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THE POLITICAL REALITIES OF RIO GRANDE VALLEY WOMEN

**A Thesis
by
LINDA BUXTON**

**Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

May 1997

Major Subject: Speech Communication

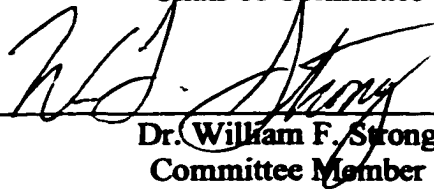
THE POLITICAL REALITIES OF RIO GRANDE VALLEY WOMEN

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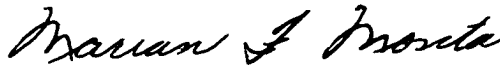
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Buxton, Linda, The Political Realities of Rio Grande Valley Women. Master of Arts (MA), May, 1997, 103 pp., references, 42 titles.

The inclusion of minority women in literature on electoral politics is scarce. Although they do exist in this realm, officially and unofficially, their influence has not been a popular topic of study. This study attempts to gain insight into the meaning that politically-active Mexican American women attach to their involvement in politics. The rhetorical criticism approach of fantasy theme analysis has been chosen as the framework for this thesis, which is linked to the general communication theory of symbolic convergence. Responses from 24 in-depth interviews with Mexican American women of Hidalgo County in south Texas were analyzed for common themes indicating the presence of symbolic convergence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research piece would not have been possible without the willingness of the participants to cooperate. With deep gratitude and appreciation, I thank the women of Hidalgo County, Texas, who agreed to be interviewed and graciously gave of their time and of themselves. I found the interviews to be highly rewarding. The women had plenty to say about politics and their observations and their experiences were as unique as the women themselves.

I heartily thank my thesis committee for their patience and nurturing. The committee was an understanding group, and their encouragement has been invaluable. Their kindness and caring towards students and the community set an example for all, especially those of us who aspire to be teachers and future role models.

With deep appreciation I acknowledge the Valley natives who willingly shared information and suggested potential participants. Fragments of information which would not have otherwise been included came together like puzzle pieces. Due to the kind generosity of local citizens, my thesis was able to be more fully developed.

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OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF RESEARCH TERMS

Chicanas: “(R)ooted in the Chicano movement of the 1960s...a political, ideological term describing a group of people (women) with shared cultural characteristics and shared political interpretations of their experiences,” (Blea, 1992, p. xi)

Chicano: “A symbol of resistance as well as a demand for self-determination,” (Cotera, 1976, p. 3).

Hispanic: A person of Indo-Spanish origin (Cotera, 1976, p. 2).

Latinas: Women who are “Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Central and South Americans, Mexican Americans, and Cubans,” (Hardy-Fanta, 1992, p. 40).

Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas: The southern tip of Texas including the counties of Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy, also known as the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), and The Valley.

Mexican American: A person of Mexican descent living in the United States and more than likely bilingual in Spanish and English.

Personal (private) politics: “(A) politics tied to individual, family, friendship networks and community relationships,” (Hardy-Fanta, 1992, p. 52).

Personal (private) sphere: “(T)he level of activity is more spontaneous, negotiated interpersonally,” (Rieke & Sillars, 1993, p. 27).

Politics: “(O)rganizational membership, voting rates in elections, and attitudes about political participation,” (Hardy-Fanta, 1994, p. 11).

Public politics: “(A)ppointed or elected positions,” (Hardy-Fanta, 1992, p. 46).

Public sphere: “(P)eople who seek participation in public debate and are recognized by the relevant decision makers,” (Rieke & Sillars, 1993, p. 27).

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

There are many more women involved in politics than is noted by the number of elected female officials. These women may not be known to the general public because they may never serve as elected officials, yet they have influence in the public sphere through the private sphere. Women who have moved from the private sphere to the public sphere of politics have done so through their connections in the private sphere. Whether or not a woman is successful in her bid for public office, her very courage in stepping into the public arena inspires other women to become candidates in electoral politics.

In the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas (The Valley), Mexican American women serving as elected public officials are an even greater phenomenon due to the strongly-held cultural expectations of a woman's role being domestic and subservient. Traditionally, women have been more likely to exert political influence in the private sphere, and even though they may receive very little public recognition, their contributions to the political empowerment of Mexican Americans are invaluable. The effects of their ability to mobilize Mexican American voters have far-reaching consequences at election time. Mexican American women may be a minority within a

minority, however, with 84.7 percent of The Valley population being Hispanic (The Rio Grande Valley Partnership, 1997, p. 9), these women wield power and influence within the family, the community, and in the political arena.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Mexican American women perceive their roles in politics, the scope and use of power and influence, and the effects of their influence in the public sphere. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge of women's perceptions of power and influence in public politics and more importantly, Mexican American women's deployment of power and influence in public politics.

Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

1. To explore how Mexican American women perceive their roles as political actors, both in the public and private spheres.

RQ1 Do Mexican American women politicians in the public sphere evolve from the private sphere?

2. To explore the motivating factors of Mexican American women seeking public office.

RQ2 Do Mexican American women's reasons for becoming involved in politics reveal symbolic convergence on virtues and communality?

3. To determine the range of contributions of Mexican American women in political activities.

RQ3 Are the number of politically-active Mexican American women not accurately reflected in electoral politics?

4. To explore the obstacles and challenges faced by Mexican American women in politics.

RQ4 As a minority within a minority, do Mexican American women have additional challenges associated with race, class, gender, and culture?

5. To investigate whether or not there are re-occurring themes in the political discourse of Mexican American women.

RQ5 Do Mexican American women exemplify the five characteristics of feminine style in political discourse?

6. To offer some predictions about the future of Mexican American women's involvement in politics.

RQ6 In the future will there be more Mexican American women involved in politics, particularly in political appointments and electoral politics.

Significance of the Study

Historically, Mexican Americans have been a marginalized group. However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hidalgo County of The Valley is approximately 85 percent Mexican American in population (1994; Duncan & Lawrence, 1995, p. 1287). With an official population of 420,955 in 1992, Hidalgo County has the seventh largest county population in Texas (County & City Data Book, 1994). However, the high Hispanic population in south Texas is not indicative of the total Texas Hispanic population of 26 percent (Duncan & Lawrence, 1995, p. 1241).

With a south Texas Hispanic population of more than three times that of the whole state of Texas, the disparity may raise one's curiosity. Before this land belonged to Texas or the United States, several generations of Mexicans knew The Valley as their homeland. After the United States-Mexico border was finally established in its present-day form, the Mexicans living on the north side of The Rio Grande River, or *El Rio Bravo*, were suddenly "Americans" and their family members just across the river remained Mexicans.

In *Troublesome Border* Oscar Martinez writes, "Mexicans in the annexed territories were free from the neglectful and often oppressive control of Mexico City, but in the new American social order they had become at best inconsequential bystanders and at worst colonial subjects in their own land," (1988, p. 84). The new political boundary did not have significance as a social boundary and only served to reinforce the strong ties to Mexico in language, customs, food, and traditional cultural values. Through their experiences with oppression and disenfranchisement Mexican Americans have learned that in order to improve their political and socioeconomic status, they must work within the political system. Getting involved in politics was and is the key to a better life for the majority population in The Valley.

The Rio Grande Valley is experiencing rapid growth which brings opportunity for many. However, the majority population as a whole may not fare as well by comparison. The Valley's economic base is diverse consisting of agriculture, labor-intensive industry, and tourism (Rio Grande Valley Partnership, 1997, p. 31). In 1990 the largest percentage of the workforce, 25.7 percent, were employed in wholesale and retail trade (County & City Data Book, 1994). The 1991 unemployment rate in Hidalgo County was 17.6

percent (County & City Data Book, 1994). By January of 1997, although the civilian labor force had swelled by 50,000 workers, there was little change reflected in the more current unemployment rate of 17.4 percent (The Rio Grande Valley Partnership, 1997, p. 29). This figure is almost double that of the national Hispanic unemployment rate of 9.3 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, p. 51). According to *Congressional Quarterly's Politics in America 1996*, Hidalgo County is "the seventh-poorest county in Texas with more than 40 percent of residents living below the poverty level," and the median household income is \$17,500 to \$20,000 (1995, p. 1287).

Part of The Valley's labor force is dependent on agricultural jobs involving labor-intensive harvesting of fruits and vegetables. Included in this section of the labor force are migrant farm workers who not only harvest fruit and vegetable crops in The Valley, but also travel to northern states to harvest. Many migrant farm workers reside in *colonias* which typically lack some or all aspects of basic infrastructure such as water, sewer, electricity, indoor plumbing, paved roads or proper drainage. Hazardous working conditions involving chemicals coupled with substandard living conditions and very little voice in politics are only a few of the reasons leading the motivation for self-empowerment in the Mexican American population.

National Growth and Political Clout

Although government census figures indicate that percentage-wise the Asian population is the fastest growing, their numbers constitute only about one third of the faster-growing Hispanic population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, p. 20).

Comparable to the percentage of growth in the Asian population, those of Hispanic origin have experienced a net growth rate in the mid-thirties in the first half of this decade. In

1995, Mexican-descent Hispanics comprised over 65 percent of the estimated 27.5 million of Hispanic origin living in this country (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, p. 51).

Despite impressive growth in numbers, not all Hispanics of voting age are eligible to vote due to a lack of citizenship. This creates a dilemma for Hispanics in that they are unable to participate fully in the politics that affect their lives and their livelihoods.

Without citizenship, Hispanics lack voting power and therefore lack representation.

Obtaining citizenship can be quite a lengthy and involved process spanning several years.

Recent tightening of immigration policy witnessed countless numbers of resident aliens scrambling to complete Immigration and Naturalization Service applications for citizenship.

In the 1988 general elections, 52 percent of the more than nine million nonvoting Hispanics were noncitizens (Vigil, 1994, p. 82). While these numbers may appear to present a challenge to Hispanics' voting power, they do not reflect the number of politically-active Hispanics involved in civic affairs, or those who attend public hearings or work for political candidates. A lack of citizenship does not indicate a lack of speaking out. If government figures projecting population growth prove to be accurate, the number of eligible voters will increase as well, particularly in the incredibly large segment of the population who are too young to vote now.

The United States government projects that by 2010 one of every five residents will be Hispanic (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, p. 26). This means that if they continue to move towards self-empowerment through the political system, they will have a stronger voice politically and a larger share in the decision-making process on policy issues which affect their lives. In *The Hispanic American Almanac*, Congressman Bill

Richardson (D-NM) is quoted as saying, "National candidates and both major political parties are undertaking major campaigns to woo Hispanic American support. We are recognized as the nation's fastest growing minority group and are being courted as such. This attention will only increase our political strength," (Kanellos, 1993, p. 258). Presidential hopefuls for 2000 have already begun to court the Hispanic vote as noted in the summer of 1997 by the appearance of Vice President Al Gore and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt at a convention of the National Council of La Raza in Chicago (Shepard, 1997, p. 3A).

Hispanic Officeholders and Voting Patterns

During President Clinton's first term in office, his focus on diversity was reflected in his cabinet appointments of minority members, including San Antonio native Henry Cisneros as secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Unterbuerger, 1994, p. 166). He also appointed Federico Peña, born in Laredo, Texas, as secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation (Unterbuerger, 1994, p. 612).

President Clinton was not the first president to appoint a Hispanic to a cabinet-level position. In 1986 Ronald Reagan appointed Lauro Cavazos, Ph.D., born on The King Ranch in south Texas (Unterbuerger, 1994, p. 148), as secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (Vigil, 1994, p. 83). When George Bush took office, he added New Mexico native Manuel Luján as secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior (Vigil, 1994, p. 83).

