvet Barrio: Este-reo-tipos/Stereotypes" examines women's bodies and social control, images, and representation. First, a feminist tour-de-force unpacks the historical origins of racist misogyny and violence targeting Mexican women. This essay examines the story of a song dedicated to Lupe (a name surrounding the history of independence, the spiritual conquest of Mexico, the everyday lives of people of Mexican origin) that has been used in more than one university campus in California as part of a fraternity's activities. Here we learn why this contemporary ritual is neither accidental nor isolated; there is in fact a historical background that confirms that Mexican women were the target of systematic violence, crime, and harassment as part of the U.S. history of conquest, colonization, and territorial occupation. This passionate essay provides multiple answers but many questions as well, as one reflects on other forms of violence against Mexicanas and their social and political implications.

A second essay examines the ways in which ideals of beauty, the body, and sexualized femininity are constructed by and through *Latina* magazine, the iconic personas of Selena and Jennifer López, and the acclaimed film *Real Women Have Curves*. The author explains, for example, how *Latina* (a pro-assimilation magazine) promotes ideals of beauty that are oppressive to Latinas: "Straight hair is normative, preferred and beautiful, while *rizos* are ordinary, undesirable, common, and just too natural" (265). Thus, relaxing the *rizos* emphasizes the ideal of White beauty, something that is recommended and successfully accomplished in some of the step-by-step formulas the magazine has published. In this essay, therefore, curly hair seems to be synonymous with *latinidad*, and thus something that has to be changed in order "to assimilate." I would like to expand on this argument. While this is true for some Latinas, this is not true for *all* Latinas living in the United States. For instance, the experiences of some Indigenous women migrating from Mexico may complicate this argument. As a native of Northern Mexico, I grew up being keenly aware of the racist ideals of beauty in Mexican society: while straight and blond hair may become the ideal of Western beauty, *el cabello ondulado* (hair with waves) is also an indication of Spanish blood. This racist ideology was confirmed as I observed some poor immigrant women in Los Angeles in the mid 1990s. Some of these women were from Indigenous background (and thus had *pelo liso* or straight hair) and had gone to the beauty salon to get a perm after saving money in Los Angeles.

Beyond these reflections on hair texture and oppression, this contribution also offers a critical perspective with regard to the sexualized bodies of iconic Selena and J-Lo. While these Latinas may embody (and thus celebrate) the Latina aesthetic beyond the Western ideal of the slender body, it is interesting to observe how neither Selena nor J-Lo (the impersonator of the former on the big screen) has been free from being exposed to expressions of racist sexism and sexist racism. It also is interesting to observe how the bodies of Latina pop culture stars like Salma Hayek and Shakira changed after they “migrated” to the United States. Salma lost weight and Shakira dyed her dark hair and became blonde. But beyond Latina icons, “real women” have a feminist alternative: the bodies of “real life” Latinas may become politicized and empowered—a body that is “fat” may be redefined as a body that matters, a body that sexually desires. May the happy ending of *Real Women Have Curves* become a possibility for countless young Chicanas and Latinas.

The third essay in this last section looks at U.S. Latino theatrical performance. Here we learn about how some of the most prolific Latina/o performers disrupt, challenge, and reinvent taboos about sexuality, gender, and religion. For them, creative transgressions become a political act that is possible through performance. And fourth, the examination of the iconic images of the volcanoes Ixtacíhuatl and the Popocatepetl go beyond the colorful and traditional submissiveness and sexual objectification of women these images may promote. The author offers a counteroffensive by inviting the reader to look at these images from a Chicana feminist perspective that rebels against the heterosexual possibility implied in these images that have traditionally celebrated ethnic identity. And lastly, through a Chicano comic one can only imagine the fluid nature of gendered and sexualized icons that will emerge as one witnesses the apocalyptic demographic and political future of Chicanos and Latinos in the United States.

Velvet Barrios is a must read for anyone interested in gender and sexuality studies with Chicana and Chicano populations. This book is an intellectual celebration and a mosaic of the multiple and nuanced ways in which popular culture becomes the social vehicle for the representation and reinvention of gender and sexuality expressions in the cultural Borderlands—the evolving yet legendary Aztlán.

