

Theories of Differences:
Changing Paradigms for Organizations

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The domain of social life is essentially a domain of differences. Mauss¹

In the diverse and global world of today, differences are part and parcel of every day life. During the last two decades differences in organizations have become an important area of organizational change under the rubric of “managing diversity,” “valuing differences,” “diversity management,” “multiculturalism,” “multicultural organizational development,” and “working with diversity” (Cox, 1991; Cross, et al., 1994; Esty, et al., 1995; Jackson and Holvino, 1988; Loden and Rosener, 1996; Merrill-Sands, et al., 2000; Thomas, 1990, 1991, 1995; Thomas and Ely, 1996). Researchers study social identity, identity groups, racial identity development, but it all has to do with differences (Cross, 1995; Ferdman and Gallegos, 2001; Nkomo and Cox, 1996). Depending on the context, differences are seen as precious, threatening, denied, valued, appreciated, or tolerated. But it is not differences that are the challenge, but what we do with them.

In this chapter two approaches to working with differences are described and their implications for organizational change explored. One approach to differences, which draws upon psychosocial theories of difference and functional themes of organizational change, underlies the work of most diversity professionals. This approach cannot address the complexity of social relations in today’s organizations. Consequently, our visions and ways of implementing diversity change efforts in organizations are limited. In order to more adequately address current social relations in organizations, I draw upon social constructivist theories and feminist and postcolonial writings to develop another approach to differences (Acker, 1992; Holvino, 2000a).

In this chapter, the characteristics of the current dominant approach to working with differences will be described. An explanation of the feminist-postcolonial approach, which integrates race, ethnicity, class and gender into our analyses of organizations, will then be provided. This examines the organizational dynamics of differences “differently.” Finally, suggestions are made for how human resource, diversity professionals, and managers can use this new perspective on differences to guide organizational change.

The current approach to understanding social differences

The current approach to differences, which draws from psychological and sociological theories of human nature (Billig, 1999), has the following characteristics:

First, it treats differences as *essential* and *inescapable*, because they are considered to derive from the body and/or the psyche. For example, gender (or race) is considered to be the ultimate “*irreducible*” difference (White, 1987).

Everyday encounters with difference

Ever since my very early life in San Juan, when the kindergarten teacher wanted to flunk me because I did not know enough English, I’ve been dealing with differences. Spanish is my first language, so even to my little girl’s mind it seemed a bit unreasonable to demand that I know English at the age of five.

Just a week ago, my partner went to give a talk about our business at our town’s Rotary Club. Chatting with people beforehand, he mentioned to a member that his partner’s name was Evangelina Holvino. To his surprise, the woman responded to this bit of information, without a hint of self-consciousness, “Oh, I am glad she was not the one who came to talk about your firm!” Many years later I’m still dealing with differences, and so is everybody else.

Loden and Rosener (1991) exemplify this approach by differentiating between “primary differences” - age, sexual orientation, physical abilities, gender, ethnicity, and race - and secondary differences like religious beliefs, military experience, marital status, income, work background, education, and others (p. 20). Primary differences are seen as the most important type of difference, because persons are born into them and cannot change them at will; differences are innate and unchangeable. Secondary differences are “less important” because they are mutable and able to be changed by circumstances or choice. In this model for example, class is a secondary difference because it is amenable to change. But what this model does not consider is that despite the rhetoric of class mobility, the best predictor of one’s socioeconomic class is one’s parents’ class, suggesting that class may be partly as pre-determined by ones’ family as differences such as race are seen to be determined by ones parents’ genes.

Second, differences are seen as *isolated* aspects, independent variables, separate from each other. They are studied independently and connected to each other in an additive fashion. Because of this approach to differences the experience of women of color in particular is always misrepresented. For example: Are they women? Or Latinas? Or professionals? Or lesbians? Clearly, it is not sufficient to consider only one of these aspects of a person’s complex identity. So, while isolating dimensions of difference and social categories may be a good approach for the purposes of traditional scientific research, it is not the most effective manner to describe an organizational reality, or to design and implement change interventions.