The growing political clout of Hispanics is also reflected in the profiles of public officials from the halls of Congress in Washington, D.C., to school boards in Hidalgo County, Texas. From 1985 to 1994, the number of Hispanics serving as public officials has swelled 42 percent to 5,459 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, p. 284). Of the 36

states reporting Hispanic office holders, Texas leads with 2,215. Breaking that number down, figures show that the majority hold county and municipal offices, 1,022; followed by education and school board positions, 763; judicial and law enforcement, 389; and finally state executives and legislators, 41, which includes U.S. representatives (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, p. 284). A contributing factor in Texas leading other states by a large margin in Hispanic office holders is that Texas has 254 counties and more than 12,000 municipal governments as compared to only 58 counties and 500 municipalities in California (Padilla, 1994, p. 99). In The Valley there are 25 school districts (Guide to Rio Grande Valley, 1997, p. 56) and 38 municipalities (Regional Profile, no page number).

As Hispanic men gain political clout, the women are not far behind. Although Hispanic women are considered a double minority, according to *The Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in The United States*, the ratio of public office holders when compared to Hispanic men in office is similar to the national population of women office holders which is about one in five (Padilla, 1994, p. 100). In addition, more Hispanic women vote than Hispanic men (Padilla, 1994, p. 100). For example, exit polls conducted by the Southwest Voter Research Institute in Texas on November 8th, 1987, indicated Mexican American female voters outnumbered male voters, 53 percent to 47 percent (Padilla, 1994, p. 89). This number exceeds national figures. Although women significantly outnumber men in voting age population, the gap narrows to within a few percentage points or less in numbers of voters registered and voting (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, p. 286). In Congressional District 15 which includes Hidalgo County, 52.8 percent of the female population is of voting age compared to only 47.2 percent of males

(*Congressional Quarterly's Congressional Districts in the 1990's*, 1993, p. 703). In addition, voters in Hidalgo County are likely to vote Democrat (Clements, 1997, p. 253). Noted as "a reliable vote-getting region for any Democrat," District 15 carried President Clinton in 1992 with 53 percent of the vote, the most votes for any non-urban district, (*Congressional Quarterly's Congressional Districts in the 1990's*, 1993, p. 726). For the November, 1996, general elections there were 199,246 registered voters in 94 precincts in Hidalgo County (Perez, 1997). As Mexican Americans make up the overwhelming majority of Hispanics in the United States, and specifically in south Texas, this study therefore postulates that the increasing political influence of Mexican American women is worthy of rhetorical study. Building data on Mexican American women in public politics will broaden the knowledge base on women involved in politics in general.

Limitations of the Study

The interviews were conducted with Mexican American women of Hidalgo County, Texas, which may limit the generalizability of this study due to the geographical uniqueness of the area and a multicultural influence. According to the *Congressional Quarterly's Congressional Districts in the 1990's*, Congressional District 15 has a large percentage of Hispanic population compared to other districts in the state or the nation (1993, p. 726). This may also have some impact on the limit of generalizability. However, since there is very little data available in this area of study, it is necessary to augment current studies.

Theoretical Model

As human beings, we have the capacity to use symbols to communicate with others. The more symbols we mutually share, the better the chances for successful

communication. Assigning meaning to symbols is arbitrary, and although we share symbols, the values attached to those symbols are highly individualistic. When a group of people attaches the same value to a symbol or cluster of symbols, e.g., The American Dream, *Si Se Puede*, or *Viva la Raza*, and these symbols motivate their thoughts and actions, symbolic convergence is apparent.

Considered a general communication theory, symbolic convergence provides a link between rhetorical studies and general communication studies and “applies to all human communication no matter the context,” (Bormann, Cragan & Shields, 1994, p. 275). Ernest Bormann has written extensively on the rhetorical criticism method known as fantasy theme analysis which employs the general theory of symbolic convergence. He is quick to explain that *fantasy* in rhetorical study does not mean that which lives in one’s imagination but is “the creative and imaginative shared interpretation of events that fulfills a group psychological or rhetorical need,” (Bormann, 1985, p. 130).

Bormann uses the term “chaining” to explain how symbolic convergence results from individuals connecting with others in the sharing of a rhetorical vision, or group fantasy. “For symbolic convergence theory, the dynamic is the process of sharing group fantasies,” (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 1994, p. 267). Shared fantasies do not occur in the present moment but are “coherent accounts of experience in the past or envisioned in the future that simplify and form the social reality of the participants,” (Bormann, 1985, p. 134). Bormann further believes that fantasy themes are subjective, providing a rhetorical vehicle for group members in the explanation of specific phenomenon and resulting in a common group consciousness (1985, p. 134).

Symbolic convergence theory provides a framework for fantasy theme analysis in rhetorical criticism. According to Bormann, a qualitative rhetorical study of fantasy theme progresses as follows:

The fantasy theme analyst begins by making a study of the communication practices of a group of people by means of qualitative and content analysis of messages to discover the fantasy themes, types, and rhetorical visions in the material...the critic then takes the shared fantasies and rhetorical visions discovered and documented by humanistic or social scientific means or both as the basis for a critical qualitative analysis (1993, p. 379).

As the researcher discovers shared fantasies and rhetorical visions, she or he also finds symbolic convergence.

In his articles, Bormann consistently explains each of the technical terms he uses to explain fantasy theme analysis. Group fantasy is “the result of sharing dramatizing messages,” (1985, p. 131). A fantasy theme is “the content of the dramatizing message that sparks the chain of reactions and feelings,” (Bormann, 1985, p. 131) and is “a single dramatic case,” (Bormann, 1985, p. 132). As distinguished from a fantasy theme, a fantasy type is “a general or stock scenario,” (Bormann, 1994, p. 279). To combine those two, a rhetorical vision is “a unified putting-together of the various themes and types that gives the participants a broader view of things...indexed by a key word, a slogan, or a label,” (Bormann, 1994, p. 281).

Fantasy theme analysis is one of the approaches in rhetorical criticism which is “based on a dramatic metaphor,” (Brock, Scott & Chesebro, 1990, p. 173), wherein scripts are composed, characters take shape, scenes are set, and roles are played out. Heroes and villains develop, not necessarily in human form but possibly as an abstract concept. In the case of politics, some rhetorical communities may regard a politician as a hero while in others she or he may be thought of as a villain (Bormann, 1985, p. 135).

The realm of politics provides endless examples of symbolic convergence. On the campaign trail when slogans are repeated and platform promises are being spewed forth, audiences may adopt a collective vision of a brighter future based on a candidate's ability to influence audience members to visualize the possibilities. As the message chains out, followers are moved to action and persuade others to support their candidate.

Within an election committee, the group fantasy is to create a rhetorical vision among constituents of their candidate being the best one for the position. Supporters of the candidate hope for enough symbolic convergence among voters to get their candidate elected.

Justification of Rhetorical Criticism Approach

In a quest for discovering the motivations of women to become involved in politics and compare accounts for similar themes, the fantasy theme approach to rhetorical criticism lends itself well to this study. As commonalities include past or present political involvement, gender and culture, the combination of these should reveal some degree of symbolic convergence in the findings. This study will attempt to ascertain the presence of fantasy themes and types culminating in rhetorical visions among the subjects interviewed.

Organization of the Study

The literature review in Chapter Two discusses the invisibility of women in political theory and the relevance of feminist theory in framing women's participation in politics, then continues with an exploratory communication theory arguing that a feminine style in women's political discourse is gaining legitimacy (Blankenship & Robson, 1995). The literature review also includes an assertion that women have

generally been omitted from studies in community politics as research data has been gleaned mostly from the male perspective. The applied research article in the literature review is a Boston-based study of Hispanic women's involvement in politics which discusses empowerment through self-determination.

Chapter Three entails the chosen methodology for this study as well as the research design, the extraction of data, the criteria for population selection, basis for question design on the interview guide, and data analysis. Chapter Four presents the research findings. The data derived from personal interviews with Mexican American women in Hidalgo County are summarized and analyzed. Chapter Five states the conclusions and recommendations from the study based on personal research findings and relevant literature. The conclusions reveal the implications and limitations of the research and suggestions for further study. The appendices contain the interview guide and a list of interview subjects.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The obtainable literature addressing the invisibility of women's roles in politics argues for the inclusion of politically-active women. These writers present argument for expansion of the definition of politics so that the contributions and voices of women who engage in political activities but who do not hold high-level public office are included, (Hardy-Fanta, 1994, 1992; Bookman & Morgan, 1988; Kelly & Boutilier, 1978; & Cotera, 1976). "The mere inclusion of women in the study of political behavior required a major social science breakthrough just as the inclusion of women in the voting population required a major societal breakthrough," (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 329).

Gender Bias in the Study of Politics

Carol Hardy-Fanta notes that in general women have been omitted from political science studies since these studies usually focus on white men (1994, p. 9). Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen add that while there have been studies on women's political experiences, they have been "focused unduly on white and middle-class women," (1988, p. 3). Studies that have been conducted on minority involvement in politics typically cover only male minority, such as blacks and Chicanos, according to Hardy-Fanta (1994, p. 10), which result in some women being categorized as a minority

within a minority. Bookman and Morgen agree that gender has not been adequately addressed in racial and ethnic minority research in political involvement. “This neglect has contributed to the development of theories of political action and consciousness that fail to deal with gender as a salient analytic concept and do not recognize how race, ethnicity and class specify women’s modes of resistance,” (1988, p. 3).

Exclusivity of Electoral Politics

Electoral politics is not an accurate indication of the number of politically-active women. There are many more women involved in politics than is reflected in electoral politics and for this reason, their influence and participation should be recognized. Women who are serving as elected or appointed officials are afforded more visibility but are still small in numbers. This leads to an imbalance of power in determining political agendas and their outcomes.

Bookman and Morgen believe the narrow definition of politics contributes to its exclusiveness:

“When we define politics narrowly, as activities in the electoral political arena, for example, we treat politics as a specialized activity of concern only to the few. This move effectively *depoliticizes politics*; it prevents many citizens from recognizing that their concerns could be represented on a larger political agenda and convinces them that ‘politics’ is an activity beyond their ken,” (1988, p. 298).

This results in apathy, frustration and a “resignation to their relative powerlessness,” (Bookman & Morgen, 1988, p. 298). Politically-active women are working to break the chains of apathy and powerlessness, to better their communities and the lives of their families, however, their numbers and the extent of their influence are unknown.

Women's Political Participation

When women get involved in politics, it is usually for different, and more personal, reasons than those that draw men into the political arena. Jane Blankenship and Deborah Robson have studied the “feminine style” of women’s political discourse and have arrived at the following conclusions of the characteristics of this style:

Political judgments are based on concrete, lived experience; higher value is placed on inclusivity and the relational nature of being; the purpose of public office is to ‘get things done’ and to empower others; policy formation is approached more holistically; and women’s issues become more salient, (1995, p. 359).

Furthermore, Blankenship and Robson claim the boundary between the private sphere and public sphere is shifting and is not as clearly defined as in the past which leads these researchers to conclude that major public issues are more likely to be re-prioritized (1995, p. 362). According to their findings, women perceive political power as “the ability to get things done,” (Blankenship & Robson, 1995, p. 361). This perception of power would indicate a desire for positive change rather than a self-serving political agenda.

Gender Role Constraints

According to Rita Mae Kelly and Mary Boutilier, role constraints in the private sphere present obstacles to women who desire to become involved in the public sphere of politics, (1978, pp. 9-10). Traditionally, women who wanted to become involved in politics were considered socially deviant and strongly discouraged from pursuing interests in the male-dominant public sphere. “Throughout all cultures the male has historically been the public being, the female the private, non-public being whose place is in the home,” (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 61). There is evidence that women’s political involvement is increasing whether it remains solely a part of her personal life or crosses

the threshold into the public arena. "To study the 'why' of women in nontraditional, formerly 'male' roles requires a look at the things that bring changes to society, rather than a concern for the past or the status quo," (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 332).