Hotel Ritz—Comparing Mexican and U.S. Street Prostitutes explores commercial sex, drug use, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic from the perspective of a former heroin addict who has had real life exposure to women engaged in commercial sex, drug use, and HIV/AIDS infection. Now a professor and a former mayor in a Southern California location, the author describes his comparative research with sex workers living on both sides of the border—San Bernardino (U.S. side); three cities located in different Northern Mexico states (Tijuana, Baja California;

Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua; Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas); and in Central Mexico (Cuernavaca, Morelos). The author offers a condensed profile on HIV/AIDS statistics for these populations; a historical reflection of drug use and commercial sex; a history of the political and economic contexts and nuances surrounding drug trafficking in contemporary Mexican society and both sides of the border; and his fieldwork and justification to work in these Mexican locations. While comparing his U.S. and Mexican samples, he offers what I found to be the one of the most relevant contributions of this book: Mexican sex workers are less likely than their U.S. counterparts to spend money and engage in drug use. Why? The author explains that the former group lacks a social welfare program and thus is more likely to live in more deplorable conditions of poverty and to perceive commercial sex as a job. His recommendations to officials, educators, and activists working with these populations echo what some activists working with these populations have suggested: sexually transmitted diseases prevention education; keeping *zonas de tolerancia* or prostitution districts; revisiting HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, and free needle/syringe exchange programs; decriminalization of heroin use; and a reevaluation of prostitution laws. This book is a brief and general, yet sensitive and accessible research project about a complex web of social inequality: commercial sex, drug use, and HIV/AIDS on both sides of the border. However, the methods section and the theoretical framework represented a challenge for me. For instance, I would have liked to read more about the actual stories and these women's voices. Such an exercise might have helped the author establish deeper connections between the multidisciplinary theoretical perspective he presented in the first chapters of this book and his research findings.

And lastly, *Cuerpo y Sexualidad* is an informative and comprehensive multidisciplinary edited volume that offers a rainbow of reflections for those interested in the state of the art in sexuality research in contemporary Chilean society. Two major themes stand out in this collection. The first deals with social regulations of desire.

The first four essays cover the historical evolution of sexuality and the ways in which it has been morally and scientifically regulated in Chilean society. In the first contribution, the author explains how the "scientific establishment" (medical models which have pathologized the expression of sexual desire) has shaped the ways in which contemporary Chileans experience sexuality. The author argues that the democratization of sexuality as perceived by Giddens is not achieved yet by Chilean society. Why? Gender inequality shapes the quality of the sexual encounters of heterosexuals and women are still trapped in a need to satisfy their male partners. However, class and exposure to college education seem to shape these dynamics, as women from upper

socioeconomic strata and college-educated young women and men seem to be closer to the ideal of sexual democratization Giddens proposes.³ These women are more likely to enjoy sex and demand sexual satisfaction from their intimate experiences. This dynamic resonates with my own research with Mexican women living in Los Angeles: the exercise of sexual autonomy is encouraged by socioeconomic factors including but not limited to access to economic mobility and education.⁴ Second, we learn about the challenges the media has encountered as a heteronormative discourse on sexuality regulates and silences the freedom of expression. Some of these reflections offer interesting paradoxes in Chilean society. While there is some openness in a society that seems to be changing in terms of sexuality, media and freedom of expression still face numerous obstacles especially by those who are in power. Third, a philosophical perspective exposes a reflection on how a relationship between ethics and sexuality is possible. The subject (the individual) and her/his sexuality are examined as an ethical project; ethics and sexuality seem to go hand in hand. And lastly, a powerful reflection about the rights of “sexual minorities” highlights the complexities of exclusion and the multiplicity of identities of those who are marginalized. A concept popular in U.S. intellectual circles, “multiple marginalities,” is also addressed in this context, especially for lesbians, gay, and transgendered individuals.

This second section examines the way desire has been expressed through sexualized bodies but controlled and shaped by a modernized society. First, an anthropological examination looks at the different expressions of violence toward the woman’s body by reflecting on the murder and mutilation of a group of adolescent women and the sociological experiment known as *La casa de vidrio*. The Glass House was a “sociological experiment” that exposed a young woman who lived in a house made of glass. In this way the boundaries between public and private became blurred as those who looked at the woman paid special attention to her moments of nudity, especially when she undressed to take a shower. The reflection by the author is stimulating. She examines how a woman’s body is subjected to patriarchal control in her examinations of reproductive health and beauty. Her final remarks, however, risk reproducing the Madonna/whore dichotomy. Second, an anthropological examination looks at the public discourses about pornography in contemporary Chile. The confiscation of “illicit material” such as pornographic magazines and videos,

3. Anthony Giddens, “Intimacy as Democracy” in Christine L. Williams and Arlene Stein (eds.), *Sexuality and Gender*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 446–455.