Consider the complex interaction of racism and sexism expressed by Antonia Hernandez, president of MALDEF (the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund):

My experiences with racism and sexism have been, at times, amusing. Once I was refused entry to the lawyers' seating section in court because I was “too young and too pretty.” What the white male bailiff meant, of course, was that I was Mexican. Some might conclude that the bailiff's comment was more sexist than racist, but as a woman of color, I cannot separate my gender from my ethnicity. I cannot report that the comment was less hurtful because it was directed at me as a woman rather than me as a Latina. The result was the same (1994:257).

Thirdly, the current dominant approach treats differences as if differences were *fixed* and *ahistorical*. From this perspective, gender and racial differences are believed to be universal and constant through time. Race means the same in the United States, China, and Latin America, and what we know about other differences like gender or age applies in all contexts and remains true through time. But even in the United States, during the last three centuries race has not meant the same and racial categories have shifted for specific racial-ethnic groups (Omi and Winant, 1986).

Implications of using the current approach to differences

One of the problems with the current psychosocial-based approach to differences is that it leads to the dilemma that Scott (1988) has aptly named the “equality versus differences conundrum.” In other words, if we are truly different, then, no equality is really possible. But, if we are basically and universally the same, differences are ultimately superficial and unimportant; deep inside we are all human and social differences are basically irrelevant. The dilemma plays out in training programs in the dialogue between those who affirm, “You’ll never be able to understand my experience,” and those who affirm, “Let’s focus on similarities, all these talk about differences just makes it so.” Neither position helps engage in a dialogue about differences that leads to understanding and change.

A feminist postcolonial approach to differences: An alternative

While many scholars and practitioners refer to “all kinds of dimensions” when they use the term “differences” – dimensions such as function, race, gender, demographics, tenure, age, sexual orientation, cognitive style, occupation, education, family status, culture, ethnicity – as an organizational consultant and educator I am particularly interested in exploring those differences that derive from one’s membership in and identification with particular social groups. Differences like class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation shape one’s social identity at the same time that they form the basis for specific social categorizations of groups of people (Nkomo and Cox, 1996). These categorizations and identities, in turn, impact who we are, how others see us and what they expect of us, and the access and opportunities we have (or not) in organizations. In other words, it is these differences that are deeply tied to systems of inequality.

A feminist postcolonial approach to differences, which draws more from feminist theories and literary, cultural and political studies, works under a different set of premises (Calás and Smircich, 1996; Holvino, 1993).

First, social differences are seen as *relational*. They depend on the formulation of more than one individual and the existence of an “other” without which the first would not make sense. For example, male only exists in relation to female from which it can be differentiated. Thus, there is not a female or a male “gender,” but a relation between men and women, which is constructed in terms of a binary opposition between the masculine and the feminine sexes. Gender is the term that refers to this particular relational arrangement that may vary according to the cultural context. From anthropological research in other cultures, one could envision four sets of gender relations: children, females of reproductive age, males of reproductive age, and elders (Gailey, 1987).

In a poignant description of these set of relations as they apply to race in the United States Toni Morrison writes,

Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny. (1992:52)

Second, differences are seen as *socially constructed*. They reflect the meanings attributed to specific dimensions of human differences that have been signaled as important in a given society. Thus, gender is not an intrinsic characteristic of men and women based on their physical, psychic or socialized attributes, but gender is the meaning attributed to those “differences.” These meanings have changed over time and are constantly contested and transformed by academic disciplines, social movements, the

On the fluidity of racial identity

I will never forget how in 1983 a few children in Kano, a northern city in Nigeria where I was working, helped me understand the instability of the category race. I had lived in the U.S. for a few years after moving from Puerto Rico, and not being white, nor black, I had painfully learned about race relations in this country and its infamous “one-drop rule.” (The rule that if you have “one drop” of anything else but white [blood, I guess] you are Black, “less,” “other,” “breed,” “mulatto,” “subordinate”). But, this is a learning about race that is not universal. In the ancient empires of Africa and many countries in Latin America, “one drop” made you “free” instead of a slave.)

As I walked, the children shouted, “Bature, Bature!” with a mixture of laughter and who knows what else. When I returned to my hotel, I asked, “What does ‘Bature’ mean?” Much to my surprise, my Nigerian colleague answered, “Bature means ‘white’.” After years in the U.S. learning that my racial identity was brown, or black, or Latino, or mixed—anything but white—to those children, in the northern part of Nigeria, I was, once again, white. (“White” was the way I was categorized and learned to see myself in the Puerto Rico I grew up in, where there has been much racial mixing and everyone is assumed to have some Black ancestry.) Nothing biological or fixed about race, these children proclaimed!

state, the media, in everyday interactions, and of course, in organizations.