Closely echoing the findings of Blankenship and Robson, Kelly and Boutilier assert that the political roles of those who do get involved are likely to parallel familial roles of "selfless service," (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 60). Irene Blea writes, "Chicano women are also socialized to be communal, to place their own needs in conjunction with or second to the needs of the group," (1992, p. 149). This communality would favor the plausibility of women's politics evolving from the private sphere, in that, they are just as likely to be found engaging in political organizing around the kitchen table as in an agency office, (Bookman & Morgan, 1988, p. 11).

Personal Epistemology

Where Blankenship and Robson discuss women's political judgments being based on lived experience, Kelly and Boutilier refer to the "life-space" of a woman and define it as "the physical and social reality of an individual's day-to-day existence, objectively and as self-perceived," (1978, p. 52). Writing on women's motivation for political involvement, Kelly and Boutilier note, "The need theory of political efficacy assumes that politics becomes salient to a person to the extent that it is perceived to be relevant to that person's life-space," (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 63). This provides considerable evidence that women are more likely to become involved in politics where it intersects their personal lives and their communities. Hence political involvement in the public sphere evolves out of private sphere experiences and concerns.

Influence of Socialization on Political Participation

Kelly & Boutilier recognize that a husband and children have an impact on a woman's political career, however, they believe that her socialization process has more influence on her decision of whether or not to become involved in politics, (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 157). It is possible that a woman's socialization process may completely exclude the public sphere as an acceptable career option. "The major obstacle to participation is a sex-role ideology that requires women to be subordinate as well as supportive of their husbands," (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 157). Socialization practices within a culture largely dictate the extent of a woman's involvement in politics. "Ethnic groups with a religious and philosophical heritage stressing strongly the traditional family relationships will have the least political participation by females, regardless of the family structure," (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 192). Conversely, traditionally-bound women are more likely to have the opportunity to become active in politics "in cultures and subgroups that have experienced a loss of continuity and purity of ethnic and religious influences," (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 192). Here in the United States, a change in socialization patterns of ethnic groups is likely to occur when intersecting with the hegemonic Euro-American culture.

Influence of Race and Ethnicity on Political Activism

Not only does socialization play a major role in a woman's level of political activity but her race and ethnicity must also be considered. "An examination of ethnicity and race in this framework might lead to a major breakthrough in our knowledge of how ethnicity and political behavior are related," (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 332). The framework Kelly and Boutilier refer to is the development of activist ideology and the

definition, nature and scope of one's life-space, (1978, p. 332). As Latina/Chicana women know, "Political activity is clearly not un-natural for women," (Kelly & Boutilier, 1978, p. 333). Martha Cotera notes that political activism is nothing new for Chicanas and has been a way of life for them historically (1976, pp. 189-190), as they work to reverse subordination of the Chicano community and better their lives within the context of the whole community, (1976, p. 192). Anna Nieto-Gomez, writing in 1974, is quoted by Cotera as Nieto-Gomez discusses the exigis of Chicanas remaining loyal to the Chicano movement and not abandoning it for the Anglo-American feminist movement:

It is therefore the philosophy of the Femenistas that in order for a movement to truly fight for justice for all its people (both men and women), it must also, from the beginning, identify and fight the economic oppression delivered through sexism as well as through racism. It is the double responsibility for both Chicanas and Chicanos to become politicized to the economic implications of sexism-sexist racism; otherwise, the issues of employment, welfare, and education as they pertain to the Chicana are not known and therefore ignored and not resolved, (Cotera, 1976, p. 192).

It was more important to the Chicanas to further the Chicano cause and remain loyal to the issues of the political movement because those issues were more salient to the Chicanas, their loved ones, their communities, and future generations. The value placed on communality also had influence on the Chicanas' type of activism.

Impact of Race, Ethnicity and Gender

The political activity of Latina women is far more familiar to those in the private sphere than in the public sphere. The lack of recognition of involvement in the public sphere is not an accurate measure of participation. Irene Blea adds, "Indeed, struggle against oppressive forces has been a lifestyle for many Chicanas," (1992, p. 16).

Regarding the expansion of the definition of politics and how it impacts minority women, Bookman and Morgan assert, "It is no accident that the articles best illustrating the value

of reconceptualizing politics focus on women of color,” (1988, p. 11). They also believe that because women of color are more likely to suffer from triple oppression, they have become more creative and innovative in their approaches to organizing politically, (Bookman and Morgan, 1988, p. 11). In addition, Bookman and Morgan argue that working-class women’s political activities will remain obscure until the definition of politics is expanded “to include the everyday struggle to survive and to change power relations in our society,” (1988, p. 8). Blea echoes these sentiments of triple oppression when she writes of the repression of Chicanas:

Combined class, race (ethnicity), and gender biases inherent in the social and political systems underlie the political underrepresentation of Chicanas. This combination causes Chicanas to face special obstacles in penetrating public spheres of power dominated by Anglo and minority men. Chicanas share with other women male stereotypes, childbearing and -rearing responsibilities, and fewer economic resources, (1988, p. 71).

The many challenges of Chicanas in the private sphere as well as the public sphere only add to their creativity and ingenuity in their approach to politics.

Latina Women’s Involvement in Boston Politics

Latina women have been less visible in politics than women in general. However, as Carol Hardy-Fanta has discovered in her study of Latina women in politics in Boston, they are an indispensable force in mobilizing the Latino community to action in political issues which affect their personal lives. Hardy-Fanta echoes other writers in asserting that “there has been little research which includes an explicit goal of exploring Latina women and politics,” (1994, p. 8). This is due in part to other foci in Latina studies which address issues of labor, health and familial relationships, e.g., husband and children (Hardy-Fanta, 1994, p. 8). One of Hardy-Fanta’s interview subjects attributes political invisibility of the Latina to stereotypical male-dominated roles which assigns

community leadership to men holding public office (Hardy-Fanta, 1994, p. 9). However, Hardy-Fanta has discovered that, “Latina women are political actors and play crucial roles in Latino community mobilization,” (1994, p. 6). Holding an official title does not necessarily confer power or bestow leadership attributes.

Community Activism and Political Definition

As Hardy-Fanta’s research increased her awareness of wide-spread political involvement and key community activity by Latinas in Boston, she too was lead to challenge the definition of politics. She argues that its scope should include community politics, which allows for the validation of political activism at the community level, (1994, p. 13). Similar to other scholars, Hardy-Fanta believes the reason for Latinas’ intense involvement in participatory politics is to improve community life through local efforts in self-government, (1994, p. 13). Latina women serve as the “connectors” between local officials and community residents, (Hardy-Fanta, 1994, p. 12). “If politics is more than elections and public office—if we say that politics is about people joining together, collective efforts, better life conditions, or redistributive justice, the role of Latina women in mobilizing Latinos becomes more visible,” (Hardy-Fanta, 1994, p. 12).

Electoral Politics’ Interdependency With Participatory Politics

The public sphere interacts with the private sphere where it effects the personal lives of Latinas, Hardy-Fanta believes, and “if political mobilization is more likely to occur when interpersonal relationships are the basis for politics, rather than access to hierarchically determined positions, then how women view politics is an essential element in any struggle for a more participatory America,” (1994, p. 15). Here is where Hardy-Fanta’s argument closely aligns with Blankenship and Robson’s criteria for a

feminine style of discourse by observing the significant role interpersonal relationships play in political involvement. This further supports Hardy-Fanta's claim that "electoral politics are not in a hierarchical relationship with participatory politics, but form an inseparable thread, perhaps a continuum, one dependent on the interpersonal relationships of everyday life," (1994, p. 16).

The Politics of Empowerment

As connectors between community and local government, Boston Latinas work for the empowerment of the Latino population so that the quality of life may be improved for those who live and work in the community. Again, Hardy-Fanta's private-sphere politics argument intersects Blankenship and Robson's feminine style of politics through women's lived experiences (1995, p. 359). Empowerment makes change possible and gives voice to the people so that self-government can become a reality. Regarding gender differences in the perceptions of power and empowerment, Hardy-Fanta notes that for women, community empowerment is the goal for making change possible and politics is the vehicle for getting there (Hardy-Fanta, 1994, p. 18).

Challenges for Women In Electoral Politics

In 1991, an issue of *The Journal of State Government* featured essays from women serving in state-level public positions. The issue also included studies conducted on women involved in electoral politics. Editor Elaine S. Knapp addresses the disparity between the total population of women and the number of women serving as public officials. Statistics collected from the Center for the American Woman and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, confirmed the low numbers showing "less than 15 percent of municipal offices and less than 9 percent of county governing

board seats” are held by women (Knapp, 1991, p. 42). One of the challenges women face in running for public office is the frequency in which male incumbents are re-elected. However Knapp also believes that in order for more women to win elections, more women need to run for office (1991, p. 42). Other problems appearing to affect women’s rate of election were voter apathy, family priorities, and lack of political participation by younger women.

Catherine Baker Knoll, Pennsylvania State Treasurer, contributed to *The Journal of State Government* with a message centering on women in office being able to change the political agenda by bringing women’s issues to the forefront. She asserted that women’s issues affect everyone and specifically mentioned child care and wage equity. Her message to women holding political office was that they are in a position to help other women succeed where the office holders may have encountered obstacles based on gender. As Knoll stated, “It’s the duty of politicians, women in particular, to help those women too occupied with the immediate needs of putting food on the table to fight for a better life through politics,” (1991, p. 54). Knoll was instrumental in implementing a state home mortgage program benefitting low-income households.

The first woman elected to serve as Nevada Secretary of State and later as Nevada Attorney General, Frankie Sue Del Papa also illustrated how women in key positions are able to make changes that benefit other women. Del Papa related an incident where she was denied a scholarship for graduate school because of the prevailing ideology that women were not successful in law school. After she became a practicing attorney, Del Papa was able to change this policy along with other sexist policies as a member of a

university's board of regents. She makes an argument for women becoming involved in setting policy:

That's why I believe women really are needed in elective and appointed positions. They are needed to lend a different perspective and cultural viewpoint. My experience has taught me that a woman can make a difference and bring about positive change. Furthermore, public service is rewarding, (Del Papa, 1991, p. 55).

Del Papa encouraged women to become players in electoral politics, willing to take risks for the potential outcome of a better future for humanity. Reminding readers that "democracy is not a spectator sport," (Del Papa, 1991, p. 56), Del Papa urged women who are interested in being elected or appointed to office to have a working knowledge of the political process. She cautioned women to consider their health and their families' support before they begin a political campaign and the demands of public service. Del Papa added, "The strength of your own convictions can help sustain you," (Del Papa, 1991, p. 56).

Teola P. Hunter asserted that minority women are also changing agendas through those who have made the transition to the public sphere from the private sphere through their community involvement, making the "giant step from personal and family interest to community interest," (1991, p. 50). She wrote that minority women have always been more challenged in their quest for equality, even more so than minority men which makes it appropriate for them to step forward to assume positions of leadership (Hunter, 1991, p. 50). Hunter believes that in order for minority women to encourage diversity in politics, they must be active in women's networks as well as serve as leaders in their ethnic communities (1991, p. 50).

In order for women to rise to high positions in electoral politics, Hunter emphasized the women must first become active in local electoral politics because "this

is the pipeline through which the future state and national leaders usually flow,” (1991, p. 50). Hunter’s observations that women office holders, especially black women state representatives, are likely to have worked on a woman’s campaign before becoming candidates themselves (1991, p. 50) agrees with other findings on women crossing the threshold into public politics. Historically, the networks and relationships of minority women such as “family, education, business, community and supportive coalitions,” (Hunter, 1991, p. 50), have bolstered the courage of these political actors and fostered their vision.