4. Gloria González-López, *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and their Sex Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

as well as a wide variety of sex toys, receives special attention. Here we learn about the social embarrassment caused when official authorities found pornographic material, something that is perceived by a dominant discourse as offensive and grotesque, in the presidential residence. As a result, the moral integrity of former president Salvador Allende was at the center of this scandal. Also, an analysis examines some of the implications for those involved in virtual encounters—namely, cyber sex. The reader is invited here to reflect about how cybernetics may affect the ways in which people seek to explore the erotic in a middle class society that has become technologically savvy, but vulnerable and open to seeking and experiencing sexual pleasure online. And finally, a group experience of bodywork and images is briefly discussed in poetic prose.

The unifying force across Las Americas with regard to contemporary social struggles is confirmed in a discussion concerned about gay, lesbian, and transgender populations and their human rights. A series of testimonials about oppression and exclusion offer a powerful social vehicle as we learn through the poetic narrative of a man who reflects on being a “sexual minority,” a woman’s examinations of the emerging lesbian groups in Chile since 1984, and the powerful experiences of transgender individuals. Here the concept of sexual minority is used to address the way in which lesbian, gay, and transgender populations are marginalized and controlled by the “majority.” As for many progressive sectors of Las Americas, here homophobia is a serious concern.

A collection of essays examines different research reports and projects on HIV/AIDS from the powerful perspective of activists, including those who are currently infected. Reflections on how women have become vulnerable because of gender inequality and epidemiological reasons, or biology, are included. Another reflection includes a discussion of the *Ley de SIDA*. A law initiative, this proposition exposes the political establishment’s reactions to this initiative as organizations became involved in a highly political project that touched a sensitive nerve in Chilean political spheres. This important piece invites the reader to reflect on the institutionalization of politics that are sensitive to HIV/AIDS in Chile and other Latin American societies. A discussion about the implications of HIV/AIDS within the international landscape helps us visualize how other Latin American societies may interact with organizations such as the United Nations, especially with regard to sexual health and human rights. An important concern emerges in this last section of the book: studying sexuality, sex education, reproductive health, and pleasure as human rights for all may facilitate a process of emancipation and democratization of intimacy—a common denominator in all three books.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

These three publications revisit and critique (but at times reinforce) traditional theoretical paradigms. In the process, they also inaugurate promising and creative intellectual possibilities to study sexuality and its intricate connections with culture and society. And while each book examines unique aspects of sexuality in diverse geographical and cultural spaces, the common thread uniting these three volumes highlights many of the concerns that characterize contemporary sexuality research. These concerns include (but are not limited to) gender inequality; colonization; homophobia; racism and classism; multiple marginalities, heterosexism and heteronormativity; economic and cultural exploitation and sexual vulnerabilities; multiple expressions of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality; drug use and commercial sex; sexual, reproductive, and human rights; media and hegemonic control of freedom of speech; marginalized sexual and gender identities; the HIV/AIDS epidemic; the dangers and the pleasures of sexuality; the State and sexuality; cultural icons of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality and everyday life experiences of gender and the erotic; and Christian (mainly Catholic) religion and sexual morality.

What is the future of our intellectual inquiry about sexuality and society? As the Latino "boom" keeps surprising North American society with new demographic silhouettes, and Latin America keeps fighting old and new social, economic, and political struggles, my hope is for unresolved and renewed sexual concerns and issues to be addressed from *within* the same communities striving for self-understanding, self-definition, and self-empowerment. These changes become unpredictable as political change shapes beliefs and practices with regard to sexuality in other nations having close cultural and historical connections with U.S. Latino communities and Latin America. For instance, it is crucial to see how the approval of same-sex marriage in Spain in June 2005 may shape sexual politics in the Spanish-speaking Americas. Exploring ways to use emerging knowledge and political change for purposes of inquiry about gender and sexuality is always at the edge of intellectual novelty and creativity. These new projects and unprecedented political changes may discredit overused and outdated paradigms to give birth to groundbreaking ways to study sexuality. In the end, promoting intellectual activism may offer equal access to sexual education and health as well as the right to autonomy and pleasure as human rights *for all* in our Spanish-speaking communities and countries. The Universal Declaration of Sexual Rights adopted by the World Association for Sexology in 1999 is an exemplary convention to follow in this vibrant struggle for social justice and change.⁵

5. Declaration of Sexual Rights, World Association for Sexology *SIECUS Report*, April/May 2000, 17.