The differences that are meaningful in any particular moment and society are shaped through time and history and are culture specific. For example, there was a time when Irish immigrants in the United States were considered “nonwhite” (Ignatiev, 1995). Before the 19th century there was no category of “homosexual” and before the last two decades “gay rights” did not exist. Today, after enormous political struggles, civil unions between gays and lesbians, which give them the legal benefits of heterosexual marriages, are legal in the state of Vermont; a set of rights still denied to gays and lesbians in the rest of the USA.

Third, social differences also “construct” who we are and are important elements of our *subjective identity* (Calás and Smircich, 1992). There is not an essential (un-gendered or un-raced) identity that all humans possess, which is then “tarnished” by gender stereotypes as we grow up and become “aware.” For example, girls know themselves to be “female” by the age of four.

Instead, subjectivity, how we think of ourselves as social beings, is shaped by gendered beliefs and structures, which are inseparable from our self-identity. Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales, in a call and response mother-daughter dialogue, write about a complex subjectivity shaped by race, gender, ethnicity, language, and nationality, in opposition to uni-dimensional notions of identity:

I am what I am.

A child of the Americas.

A light-skinned mestiza of the Caribbean.

A child of many diaspora, born into this continent at the crossroads.

I am Puerto Rican. I am U.S. American.

I am New York Manhattan and the Bronx.

A mountain-born, country-bred, homegrown jibara child,

up from the shtetl, a California Puerto Rican Jew. (1986: 212)

Fourth, differences *signify relations of power*. In our culture, gender reflects the social organization of the relation between the sexes whereas the male is privileged (one-up, desired, better) and women are subordinated (one-down, less, inferior). This privileging process involves both the material – women earn 74 cents compared to a man’s dollar – and the symbolic – the color of girls is pink and the color of boys is blue.

When the difference is about class, managers are privileged and workers are not. Latina workers are painfully aware of how power and social differences interact, as the following quote illustrates:

The boss tells us not to bring our ‘women’s problems’ with us to work if we want to be treated equal. What does he mean by that? I am working here because of my ‘women’s problems’—because I am a woman. Working here creates my ‘women’s problems.’ I need this job because I am a woman and have children to feed. And I’ll probably get fired because I am a woman and need to spend more time with my children. I am only one person—and I bring my whole self to work with me. So what does he mean, don’t bring my ‘women’s problem’ here? (Hosfeld, 1990:168-9)

Lastly, differences *intersect with other social processes* like class, race, and ethnicity. They are interdependent or interactive, not “independent variables” which can be understood in isolation of other social differences. For example, while stereotypes of a competent white woman manager are that she is feminine, bright, and driven (Morrison, et al., 1987), Black women managers are perceived as tough, self-sufficient, and caretaking (Dumas, 1985). These different perceptions create different kinds of dilemmas for Black and white women in

leadership roles.

The attempt to disconnect gender from race and class, as if being a woman was a universal experience, has been questioned by women of color (Anzaldúa, 1990; Collins, 2000; Hooks, 1984; Hurtado, 1996). They see it as a power move by white affluent feminists to render invisible the situation of women of color and the way in which the experience of being woman is shaped differently by race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation.

Bell and Nkomo (1992), two African American scholars, have developed a model of social identity that stresses the interrelatedness of social differences by representing race, gender, class and ethnicity as a set of four overlapping circles. For them, identity is at the point where the four circles intersect. But more than intersecting circles, social identity is constructed by a large number of co-existing identity-forming systems in interaction and transaction with each other. The view that social identity is the sum of parts of identities such as race, gender, and class is too simplistic. It misses the dynamic nature of identity formations and manifestations through the human life cycle.

In summary, the model of differences I advocate understands differences to be: (1) *social* (a social relation); (2) signifying *relations of power* (where one aspect of a dichotomy has been privileged); (3) *interactive* with other processes; (4) shaping our *subjective identity*; and (5) useful *categories of analysis*, *historical*, *changing*, and *specific*, not fixed and universal.