Researcher Susan J. Carroll discussed results of studies conducted on women candidates in electoral politics. Her findings revealed that incumbents frequently get re-elected. For the women serving in elected positions, this would indicate that they are likely to win another term. However, since male incumbents are also likely to win re-election, it means “women’s gains are gradual and incremental,” (Carroll, 1991, p. 43). Women have a better chance of winning public office when the incumbent is not a candidate. Carroll predicted that in the 1990’s the trend of a gradual increase in numbers of women in elected office is likely to continue (1991, p. 43).

Carroll also found that women are equally qualified to serve in an elected capacity even though their political experience is likely to be different from their male counterparts. Men are more likely to have held an elected office before where women are likely to have been appointed to a position. In addition, women are more likely to become candidates after helping with someone else’s campaign or working for an elected official (Carroll, 1991, p. 43).

Women's networks and organizations are significant to women in politics, according to Carroll, providing them with "an important source of encouragement" and a "base of support for their campaigns," (1991, p. 44). It is common for women officeholders to belong to organizations such as the League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, National Organization for Women and the National Women's Political Caucus (Carroll, 1991, p. 44). In 1988, political action committees donated more than one million dollars to women political candidates (Carroll, 1991, p. 44).

Women's organizations are not the only mode of encouragement received by a woman interested in running for political office. Women who already serve in public office encourage others to get involved in politics. Also, the women in office were likely to have had a mentor or role model who was female. As previously mentioned, women's transition into electoral candidacy is more likely to occur after involvement with other women's campaigns. Additionally Carroll found that female public officials are more likely to recruit women as staff members (1991, p. 44).

The deciding factors in whether or not a woman becomes involved in public politics are most likely to occur in the private sphere, according to Carroll. A woman is more likely than a man to strongly consider the family in her decision to become a political candidate. Most women wait until their children are older before seeking office. Approval from the spouse is more crucial to a woman's political career than to a man's. Carroll's findings reveal that although female elected officials are more likely to be single than male public officeholders, the women's spouses are likely to be more

favorable to their being in politics (Carroll, 1991, p. 44). The male public officials though married were not as likely to have a highly supportive mate.

Carroll's findings revealed that women in elected office do influence public policy especially where women and children are concerned. Health care is an area of concern for women officials as well as women's rights and opportunities. Carroll notes, "regardless of whether the issue is foreign aid, the budget or the environment, women are more likely than men to consider the effect of the policy on the lives of women and children," (1991, p. 45). Women are more likely to take the initiative on policy concerning the issues that affect their gender the most, such as "child care, teen pregnancy and spouse abuse," (Carroll, 1991, p. 45).

A study was conducted in September of 1989 by two university professors comparing female commissioners to male commissioners in state government in Connecticut. The study examined several aspects of the commissioners' approaches to decision making and policy. While findings revealed both genders were highly educated with many holding graduate degrees, the results were not as similar when comparing age and marital status. The women were more likely to be older with half being at least 50 years old. All of the male commissioners in the study were married, however, only 59 percent of the women were married (Havens & Healy, 1991, p. 64).

Both male and female commissioners were concerned with women's issues. The issues specifically mentioned in the study included "child care, enforcement of sexual harassment laws, increases in Aid to Families with Dependent Children and reintroduction and passage of the ERA. Most support adult women's right to abortion," (Havens & Healy, 1991, p. 64). Regarding the family leave legislation, the male

commissioners were significantly more likely to believe it would be detrimental to businesses and state agencies.

As more women hold public offices, their presence influences perceptions of the decision-making process. More males than females believe that women's presence in the policy-setting process where women would be affected has some influence on the decision makers. In a similar regard, the men surveyed believe more so than the women surveyed that women's presence in meetings affects the conduct of managers. Another area studied was whether or not a woman's presence has an impact on the formal or informal setting of the meeting, e.g., the board room or the golf course. Women were more likely to believe it does than the men surveyed.

Not only do women executives influence the outcome of decisions affecting the female populace, they also shape the policy agenda for "child care, family and children's issues, equal employment policies and other work issues with special effect on women...welfare reform, consumer protection, privacy regulations for corrections and civil rights..." (Havens & Healy, 1991, p. 65). The participants in the study believed that government departments headed by women were more likely to consider the impact of policy decisions on female employees and those women the department served.

The inclusive style of women in decision making was also studied. Women executives preferred to include more subordinates in meetings with a purpose of reaching consensus on decisions, whereas the men in the study preferred smaller executive-level meetings where decisions were made later based on information exchanged in the meeting. According to the authors, "All of the male responses indicated that they would

inform staff of the final decision while nearly half of all the women's responses indicated that staff would be engaged in making the final decision," (Havens & Healy, 1991, p. 66).

Sexist attitudes, according to the female commissioners, continue to exist which cause the women to feel a "sense of isolation and vulnerability because of their visibility as women. All these perceptions led them to be cautious in freely using their talents as female leaders," (Havens & Healy, 1991, p. 67). The authors concluded that until more women are elected or appointed into high leadership positions, sexism will remain an issue for women serving as public officials.

Conclusion

The contributors to the issue of *The Journal of State Government* which was dedicated to women in politics reflected the status of women's involvement in electoral politics in the late 1980's. As the pool of women candidates for public office continues to grow, the likelihood of more women being elected is greater. It is important that they are qualified and that they understand well the workings of public office. Women running for public office are more likely to have a highly approving spouse or be single.

In addition studies done on women holding public office show that they bring change to the position in a number of areas including communication style, communication environment, and inclusivity. Once a woman is in office, the political agenda is likely to reflect the concerns of women. The decision-making process is likely to be more inclusive with women leaders. The presence of women affects the communication environment and the conduct of policy makers. Women in public office encourage other women to make the transition from private to public sphere. These "pioneers" have made the roadway smoother by changing policies that presented

obstacles to other women. The message that more women are needed in public office was prevalent. State and national leaders are likely to emerge from local political involvement.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY & DATA ANALYSIS

Research data: Responses to Questions

The availability of information on Mexican American women in politics in The Valley appears to be scarce. Therefore, there is a need to add to the body of knowledge in this area of research for those who desire to obtain qualitative data on how minority women attach meaning to their involvement in politics. This research project will be a qualitative study using a small sample but providing a wealth of soft data.

Finding Willing Subjects

During the initial stages of the research proposal, there was concern expressed that Hispanic subjects might not be comfortable answering questions posed by an Anglo researcher. From the first interview to the last, there did not seem to be a problem in this area. The women had plenty to say about being involved in politics and every interview was enjoyable. There was one woman who refused to become involved in the sample, even though she had been recommended by several, and stated preference for remaining behind the scenes. There were other women whose names continually surfaced and who had consented to interviews, however, after several attempts to coordinate schedules, ultimately they were unable to make time for the interview.

Personal Interviews

The initial interviews were the result of contacts made at a district meeting of the Hispanic Women's Network of Texas. The balance of the interviews were obtained by snowball sample. The attendees were made aware of the study and some of the local women volunteered information and gave suggestions regarding sample participants. The prospective participants were initially contacted by letter. Following that, they received a telephone call to set up an appointment for the interview. The interviews were conducted almost exclusively on site in order to make the interview session as convenient and time-efficient as possible for the respondent, and also so that she might feel more comfortable in the setting of her daily routine. The interview sessions revealed that although the participants have busy schedules, most considered the interview important enough to ask office staff to hold all calls. After the interview, each subject was asked to participate in a possible follow-up interview or clarification of information. The roster of interview subjects can be found in Appendix B.

At the conclusion of the interview, each participant was asked for the names of others they thought should be included in the sample. After the first few interviews, a list of potential interview subjects was assembled. The names that were mentioned by more than one participant were pursued for interviews. The interviews were in-depth with most lasting about an hour in length. The shortest interview lasted half an hour and the longest was one and a half hours. The interview guide was employed each time and follow-up questions were asked at the discretion of the researcher.

More contacts were made at a workshop for women who were interested in campaigning for public office, sponsored by the Anthony Statton organization.

Attending the workshop and video taping it contributed to a better understanding of the complexities of running a campaign which was helpful when conducting subsequent interviews.

During the interview phase of the study, there were local elections, some involving women which ultimately provided additional interview subjects.

Population to be Studied

The criteria for selection of participants included past or present involvement in politics, which in this case included political activism and electoral politics. They had to be women of Mexican descent residing in Hidalgo County. Although the snowball sample included women serving in many different capacities, some with formal titles and others in informal roles, the final sample total of 24 is not exhaustive of women in politics in Hidalgo County.

Questionnaire Development

A moderately unstructured interview guide employing a series of open-ended questions was designed. The purpose of using the open-ended format is that in order to test the theory of symbolic convergence, an abundance of soft data is helpful for analysis. The original ten, open-ended questions on the interview guide grew from the Hardy-Fanta article. In the pilot sample as a result of new information obtained from subjects' responses, another question was added regarding pachanga politics. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent the questions about public politics and private politics did not hold much meaning for the participants and were extraneous. Some of the questions elicited more data than others.

Method of Collection

The interviews were recorded onto audio cassette contingent upon the permission of the subject. Manual note taking was also employed. One subject declined to be recorded, and the recorder malfunctioned during three interviews so as to necessitate manual note taking. Another subject requested that the recorder be shut off during responses that she felt should be kept confidential.

Method of Analysis

After the interviews each participant's data was transcribed onto note cards, question by question for convenience in separating data. After all interviews have been transcribed onto note cards, the data was organized into categories, and reviewed for common themes. Preliminary interviews indicated overwhelming consubstantiation with both Hardy-Fanta's Boston research and Blankenship and Robson's feminine style of political discourse. A frequent theme in the preliminary interviews was that the women wanted to see a change, and they believe that one way they can improve things for their communities and their families is to become actively involved in public politics. They all expressed a desire to serve others and to improve life in the community. Virtues of honesty, morals, justice, fairness, and "doing the right thing" were prevalent in their responses.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction of Findings

The perspectives of the respondents varied depending on the level of formality, or informality, of their political roles, their lived experiences, and their job-related encounters. One of the fantasy types found underlying the data gathered from the interviews was the significance of political participation and the rights of those living in a democracy to speak up and be heard. The subjects exhibited knowledge of the political system and the responsibilities of good citizenship. A second fantasy type among participants centered on the virtues of returning ethics and morality to government as responses indicated the need to eradicate corruption, favoritism, and bribery in favor of open, honest, and inclusive government.

The participants placed a high value on probity. This was based on frequent mention of the importance of *doing the right thing* and *wanting to do what was right*. According to Bormann, Cragan & Shields, “A vision based on a righteous master analogue emphasizes the right way of doing things,” (1996, On-line). The women believed public sphere decisions should be based on fact finding and fairness rather than the influences of political alliances. Conscience was also a prevalent factor in decision making. Some of the public office holders interviewed emphasized the importance of

making moral and ethical decisions and not bending the rules even if it would cost them the next election. Women prefer to make informed decisions and vote their conscience on issues rather than being influenced by political wrangling.

The subjects' answers closely resembled the characteristics of feminine style in political discourse. They expressed a desire for a change in leadership for the purpose of community betterment and serving others. Inclusivity was apparent in decision making as was the desire to help others and empower the disenfranchised.

The study found women to be involved in a wide range of political activities at all levels. Some women prefer to remain anonymous in their involvement and work only behind the scenes. For this reason the study does not include the sought-after subjects who declined to participate and those who agreed to be interviewed but did not have the time available for the interview.

Politics Defined

Although the participants were not asked to define politics, many volunteered their definitions of politics during the course of the interview. The definitions offered indicate the presence of **fantasy types** including serving others in a professional capacity, empowering taxpayers by self-involvement in the budget process, and shaping policy. The definition of politics given by Ofelia de los Santos agrees with Hardy-Fanta's argument that politics involves more than the electoral process:

Politics is not just promotion of self in elected office but helping the community. Until involvement in Valley Interfaith, I thought politics meant electing the right person, being the grunt with no decision power. True politics is the politics of the local community coming together in an effort to solve its problems and its issues whatever they may be. Group decisions are made rather than a politician dictating what to do.

The self-empowerment rhetorical vision of the Valley Interfaith community shaped de los Santos' belief in the local community's ability to make change happen.

Feminine Style in Political Discourse

Most of Blankenship and Robson's conclusions on the characteristics of feminine style were found to be true in this study as well. The subjects' political judgments are based on personal experiences such as observations from childhood or participation in the political process as adults. As a rhetorical community, the women's discourse reflected consideration of others in decision making. Although the subjects were not questioned specifically on the purpose of public office, the fantasy type of empowering others, especially other female political actors, was present in the responses. Very few subjects indicated that holding a public position was for the purpose of advancing their careers. The women were more likely to discuss public office in terms of serving others, community betterment, and quality of life issues. The bane of corruption in public office was a frequent topic. Policy formation was discussed by some participants. The discourse would agree with Blankenship and Robson's findings of a more holistic approach to policy by women. The importance of women's issues surfaced occasionally but not as frequently as community issues. The general consensus was that women's issues affect everyone.

Life is Politics

Another area in agreement with the Blankenship and Robson study was that political judgments of participants were based on concrete, lived experience. Again there was evidence that women enter politics where the private sphere intersects with the public sphere. Participants expressed the desire to change the status quo and stem corruption. Political experiences were related through personal stories and observations.

The epistemology of the political actors interviewed was predominantly through *phronesis* which has been described as “the practical wisdom gained by lived experience,” (Brock, Scott & Chesbro, 1991, p. 237).

A righteous master analogue surfaces with regard to caring about the community. As Hans-Georg Gadamer discusses ancient philosophers’ interpretations of *phronesis*, common sense, or *sensus communis*, is explained as a sense of community: “(S)ensus communis is the sense of what is right and of the common good that is to be found in all men; moreover, it is a sense that is acquired through living in the community and is determined by its structures and aims,” (Gadamer, 1993, p. 22). The moral aspect of *phronesis* is described as “the virtue of thoughtful reflection,” (Gadamer, 1993, p. 323), and “right living,” (Gadamer, 1993, p. 320). When perceived in this manner, *phronesis* has strong import into moral and ethical behavior. “The distinction between what should and should not be done includes the distinction between proper and improper behavior...,” (Gadamer, 1993, p. 22). In many cases the subjects described making political decisions based on the moral aspect of *phronesis*.

Inclusivity

One of the fantasy types contributing to the righteous master analogue was apparent in the women placing a high value on inclusivity and the relational nature of being. Many times the participants mentioned the desire to do things to better the community, and improve the quality of life for others as well as the lives of their families. Voter apathy and general indifference towards the political process were viewed as a challenge to these south Texas political actors. Apathy can also occur in disillusioned campaign workers who have devoted time and energy to a successful campaign only to find their candidate not abiding by the promises of the campaign platform. Lack of

participation by younger constituents was also of concern. Some of the subjects believe more needs to be done to encourage this age group to get involved in politics. One subject expressed a desire to serve as a mentor to young people who are interested in politics, especially young women. A fantasy type could be located in the participants' desire to include more of the community in the political process.

Defining Political Power

The interview data gathered in this study revealed no overwhelming evidence of symbolic convergence on political power although every subject had an opinion about it. Most of the women addressed political power with a positive connotation, although there were some who described it negatively. In comparison with Blankenship and Robson's findings, where women perceived political power as "the ability to get things done," (1995, p. 361), none of the subjects repeated that verbatim although some answers were similar. The definitions seemed to reflect the perspectives of the interviewees, e.g., the types of roles as well as personal experiences. Again, the answers reflected the many dimensions of power including respect and admiration; the ability to influence and gain adherence from others; the ability to make or influence public policy; and the ability to improve the quality of life of others or cause positive change in a community. Some of the women believe that knowledge and access to information are means of power as well as the understanding of the political process. Others described political power as the ability to influence political involvement and to win a re-election bid without campaigning. Another aspect of political power mentioned was that of being given the time and attention of public office holders.

Those who gave political power a negative connotation focused on the abuse of power and cautioned that politicians who seek office only for exerting control over others

and gaining power by advancing their personal agenda are abusing the position and the public's trust. One subject explained that if politicians focus solely on their agenda for gaining power through public office, one outcome could be lost jobs for municipal employees due to service contracts being awarded in the private sector. Thus the workers' ability to maintain payments on their homes could be lost. The same subject also believes that women office holders are generally more compassionate towards these issues and less likely to become apathetic.

Empowerment

The idea of political empowerment can create large rhetorical communities within organizations based on visions of a brighter future and improved quality of life. Many of the interview subjects have devoted their time and energies to empowering the disenfranchised. The degree of empowerment of an organization can also influence the immediacy of the elected officials. As the local chapter of the United Farm Workers has become an organized political force, politicians including gubernatorial candidates and presidential candidates make campaign stops at the main office in San Juan, Texas, whereas before there was little acknowledgement of the local members. One of the steps to empowerment is creating awareness of the mechanics of the political process. Another avenue to empowerment is voter registration drives which some of the participants have been involved in. Some subjects mentioned Valley Interfaith as an organization that is very active in promoting self-advocacy. Ofelia de los Santos discussed how being involved in Valley Interfaith was significant in deepening her understanding of community politics and of being a Christian.

Big Picture, Little Picture

Regarding the holistic approach to policy formation, subjects were likely to relate experiences through stories with specific settings and characters, describing the decision making process during meetings, whether it involved a public school board, city council, or a regional entity. Some subjects observed that during meetings where policy was being discussed, women were more likely than the men to shift focus between the issue at hand and the impact of the decisions on those who would be affected. One explanation for this could be that generally women are more attuned to the relational aspects of outcomes, while men are more likely to focus on the task at hand. Participants expressed concern over the rapidly growing population in the RGV and the impact it will have on infrastructure, communities, and the future of the children. One woman mentioned that overcrowding in the public schools will adversely impact the quality of education.

Women's Issues are Everybody's Issues

As one subject emphasized, women's issues affect everybody. Women's issues were generally viewed as community concerns by the participants. Perhaps the reason for this is that issues involving leadership, community betterment, and inclusivity are seen as affecting the lives of women along with all other community members. Perceptions in various rhetorical communities on what comprises women's issues may be influenced by race, gender, culture, socioeconomic factors, or geographical location. During the feminist movement of the 1960's, Hispanic women identified more with the rhetorical community of the Chicano movement due to concerns aligned with race and ethnicity rather than with gender. One common sentiment of those interviewed was that more women need to get involved in electoral politics as candidates. This is believed to lead to more honest government and better service to the people. One subject mentioned

that women organized into groups are more likely to influence decision makers than individual women.

Political Actors Bridging Public Sphere and Private Sphere

According to the subjects interviewed, women have a vast network in the private sphere with more opportunity for fantasy themes to chain out. Female political actors are likely to network with other women and target other women for support more so than men do. As a group women constitute a powerful voting block and politicians are beginning to realize this. Locally, women are most concerned about what affects their households and are moved to action by the need to change the status quo. They are likely to influence their friends and neighbors to become active participants in public meetings in order to give voice to their concerns and to influence change. For this reason, women can be very influential in activating grassroots movements. There is empowerment in organizing. Women carry political messages back to the family and influence voting in this manner as well.

Key Players

Women are key to local political participation because they are willing to commit themselves to all facets of a political campaign, such as door knocking, block walking, registering voters, telephoning constituents, and getting out the vote. One subject has observed that women are able to influence constituents more so than men and can motivate more people to go vote. As political actors, they can create an awareness of the issues. Their influence reaches beyond those with whom they interact regularly in the private sphere. According to another participant, women take issues to heart and strongly believe in those issues which motivates them to take action. However, there are some would-be female political actors who do not have the resources, time or energy to devote

to the issues they value. If more women were able to participate, they would have more influence on political issues locally and statewide. To be taken seriously women not only need to organize, but also participate, influence, and lobby. Women need to be vocal in order to gain political influence, according to another subject, and be “out there” as players.

There are local women’s groups that promote political activism. The Anthony Stanton organization is a non-partisan political action committee which contributes to women’s political campaigns (ASI to honor, 1998, p. 2E). In March of 1997 the organization cosponsored a seminar for women who were interested in running for public office or being a core member of someone else’s campaign. Panel members consisting of past or current female public office holders shared their experiences in campaigning. A political consultant from Fort Worth provided information on how to successfully campaign for public office. Women who attend workshops such as this one are given the opportunity to learn from seasoned political actors, to network with others, and to create rhetorical communities through their interests in politics. The women interviewed were likely to mention groups which take an active interest in politics such as the Hidalgo County Women’s Political Caucus and The League of Women Voters.

Women can also start a political fantasy theme chain through environmental communication. One subject mentioned that her neighbors rely on the campaign signage on her lawn to know who to vote for. They trust her judgment. Other subjects receive telephone calls asking for their advice on which candidates’ yard signs to display or being asked by family members and others which candidate is the best one in each race.

A specific type of political actor who bridges the public and private spheres is the **politiquera**. The roles of **politiqueras** will be discussed at length later in **Campaign Makers**. **Politiqueras** are sought after by candidates for the very reason that they are politically astute and have influence in the private sphere. They know which voters need assistance to complete their absentee voting forms and who is turning 18 in their neighborhoods and communities. Time is at a premium for candidates in county-wide races and they have a difficult time reaching every constituent during the campaign season. **Politiqueras** are invaluable to these candidates and do a great deal of their campaigning for them by persuading friends, neighbors, family members, and those they do business with to vote for their candidates.

Political Actors For Good Reasons

As mentioned earlier, the **righteous master analogue** was evident in the subjects' comments indicating a **rhetorical vision** supported by discourse which contained phrases such as *wanted what was right for the family, knowing the difference between right and wrong, doing the right thing, doing what's right, wanted things to be right, wanted what was right for us, what I feel is right for others, or making things right.*

The rhetorical vision contained a vivid image of the crusader character, a champion for truth and justice, fair and honest government, empowerment of the disenfranchised, and for betterment of the community and the quality of life. The current political involvement of several subjects has been influenced by their childhood experiences in observing first hand political corruption and abuse of power. Racism and segregation were prevalent themes. Others were moved to political involvement as

adults, seeing the need for change, for making the system work for the disenfranchised, and for becoming decision makers in the public sphere.

Childhood Injustices

As a member of a high school student body, Aida Salinas Flores witnessed the oppression of a political boss controlling jobs in the school system. She wanted to get politics out of the high school and “make things right.”

He controlled the jobs and he controlled the people that were teaching there because that's all that kind of industry or jobs that were available were school related and if you didn't belong to that faction then you would get fired and we were against that because our teachers were intimidated so we banded together a group of students and we were instrumental, I was instrumental in going to the superintendent's office and making a stand that we wanted those politicians to stop messing with our educators, that we wanted our educators to be free from the political pressure...

Alida Hernandez also spoke of dishonesty and injustice. While growing up, she recalled politicians buying votes with a six-pack of beer and influencing the vote through alcohol consumption. Hernandez believes that her mother lost her school job because she was affiliated with “the wrong political party.” A strong believer in the Republican Party, Hernandez has voted Republican since age 18 and holds the merits of being a Republican in high value.