Implications of using the feminist postcolonial approach to differences

The feminist postcolonial approach may be more appropriate to help us expand our understanding of organizational dynamics and difference. For example, research on “the glass ceiling” has been an important way of addressing the status of woman in organizations. Women of color, on the other hand, have talked of their ceiling been one of concrete, rather than glass (Catalyst, 1999).

However, research on the glass ceiling for Latino/as² suggests that the “glass ceiling” is a very limited metaphor for explaining the situation of Latinos in organizations (Melendez, et al., 1994). Why? One of the key findings was that changes in the labor market and the erosion of traditional sources of organizational advancement like internal job ladders are limiting Latinos’ “progress” in organizations. While many of the well-known reasons for the lack of advancement which apply to other groups and which are internal to the organization also apply to Latinas, such as lack of mentoring, culturally-determined models of managerial success, and lack of access to informal networks, these only explain some, but not all of the reasons for Latino’s absence and lack of advancement in organizations.

One conclusion from the research is that since the majority of Latina workers are concentrated in the disappearing industries of agriculture and manufacturing, in the lower paid professions or trades, and at entry level jobs, it is less useful to address glass ceiling issues, which imply a managerial or supervisory level in a hierarchical organization, and it is more important to understand the impact of the changing economic and industrial climate on working-class Latinos. In other words, the glass ceiling is revealed as a problem of the middle and affluent classes; what most Latinas need in order to be able to improve their economic position is help in the “pre-organization,” for example, educational opportunities and on-the-job training. Their advancement is not so much dependent on the organization itself, but on its environment, which determines what kind of entry opportunities will be available to them in the job market.

The glass ceiling research on Latinos illustrates how a more nuanced approach that considers race, ethnicity, gender, and class with a more complex, feminist postcolonial perspective can generate new insights about differences in organizations. It also helps reveal prior limitations in taken for granted change practices like the glass ceiling, practices which are very much based on current psychosocial approaches to differences.

Using the feminist postcolonial approach as a guide to organizational change

Managers and human resource and diversity professionals need to be aware of how differences are sustained in a variety of ways that relate to and reinforce each other in systemic patterns. One strategy to heighten consciousness of this complexity is to break down the different *levels* and *processes* by which differences and inequality are created and maintained. This makes possible an analysis of differences that goes

beyond current dominant approaches and expands choices for designing organizational change interventions.

Levels of system in which differences and inequality occur

One can examine four different levels of system to understand how differences play out in organizations: the individual, the group, the organizational, and the societal levels (Kirkham, 1996; Wells, 1990). In order to understand and intervene effectively to address issues of differences in organizations, an analysis and a balance of interventions at all different levels is needed.

The *individual level* of analysis focuses on the internal dynamics of individuals - their feelings, behaviors, and conceptual frameworks - which support and challenge social differences. For example, theories of socialization that explain how individuals become prejudiced and theories of internalized oppression that explain how people of color contribute to their own oppression are good examples of theories of difference at the individual level.

Typical organization change interventions that address the individual level are coaching and awareness diversity training. The focus on the individual level is a strength of the current psychosocial approach to differences. But if one analyzes and intervenes only at the individual level, the perspective is limited to working one-on-one, missing the larger context in which individuals are embedded, as if individuals existed in a vacuum.

The *group level* of analysis focuses on the power of the group, not just the individuals, to shape behaviors, thoughts and feelings. For example, theories of culture and group identity that explain how group beliefs, norms and interaction patterns shape the behavior of its members are a good example of theories of differences at the group level.

Examples of organizational interventions that focus at the group level are intergroup events and employee support networks. Both types of interventions can generate a great amount of resistance because their focus at the level of the group is contrary to the individualistic ethos of the Euro-American culture in the United States (Alderfer, et al., 1980; Scully and Creed, 1999).

The *organizational level* of analysis focuses on the system-wide processes and structures that shape how differences and inequality are viewed, addressed, reinforced and challenged. Models of multicultural organizational development that explain how organizations manage the incorporation of those who are different than members of the dominant group are a good example of this level of analysis (Chesler, 1994; Jackson and Hardiman, 1994; Jackson and Holvino, 1988; Miller and Katz, 1995).