Lupe Abboud grew up in Kingsville where schools were segregated. The whites went to one school and the blacks and Hispanics were in another school. She fought racism and strived for inclusion and involvement. She also recalled her awareness of the injustice of poll tax at an early age. Her grandmother, who became a U.S. citizen when Abboud was about seven years old, was her first influence in politics.

The very first thing that my grandmother did when she became a U.S. citizen was go get her poll tax. At that time you used to pay for the privilege of voting and three dollars was a lot of money because she used to work in cleaning up

people's homes so that was a lot of money for that time, but she paid three dollars and she paid for my grandfather's poll tax so that both of them would go out and vote. And I think that back then I realized the injustice of having to pay three dollars for a poll tax...

According to author James W. Lamare, the Texas poll tax discriminated against minorities such as blacks and Mexican Americans because it was exclusionary, serving as a barrier to voting. The poll tax was part of the political system from 1902 until 1966 and cost each voter either \$1.50 or \$1.75 depending on county of residence (Lamare, 1991, p. 67).

At the beginning of her first grade year, Ninfa Ochoa-Krueger learned the value of speaking up. After attending kindergarten in a Catholic school, the school closed, forcing a move from parochial school to the public school system. The public schools were segregated, Anglos and Hispanics, and when Ochoa-Krueger arrived the first day she was very saddened to find that she had not been placed at the same grade level with her friends. Her father worked in a hardware store, and when his Anglo boss asked him why Ninfa was crying that day, her father explained to him that Ninfa had been held back. When Ochoa-Krueger arrived at school the next day, she discovered there had been a change and she was put in a class with her previous classmates. "One phone call did it. After that I just felt you have to speak up," Ochoa-Krueger reflected. Other school children would come to her when there was a problem to ask her to speak up to the teachers on their behalf.

For Ochoa-Krueger, speaking up continued in high school. As a junior in high school, Ochoa-Krueger and others protested the crowning of an Anglo homecoming queen. As graduating seniors they protested having the baccalaureate exercises in a protestant church. They wanted commencement held in the Catholic church and

consequently they boycotted the exercises and had their own gathering. Ochoa-Krueger reflected:

We wanted to say, 'look, we want a say-so in this.' After that they just had it at the football field. But the thing is that to me that is political empowerment. If you learn to participate in the system, that is political empowerment. I don't think that political empowerment means politics or elective office, but it means participation in our responsibility as citizens, really. Being active. And I think that political empowerment means that we are either participating pro or con in decisions that affect the populace and not just us."

Early Role Models

Sylvia Handy, the first female Hidalgo County Commissioner, grew up around politics. Her father was a city commissioner and her parents were actively involved in politics at the local level. She remembers her parents hosting *pachangas* (outdoor barbeques) at their residence almost every Sunday, with music and campaign speeches running into the night, leaving her wondering when the party would end so that she could concentrate on her homework. "I remember thinking one day, 'I'll never get involved in politics,'" Sylvia disclosed, "But I guess it's just in my blood."

Sandra Rodriguez also had a strong role model in her father. "I was spoon fed politics," Sandra reflected as she related how, as a young girl, she would follow her father around and observe his participation in the political process. She recalled how her mother did not approve of her staying up late to watch election returns with her father. She was the only one of her siblings to do so. Even then she found herself fascinated by politics.

It was Mari Zamora Pulido's mother who provided an early influence in politics for her. Zamora Pulido described her mother as a strong-minded woman and a role model who influenced her daughter's involvement in the high school student council, church, and other extracurricular activities. Later while studying in college, Zamora

Pulido developed organizational skills and learned group dynamics which has strengthened her abilities in her continuing political involvement.

For Juanita Valdez-Cox, it was both parents' involvement that provided early interest in politics. She recalled going to the first farm workers' convention of 800 or 900 delegates with her parents where she observed the need for farm workers to become organized in order to secure rights for themselves under labor protection laws. At that time the workers lacked political clout and the means to seek better wages and a safer working environment. "We have to become very political otherwise we wouldn't have laws to protect farm workers," Juanita emphasized.

To Make a Change for Public Good

After an absence from The Valley due to her husband's career, Ruby Delgado returned to her native city of McAllen to discover that Hispanics had not advanced significantly in politics. She joined civic groups such as the Hidalgo County Women's Political Caucus and later the League of Women Voters. "I believe in the process, the democratic process which they so believe, letting in, educating the public, voter registration and lobbying for issues for so many good things that need to happen to the citizens....," Ruby explained. She discussed how labeling unnecessarily segregates the city, for example, "South McAllen" and "North McAllen".

Both Ruby Delgado and Lupe Abboud realized that in order to improve the lives of Hispanics, it was necessary to empower Hispanics through the political system. One of the initial steps in the process was to register people to vote. For this reason, Delgado and Abboud have both been active in voter registration drives.

Empowerment of the Disenfranchised

Ochoa-Krueger works with colonia residents, seeking to make them aware of the impact that government budgets have on their lives and to encourage them to become active participants in the system. As a group, colonia residents are disenfranchised in that many have migrated from Mexico wanting to be homeowners and are able to afford only a basic plot of ground, “sold by landowners who carve streets out of the flat land, bring in electricity, and survey lots as small as 60 by 100 feet. The unimproved lots are then sold, primarily to Mexican immigrants, for \$100 down and monthly payments of \$65 to \$100 until the full price (typically \$9,000 to \$10,000 plus interest) is paid,” (Pasley, 1988, p. 21). Not governed by city ordinances, building materials vary “from cinder blocks to scrap sheet metal to abandoned travel trailers,” (Pasley, 1988, p. 21).

Typically the colonias lack basic infrastructure as they are beyond the jurisdiction of municipalities. For example, many streets are not paved, and when it rains there is flooding and sewage backup. Ochoa-Krueger questions where the funds are going that have been designated for colonia infrastructure improvement:

Every agency has a budget that is funded by taxpayer money and to me politics would be becoming involved in how that money is going to be spent, and if it’s a school district, county government, city government, public welfare, any agency, and down here in South Texas, or actually any border region, we have a very large amount of monies going specifically for colonia infrastructure improvement.

Ochoa-Krueger further explained that with over 800 colonias in the county millions of dollars are appropriated for improvement but yet the colonias do not appear to have any more services than 20 years ago.

In the case of one colonia, persistence paid off in gaining a Boys and Girls Club. The city of Pharr, after annexing a colonia with a population of approximately 10,000,

was asking for budget funds for a Boys and Girls Club. The colonia residents wanted the club located in the colonia. Some of the women from the colonia with whom Ochoa-Krueger was working went to the city planning and zoning committee to let it be known they wanted the club in the colonia. Their requests did not end there. They went to meetings and public hearings on the city budget and gave testimony. Eventually, their persistence proved fruitful and the Boys and Girls Club was located in the colonia. According to Ochoa-Krueger whether or not colonia residents are documented, if they live in the United States, they pay taxes and therefore they have a right to speak up about the allocation of tax dollars.

With a strong belief in government by the people, Ochoa-Krueger encourages colonia residents to attend public hearings on budgets and learn to actively monitor the system. According to Ochoa-Krueger, there is too much concern over funds spent for social services for the colonia residents and not enough awareness of what percentage is appropriated for administrative expenses.

Role models are significant in the process of empowerment. Ochoa-Krueger advanced that a role model does not necessarily have to be someone from the outside, or outgroup. Whether or not colonia residents are U.S. citizens, Ochoa-Krueger argued that because they pay taxes, they have a right to express opinions when it comes to budget allocations for their colonias. "...In order to overcome some of the imbalances in the distribution of funds, we need to let people know that they don't have to wait for somebody with a college degree or whatever to come in and speak for them, that there is other criteria, and that is taxpayer," Ochoa-Krueger explained. In her opinion, a role model for colonia residents is not somebody who has become educated, has a career and

has moved to a more affluent area such as north McAllen, but someone who lives in the community and speaks up for the betterment of the community. When children see their parents speaking out, they are seeing good role models, Ochoa-Krueger believes. The benefits of participation are two fold: The parents are actively involved in securing better services for their community, and the children are being taught that participation and unified effort are necessary for community improvement. "And so our message is you don't have to get out of a colonia to be a good citizen," Ochoa-Krueger concluded.

Meeting the Challenge of Voter Apathy

For several years, Mary Lou Duque has promoted community involvement in political affairs especially in the Delta Area which covers the towns of Monte Alto, Edcouch, Elsa, La Villa, and the outlying areas. She feels it is important to motivate people to get out and vote. "If they're not pushed, they will not go out and vote. You need to either get on the phone or go visit house to house, a block walk is very important, you know, let the people know who's running and why," Duque asserted. She emphasized that it is not enough to promote a candidate without letting the constituents know why there is a need to make a change, whether it is for a better community, county, precinct, or president of the United States.

Carmen Castillo discussed the lack of interest in the democratic process that she has observed in the neighborhood she lives in. That is why she continues to be active in political campaigns and tries to persuade her neighbors to get involved rather than complain after the elections. One of the problems, according to Castillo, is that people may not be aware there is an election going on due to television programming preferences. Castillo has observed that the popular *telenovelas* (Mexican soap operas)

take precedence over other television programming during prime time viewing. Local candidates are more likely to buy air time on channels other than those that carry the *telenovelas* resulting in no political message being sent to a segment of their constituency. Additionally, she surmised that only five to ten percent of households in her community subscribe to the local newspaper. Political actors like Castillo continually strive to create an awareness of the importance of empowerment through politics.

Elected Public Officials

With former juvenile probation involvement, Rosa Treviño felt that her experiences working with juveniles, their parents, attorneys and judges in addition to her accumulated life experiences qualified her for serving the public as a justice of the peace. She enjoyed the nature of her work and was convinced she could make a difference with her personal philosophy of serving others. According to Treviño, “All they really want is service.” For this reason, she often times refers people to other agencies to seek help even though it is not officially part of her duties. Being accessible to the public is another way Treviño believes in serving the community.

After 31 years of experience in working for municipalities, Hilda Adame is no stranger to the budget process. She returned to the community of Donna, Texas, to enjoy her retirement years. Shortly thereafter, she decided that she could be of help to the city “knowing the other side of it, how public monies work...,” and decided to give something back to the community by getting involved. Recently Donna’s citizens were faced with substantial water rate increases resulting in a great public outcry. The combination of an inadequate water system which was built in the first decade of this century, state and federally mandated improvements, and requirements involved in applying for state and federal water and wastewater improvement grants left the community with few options.

“I felt that I had some knowledge to help a team, a public board my ideas and their ideas together to try and do some changes and reforms here,” Adame explained. She also discussed the lengthy process of the bureaucracy involved in securing funds and competing for grants from the state and federal governments. If she had not had the many years of experience in city government, she would not have felt qualified to serve on the board that sets policy for the city.

Mission, Texas, City Council Member Norma Davis ran for office because she wanted to see a change in the administration of Mission. Following her successful experiences in helping others campaign for public offices, she decided to run for city council herself. A Mission native with a very large extended family, Davis was hoping for widespread support. However, she did not announce her candidacy until later in the campaign season because her father would not grant his blessing to her candidacy until he was sufficiently pressured by his peer group, even though her husband was encouraging and supportive of her desire to become a candidate. Notwithstanding the late start in campaigning, Davis was successful and won the seat after a run off against two others. She has served for eleven years.

In 1984, when a Mercedes, Texas, city council position was vacated, Norma Garcia decided she would like to be on the city council so that she could do things for the community. “It was a way of giving back to the community, you know, the usual corny things that go through your mind, and I say corny because once you get into politics, you learn a lot of other stuff. It makes you wonder, ‘Why did I do this in the first place’...,” Garcia reflected, “Because I really didn’t know the political process, my intentions were just to serve, period.” Although Garcia wanted to do her civic duty, she had no idea what

it was like to run a campaign, and she lost. She decided that perhaps God had other plans for her. Later, she served three terms as mayor of Mercedes.

As a returning student fascinated by courses in government and political science, Ofelia de los Santos found herself joining many “underdog” groups which promoted women’s issues, and the rights of the disenfranchised, such as farm workers and political refugees. This led to her extensive involvement in Valley Interfaith which encourages empowerment of disenfranchised groups through instruction in self-advocacy and political skill building. Valley Interfaith particularly encourages women to get involved politically especially women who have been involved in church activities. Within the church, the women are known for being organizers, movers and shakers. Some of the other subjects agreed that women can and do influence political participation through affiliations in the church. De los Santos remained active in Valley Interfaith for several years and experienced a variety of political activities.

Leticia Hinojosa also developed an interest in government and the political process in college. When she started practicing law she became involved in state and national races. She did not get involved in local races until she campaigned for judge for a newly created district court. Because she enjoyed trial work as a lawyer, Hinojosa knew that she wanted to be a judge. Other interviewees expressed admiration for Judge Hinojosa’s accomplishments on the bench and also for her personal development. She has served as a role model for others who aspire to a public career.

Campaign Makers

Women can make a difference in who wins an election by their high level of commitment to a campaign. Known for their ability to organize, women have the

advantage of having vast connections in the private sphere. In their dedication to a campaign, women are willing to work all aspects of the campaign including block walking, telephoning, cooking, performing clerical tasks, and transporting voters to the polls on election day. The more organization and support a candidate has, the better the chances for reaching constituents and getting the message out.

Once in office, candidates need to remember who helped them get there and why their campaign workers became motivated to help in the first place. One subject reported being disappointed after receiving little gratitude or appreciation for working the campaign once the candidate won the election. That experience coupled with unfulfilled campaign platform promises influenced her decision not to support that candidate for re-election. The subject did not communicate her disappointment until she was approached to serve on the re-election committee. It was then she let it be known she had no intentions of helping again and explained the reasons why. This can be very detrimental to a candidate because the disgruntled campaign worker may agree to help an opponent.

Another subject receives telephone calls from constituents and fellow campaign workers who are monitoring their candidate's activities once in office. Although the activities may influence her decision on whether or not to campaign for the office holder again, she first considers the legitimacy of the complaint. However, she does not call the official and share the complaints.

As one of the candidates interviewed has observed through personal experience, women sometimes discover their talents for campaigning while working on others' campaigns. This would agree with Teola Hunter's comments in *The Journal of State Politics*. Campaigning for others gives women the opportunity to participate in many

facets of a campaign while observing the expectations and requirements of being a candidate. When a woman decides to become a candidate after working another campaign, some of the groundwork in the private sphere as well as the public sphere is already in place due to the connections made previously. Experience on the campaign trail will hopefully help a candidate avoid some of the more detrimental pitfalls and costly mistakes.

Politiqueras. Political Actors in the Private Sphere.

As the participants described politiqueras, it became obvious that there is more than one character type in the role of the politiquera, yet unquestionably colorful. Traditionally known as block walkers, politiqueras were housewives who went house to house on behalf of their candidate. They enjoyed getting out to see their friends and relished the social nature of the work. Later they became involved in telephone solicitations. Following that, politiqueras assisted the absentee voters who consist mostly of the elderly and the disabled. On election day, they used to get reimbursed for expenses such as making tacos and “hauling votes.” Currently, politiqueras may not be paid for their services but are reimbursed only for food and gasoline.

Originally politiqueras were volunteers but now they have a price. For some, it has evolved into a business. Although there are politiqueras who will volunteer for candidates they believe in, the ones who have made a business of their efforts, and especially those who have not been ethical in their practices, have contributed to the negative connotation of the label. One interviewee who does political consulting work commented that she could have been earning money campaigning elsewhere while she was helping a candidate on a volunteer basis.

Pauline Gonzalez attributes the increase in politiquera activity to population growth. Their efforts save candidates a substantial amount of time especially in county-wide, or larger, elections. Politiqueras have the advantage of knowing the neighborhood, the community, and the area. They ask for votes, send flyers, obtain lists of absentee voters, and remind those voters to send the ballots in. They have influence and a following of their own, and they can win elections for a candidate. Well known in the community, some politiqueras have large families and can influence many votes through the family. They may also have widespread public contact perhaps through service sector jobs. With natural enthusiasm for politics, politiqueras “talk it up” and are influential in moving issues and persuading people to step forward as candidates for public offices. Their persuasion is most widely known in getting others to vote for their candidate.

Reputable politiqueras who are in high demand are known to be selective in their choice of candidates. They study the candidates carefully before deciding who to support so as not to damage their credibility. One way they do this is by attending political forums to observe the candidates and their messages. There is a politiquera in one of the valley towns, according to one participant, who personally interviews each of the candidates in a race before deciding who to lend her support to. Her neighbors base their votes on her judgment. Interviewees agreed that politiqueras are knowledgeable in local politics and make an effort to stay current. They also are known to closely monitor public proceedings.

Negative Comments On Politiqueras

In the character descriptions which color the politiqueras' character as unethical, subjects' comments included: *It's a way to make a living, being paid to bring in the vote; they are in it for the money; and they are not volunteers who believe in the candidate.*

The actions of the politiqueras also came under scrutiny. On election day, there are many voters who have no transportation to the voting polls. It is important for a candidate that voters who did not vote early make it to the polls. The interviewees described the election day activities of a politiquera: *A politiquera hauls the votes. They are paid by the candidate for hauling votes and telling voters who to vote for. Some actually go into the voting booth with the voter to “assist” them.*

In the unethical politiquera character type, some participants believe that politiqueras go to the highest bidder. The politiqueras who make a business of it allegedly demand \$500-\$600 per week according to one subject, and Delta area politiqueras ask \$600-\$800 per week. They will charge for two weeks of early voting work plus election day duties. Sometimes politiqueras request favors from candidate once in office, or they may ask for a job for their *compadres* or “something to help them out with.”

Combining negative fantasy themes into fantasy types, interviewees gave their observations about the detrimental impact of politiquera activity on democracy. One subject commented that politiqueras manipulate elections. Another subject emphasized that hiring politiqueras is “selling your government,” and that instead people should make the effort to inform themselves. For those who do not make the effort, politiqueras will continue to have influence. Subjects who have campaigned for public office mentioned that some candidates have refused to hire politiqueras because they want to run a “clean” campaign no matter what the outcome may be.

Politiqueros, Politiqueras & Disillusionment

Some participants believe that politiqueras “get a bad rap” while politiqueros (males) go unnoticed. Micaela Alvarez related her experience with a very persistent

politiquero before her campaign got underway for judge of the 139th District Court--a position she had been appointed to earlier by the governor. The first time he met with her, he told her how impressed he had been with her appointment by the governor and that he wanted to be a part of her campaign when it got underway. She told him that she would let him know.

When the politiquero returned the second time, he again praised Alvarez' accomplishments and let her know how eager he was to help with the campaign. This time he told her that he did this kind of work on a full-time basis. Alvarez became suspicious and inquired as to how he was able to do this full time. He explained that candidates help him out with his expenses. She interpreted that to mean costs related to the campaign such as having flyers printed. Again, he was told that he would be notified when the campaign got underway.

By the time the politiquero returned the third time, Alvarez knew his intentions were highly questionable. He admitted to her that candidates give him gifts and help him out. Alvarez emphasized to him that none of her campaign workers would be paid and all of them would be volunteers. The fourth time he came to see her, he told her in the presence of a colleague that she could do favors for him once she got elected. Alvarez was flabbergasted at his audacity.

The politiquero, however, was not the only one who approached her. Politiqueras made her similar offers asking for three to four hundred dollars a week and promising her a certain number of votes. As an attorney and former judge, Alvarez knows that nobody can truthfully make that kind of representation. Additionally she questioned their

accountability, in that, they know she would be unlikely to complain if they did not deliver votes.

When the votes were counted in the election, Alvarez fell behind substantially in the early voting ballots and never recouped those losses. Even though earlier she had been promised by pursuing politiqueras that they could deliver enough early voting ballots to win, she refused to hire any of them. Alvarez found this aspect of campaigning more disillusioning than any other, and her belief in the democratic system of government would not allow her to involve politiqueras or politiqueros in her campaign.

Some interviewees mentioned that politiqueras exploit politicians and could be working for every candidate on the ballot. If politiqueras promise to deliver too many votes, such as 500 or 600, it is reason for suspicion. While it is difficult to quantify their contributions, one interviewee said she demands proof that they brought in the votes. Other unethical campaign tactics mentioned which involve politiqueras include destroying campaign literature and yard signs of a candidate while posing as a campaign worker but taking payment from an opponent.

Early Voting

As mentioned earlier, politiqueras can be very helpful to a candidate in assisting with absentee voting. Unfortunately, there is the potential for abuse as well. In March of 1997, an 87-year-old woman from Mercedes, Texas, in Hidalgo County, was charged with “tampering with a government record, a Class B misdemeanor...,” (Essex, p. 1A). She was accused of five cases of doing the voting for the absentee voters after they signed a blank ballot. One of the investigators commented that “there were way more than that,” but the total number was not known (Essex, 1997, p. 10A). According to interviewees it is common practice for politiqueras to assist those who receive absentee

ballots by mail and to be there when those ballots arrive. It is especially convenient for politiqueras to be on hand when tenants, for example, in elderly housing receive their mail in a central location.

Politicians Soliciting Politiqueras

Reputable politiqueras are known for their skill in delivering votes and are taken seriously by politicians. Knowing the potential to produce votes, many times politicians seek them out. At times politicians must persuade politiqueras that they are the best candidate and have the best platform before the politiqueras will agree to work for them. One of the public officials interviewed admitted to hiring two men and two ladies “of respect.” Political strategy may deem the hiring of highly influential politiqueras as a means of damage control to stop an opponent from gaining their services.

Pachanga Politics

Just as politiqueras are colorful characters, pachangas are colorful settings. Employing the dramatistic metaphor, the setting can be significant to politics and plays a role in fantasy theme analysis. Unique to south Texas, pachanga politics is said to have evolved from an earlier tradition commonly known in Latin America as *patrón politics*, where large land owners came together for a county-wide barbeque to decide which candidates had merit and were worthy of their support, (Cook, 1986, p. 185). On election day the *patrones* took their workers into town and told them who to vote for (Cook, 1986, p. 185). Although the *patrón* system has faded through the twentieth century as Mexican Americans have become political actors in their own right, pachangas remain a common but significant vehicle for meeting constituents during the campaign season.

Interpersonal communication is held in high regard in south Texas. Study participants agreed that here in The Valley people like to see the candidate in person, not on a billboard and not on television. Residents come to pachangas to see who you are, face-to-face. Some believe that it is necessary to touch people, or get out there and “press the flesh.” A personal appearance by candidates holds significant meaning for constituents. “People talk in symbols here. We rely a lot more on feelings. People here want to shake your hand, look you in the eye, and see if you’re sincere about the symbols,” according to Alex Moreno, former state representative from Edinburg, Hidalgo County (Cook, 1986, p. 186).