Examples of organizational interventions at this level are system-wide diversity diagnosis and analysis of discriminatory policies and structures. The limitation of working only at this level is that it does not acknowledge the open system nature of organizations whereas the environment is constantly influencing and influenced by the internal workings of organizations. Thus, there is also a need to look at a next level of analysis; the societal.

The *societal level* of analysis focuses on the institutional influences and the societal processes, symbols, and structures which support and challenge social differences and inequality. For example, the limited portrayal of women, people of color, and working class people in the media is a powerful way in which negative images and beliefs about different groups are shaped. Organizational interventions that address this level of analysis include socially responsible investment, community campus recruitment, and strategic planning processes like the future search conference, which involve community stakeholders in shaping the direction of an organization. Interventions at the societal level are usually perceived to be risky and difficult, thus, most diversity practitioners return to individual levels of analysis in order to feel less anxious about the many forces that need to be considered in the larger context in which organizations are embedded.

But analyzing and intervening at different levels of system is not enough. One must also analyze and intervene in the social processes that create and sustain differences and inequalities in the first place.

Social processes that construct and sustain differences and inequality

Differences are created and sustained through various social processes. Understanding these different processes – symbolic- discursive, structural, and interactive - is also an important task in understanding the interlocking nature of systems of difference and inequality.

Symbolic and discursive processes refer to the ways images, thoughts, and symbols create and maintain (or not) the meaning of differences in an organization. Ideas, mental models, frameworks, norms, and assumptions shape the way we see and behave in the world of work. They get translated into organizational symbols, artifacts and language that reveal, at the same time that they maintain, current arrangements of difference (Weick and Westley, 1996).

Class symbols at work

Class symbols are constructed in many ways and forms in organizations. These symbols, in turn, shape identities and subjectivities that get enacted in daily organizational interactions. In an insurance company I visited, the claims agents worked on the sixth floor of a big gray building. The floor was divided into cubicles, each woman assigned to a small, cramped area. A big monitor located in the middle of the floor flashed the number of calls waiting to be answered. In one corner of the floor was the supervisor's "office," a small space with a metal desk, a couple of chairs, and a few family pictures.

I was then taken to meet the vice president of human resources of the company. We walked a couple of yards to a building with white and black marble floors. A huge chandelier, a wooden staircase, and a bronze sculpture converged in the middle of a magnificent entrance. I was led to a spacious office where an assistant courteously asked me to wait. While I waited I peeked into the VP's office and marveled at the exquisite décor: a large and elaborate mahogany desk with a matching set of period chairs, pink and olive green walls, and soft light illuminating the original paintings. When we met, I could not help but contrast the classic dark wool suit and silk blouse of this well-dressed managerial woman with the pants and casual sweaters of the agents working in the other building. The morning had provided me a tour of the symbols of class in that organization.

How often does this VP visit the agents' cubicles? How many of the agents have been invited to the VP's office? Symbols of class like office space, decoration, dress, and assigned parking spaces forge identities that support class divisions. Managers and workers, even when they are all women, become estranged from each other, less knowledgeable of what each one does, disconnected by their very different work-styles, and less able to communicate and work towards a common goal across these class differences. (Holvino, 2000b)

Structural processes refer to the formal positions and systems that guide and control the work of the organization. Directly or indirectly, organizational structures and systems embody the status of differences in an organization. A classic example of how differences show up in structure is when you observe how an organizational hierarchy is populated in the top positions by white men, in the middle positions by white women, and in the bottom positions by women and men of color.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's research on women in organizations is an example of the importance of structure in shaping the behavior of individuals and the culture of an organization on the matter of gender differences (1977). Kanter demonstrated how an individual's position in the organizational hierarchy determined the behaviors of power and powerlessness observed in men and women respectively in organizations. She documented four stereotypical roles taken or given to the only "token" woman in organizations where the majority of workers are men: "iron maid," "seductress," "mascot," and "mother," none of which supported women being seen as competent and able to take leadership roles in the organization. In organizations where there was more balance between the numbers of men and women, these dynamics were not observed. What is important to understand is that the stereotypical roles assigned to many women in organizations are not intrinsic to them, but reflect a dynamic of structural dominance in which women, because of their relative low numbers come to be seen and behave in these structurally shaped ways. That is why numbers matter in organizations.

Enacting differences in daily interactions

When people ask me who am I, there are many ways in which I can answer. I am an exile, a woman of color, an immigrant/emigrant, a Puerto Rican, a Latina, I'm Hispanic, mestiza, non-white-non-black, "other." I am boricua. What's in a name? ... Sometimes, I can feel the impatience when someone asks me, "and how do you want to be called, Latino or Hispanic," as if those were my only options. When it matters, I engage in a long explanation. Sometimes I answer, Puerto Rican. Other times—if I'm in the East or New Mexico—I answer Hispanic. If I'm in the Southwest, I answer Latina. Or, "Where are you from?" is quite a difficult question to answer. "Well..." I mumble, "originally from Puerto Rico. But now I live in Vermont." A Puerto Rican in Vermont, I can hear the question in their minds. When I start by answering that I live in Vermont, they quickly clarify, "But, no, really, where are you from?" meaning, but not daring to ask, Where is your accent from?

Interactional processes refer to patterns of behavior and interactions between individuals, and among and between work groups that enact and sustain differences in every day organizational life. These behaviors include comments, interpersonal encounters, humor and bantering and other interactions which whether subtle, intentional or not, have the effect of creating a hostile or undermining climate for some and a supportive and favorable climate for others. These behaviors have been called "micro-inequities" because they support invisibility, exclusion, and differential treatment towards people in everyday practices such as feedback, delegation of tasks, peer support, and inclusion in informal social networks (Essed, 1990; Ragins, 1995).

Attending to the multiple levels of system and the various complex social processes by which differences are created and sustained is not a matter of either-or, but both/and. For example, the subject created through societal level, media portrayals of people of color is individual *and* collective. In the absence of real experiences with people of color, managers and workers in organizations fill the void in their personal experience with those media stereotypes. The stereotypes in turn, whether consciously or not, are translated into attitudes, interactions, language, and symbols about people of color that permeate all the way through the individual, the group, and the organizational levels.

Understanding and working with these different levels and processes locates each of us in a complex web of social relations, where we are both oppressed and oppressor, agents of change and agents of the status quo, victims and victimizers, hopeful and fearful of differences. With no simple solutions or moral high grounds we must be willing to engage in a constant process of inquiry, learning, and change.

Final thoughts

In the role of manager, what you pay attention to and how you interpret the differences you encounter reveals your theories of difference in action. For many years, in order to improve the status of women in organizations, managers were trained to ask “How do the differences between men and women manifest themselves in particular behaviors in organizations?” Deborah Tannen’s research on the differences between men and women’s communication styles is an example of this type of approach (Tannen, 1995). Diversity consultants would then design courses to help women managers change their communication style and speak “more like a man.”

The feminist postcolonial question is more like, “How does the way work is organized influence how men and women behave in organizations and what are the limitations and privileges our organization is creating for women and men of different social groups?”

Research at the Simmons School of Management’s Center for Gender in Organizations is an example of the second type of question. In their work, everyday practices woven into the fabric of the organization are identified and examined for their potential to disadvantage particular groups. Change experiments are then designed to alter those taken-for-granted practices embedded in the structure, interactions and organizational culture. And the successful experiments that contribute to justice and effectiveness are then institutionalized (Kolb, et al., 1998; Merrill-Sands, et al., 1999; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000).

In looking towards the future, we need theories of difference that help us change the discourse on differences and change that dominates organizations today. From a discourse where differences are seen as biological, isolated from one another and isolating us from others, to a discourse that reflects the complex dynamics of social differences and social relations in organizations. A feminist postcolonial approach that seeks to understand and advocate for radical change at the various levels and through the different processes that create and sustain differences and inequality is a useful one.

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Endnotes

¹ In M. Lamont and M. Fournier, *Cultivating differences: Symbolic boundaries and the making of inequality*, p. 1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

² Like many others, I prefer the term “Latino” to “Hispanic,” but use both terms to acknowledge the contested nature of the terms and to recognize the preference for the term “Hispanic” in some geographical areas of the United States. I prefer “Latino” because it represents more accurately the U.S. social, political, and cultural phenomena of racialization of a diverse group of people during the last century, and it highlights a mixed-racial composition that recognizes the indigenous and black people of America in our ancestry—not just the white Spanish ancestry. I also alternate between using “Latino,” which indicates male, and “Latina,” which indicates female, in order to address the gendered nature of the Spanish language.