For the most part, pachangas are for the general public, however, candidates are expected to share in the food and drink, “acts that amount to a political sacrament,” (Cook, 1986, p. 186). Back yard chefs take pride in presenting their personal recipes, and they expect the candidates to partake. A Mission, Texas, regular pachanga host is particularly proud of his charro bean recipe. According to Roel Riviera, more commonly known as The Wizard, “Judge Juan Partida, J. Edgar Ruiz (former county judge), Eloy Pulido (County Clerk) and even Eddie Lucio (state Senator) has been here. You name them and they’ve been here...(t)hey just come for the bean soup with bacon in it. It’s my specialty and everybody at the courthouse knows it,” (Durnan, 1997, p. 1A).

It is difficult for candidates to maintain normal body weight during the campaign season while eating an obligatory plate of food at five or six pachangas per day on the weekends in addition to those held during the week nights. Even though a candidate is very physically active during the campaign season, gaining weight is common. Alcohol consumption is also a concern. “People get offended if you don’t drink with them...so

you quickly learn to nurse a beer through a whole pachanga,” according to Juan Hinojosa, a state representative from McAllen (Cook, 1986, p. 186). Drinking is more of a concern for the women than for the men.

Traditionally, for women, pachangas have had a different meaning. They usually cook and serve and segregate themselves from the men. The area around the beer kegs is a male bastion and “women may be brought beers, but they should not infringe on the male preserve of the keg,” (Cook, 1986, p. 138). This unwritten protocol puts women candidates in a class by themselves because as candidates it is important for them to mingle and circulate. They do not segregate themselves from the men but conversely, they cannot consume alcohol and still retain respect.

The participants in this study generally conceded that pachanga politics remains fraternal in nature but it is necessary to be seen in this setting whether the candidate is female or male due to expectations of the culture:

In an era of polls, phone banks, television, and computerized direct mail, the Valley remains an outpost of a style in which personal contact and relationships are crucial and in which the worst accusation you can make about a candidate is not that he used a cattle prod on his mistress or pleaded insanity after soliciting the murder of his lover’s spouse (two of the more lurid charges in Hidalgo County’s May primary) but that he lost touch with his constituents. That is the ultimate sin, (Cook, 1986, p. 186).

Reaching the general constituency is another function served by pachangas since several levels of social strata are likely to come together. More like a family gathering, pachangas are casual and inviting for all ages whereas more formal settings such as a country club may alienate certain segments of the population. Pachangas allow the general public to be involved in politics beyond voting.

Participants in this study believe that even in the nineties, pachangas are still a male bastion and more of a formality for women politicians. One participant believes it

could be alcohol related since gatherings such as ice cream socials do not have the negative connotation of pachangas. Micaela Alvarez attended all-male pachangas with a male escort while campaigning. If her husband could not accompany her, then her brother or her father would go with her. She believes that women cannot be “one of the guys” and that pachangas are not just a political issue, but a moral and social issue. On the other hand, men are more willing to attend a pachanga than a coffee or non-alcohol event.

Some of the subjects believe that attending pachangas is not an effective use of the candidate’s time. One reason given was that the pachanga attendees are likely to already be supporters of the candidate. However, getting out and meeting new faces may potentially generate additional votes. Another reason cited was the questionable number of voters in attendance as some pachangas yield more numbers than votes. The lure of free food and drink is strong enticement. However, some of the public officials interviewed believe that a candidate needs to attend the gatherings regardless of voter status because pachangas are a place where people discuss politics, even though it is likely some people will be encountered repeatedly on the pachanga circuit. There was agreement among the women on the significance of being there and being seen there in addition to doing her own politicking. Part of the significance of pachanga politics is that it creates a group fantasy when people later talk about the party mentioning who was there and who was absent which can affect attitudes about the candidate’s political strength.

Typically, pachangas are not a format for candidates to discuss their platforms at length. If they are given an opportunity to speak, it is common to give background

information, introduce family members, and list issues of concern. The women interviewed shared another fantasy type in their belief that non-alcohol settings such as coffees are more effective for the candidate to inform the public of her platform and beliefs. Neighborhood coffees are small group occasions but are more intimate and allow for getting to know the candidate better. Another effective way for a candidate to advance her platform is by speaking to organizations, business entities, and schools. Although there may not be alcohol served at these types of gatherings, it gives the women the opportunity to network with other women who make up the largest voting block.

A few of the women interviewed do not participate in the pachanga circuit. Family commitments are likely take priority, and women candidates with full time jobs must schedule their time carefully. One participant stated that a woman can campaign successfully without pachangas if she has a good platform and good campaign workers for starters. Although pachangas may not be mandatory, the pachangas held in the colonias are likely to yield new faces. In summary, pachangas are optional for a woman's campaign depending on her priorities and time commitments. However, if the candidate is running for a county-wide position, pachangas become more significant in presenting opportunities to meet larger numbers of constituents.

Political Actors With Double-Barrelled Challenges

Since many times women who are actively involved in their communities are likely to be married, raising a family, and working full time outside the home, their ambition to run for office is lauded by some and considered a threat to others. Interviewees commented about the problems they faced as they campaigned for office relating to gender, culture, and race. Once elected there were more challenges including

the decision-making process and exclusion. The **righteous master analogue** surfaced again in comments about doing the right thing and making decisions based on moral principles rather than political alliances.

More Effort, More Scrutiny

Several of the interview subjects made comments about women political actors working harder than the men, making more of a personal commitment to a campaign, and doing a better job once in office. Two interviewees who currently hold office believe that once a woman gets elected, she must then work hard to prove herself competent in the position. The extra effort is not a problem according to Rosa Treviño who believes serving others comes naturally for women. The consensus among interviewees was that for women to be recognized as being as successful as men in public office, they must put forth more effort than their male colleagues. Similarly, if a woman makes mistakes while in office, she is likely to receive more criticism than a man would for the same mistake.

Double Minority

Some of the subjects spoke of double minority challenges, mentioning that Mexican American women have lower status than men or Anglo women. Although there is pride in the Hispanic community when a Mexican American woman becomes a political candidate, she must push harder in her campaign efforts. Some participants said it is possible for Mexican American women to earn respect as political actors but emphasis was placed on earning it, as they must work harder for it than men or Anglo women office holders. Once elected, the subjects believe, a Mexican American woman must prove herself by performing above and beyond the expectations of men or Anglo women holding the same office. Even then the Mexican American women are not likely to receive the same recognition for doing the same work or for doing more work,

according to participants. Dora Saavedra believes not only that they must work much harder but that they are more scrutinized once they are holding public office than men or Anglo women.

Gender and Campaigning

Former Judge Micaela Alvarez would agree with the increased scrutiny for women office holders. As she discussed the “pressure of the public eye” during her campaign for judge of the 139th State District Court, she said that she felt she was under public scrutiny almost 100 percent of the time:

Somebody is always looking to see what can be criticized. It was a big relief to be out of the public eye. You had to be aware of people’s perceptions of you constantly, be aware of what they think. Women are more limited in what is acceptable than for male candidates.

As she campaigned, Alvarez believed that it was imperative that proper etiquette be followed to guard her reputation which necessitated a male escort especially for those functions that were predominantly male where alcohol was being served.

Gender & Campaign Funding

Comments from interviewees regarding campaign funding indicated that generally women are not as comfortable asking for money as men are. The men are less apprehensive in asking for donations and more comfortable with being solicitous. Also there was mention of women not being in the habit of pulling out their wallets and supporting a candidate financially. Women are more likely to appropriate their income for the household budget and family needs. For this reason, some believe a woman will not receive as many campaign contributions as a man will. One of the participants mentioned that “big-money” people continue put more faith in male candidates. Another

participant added that the good-old-boy system is being counteracted by women's political groups which allow women candidates the opportunity to network.

In observing men's intergender communication styles when being solicited for supporting a woman candidate, one subject noted that businessmen are more respectful when meeting with women. They choose their words carefully when talking about the candidate in the presence of women and give them the courtesy of listening to their reasons for requesting support for their candidate. If the men are not willing to support the candidate, they are more tactful in explaining why.

Gender & Culture

Besides earlier mention of the necessity for women to work harder in public office, protect their reputations during a campaign, and be ethical and moral in their conduct, the behavior of men towards women office holders is at times pardoned due to cultural restraints and general tolerance. Micaela Alvarez related a story of how she was shown disrespect as an officer of the court by a rather obstinate older attorney in a criminal case who insisted on addressing her as "*mi hija*" (my child) rather than as Judge Alvarez. If she had not been raised to always show respect to her elders, she may have been more likely to find the man in contempt of court. However, it is very common in her culture to be addressed in this manner by elders.

The deputies were in the courthouse like, 'Okay, do you want us to take him down to the holding cell for a little while?' because they considered it disrespectful to the bench, and they were ready to just hold him for a little while so he could understand that he couldn't just talk to me that way, but that was probably one of those issues where had I been a man I probably would've taken more offense if some elderly gentleman were talking that way to me on the bench...to him I was a young woman and he didn't see anything wrong with arguing with me about what the issue was and addressing me in that manner.

Even though it was within her right and powers of the bench to punish the man, Alvarez did not see anything to be gained by temporarily incarcerating him and proceeded with the trial.

According to another participant, Hispanic males are more of a challenge to work with during the group decision-making process than others. There is more difficulty in building consensus and collaborating with them because they want things done their way. A third participant mentioned how her husband was criticized by his peers when she ran for the school board for not having more control over her. They were not aware that she had the full support and approval of her husband before she announced candidacy.

Gender & Group Decision Making

Women being able to offer different perspectives was mentioned by several participants who believe women are likely to think globally and in detail, as in “big picture” and “little picture,” during the decision-making process. Several of the subjects who have had experience serving as elected public officials commented that men are more likely to concentrate on the issue at hand at the exclusion of considering the consequences of decisions on those affected. In addition, women are apt to consider the entire community in decision making and not just their supporters, according to one subject. Again the presence of the righteous master analogue was witnessed in comments regarding fairness and conscience.

Sandra Rodriguez believes real progress will be made when there are more women school board members. In her estimation the school board is one of the most important entities in the community because decisions made there not only affect children

but everyone. The quality of education affects the entire community. With women on the school board the agenda is likely to change, and Rodriguez related a situation to exemplify this point.

When she was a school board member, Rodriguez proposed a mothers' program after discovering the number of expectant mothers in the student body. Her proposal was nixed by the superintendent because he did not believe there was a need. Later the program was implemented after sufficient awareness of the need for the program had been created. "We think with different sides of our brains," Rodriguez explained. She believes women are more objective and able to see things from the perspective of a mother and a woman which men cannot do. The school district and the community benefit from having women on the school board for their ability to offer a different viewpoint in their concerns for children and community. She also mentioned that women are more likely to take a pro-active approach and work to deter problems before they occur.

According to Rodriguez, women public officials are "risk takers" in the political aspect of the decision making process, in that, they do not necessarily feel compelled to vote in agreement with the same board members. When she was serving on the school board, there were six men constituting two threesomes when voting which left Rodriguez as the swing voter. She did not always vote with one side or the other but made decisions based on what she felt was the right thing to do after "doing her homework." Once when a fellow board member tried to persuade her to vote with his camp, she told him that she was going to vote her conscience on the issue because she would be going to bed sober

facing her conscience after the meeting instead of going out for a few beers with her buddies.

The mayor of Donna, Texas, Hilda Adame, related an experience in which she felt she did the right thing and found herself in opposition to the rest of the members of a decision-making body on an upcoming county project. The board was to select an engineering firm to do a major, multi-phase colonia project being funded through state and federal grants. Engineers throughout the state were eligible to submit proposals and had to meet certain criteria set forth by the state. Adame spent a day and a half studying the proposals and tabulating results on a spreadsheet.

When she arrived at the meeting where the accepted engineering proposal was to be announced armed with facts and figures, she noticed that none of the other board members brought paperwork. With no discussion, there was a motion made and seconded to accept a local engineer's bid. Glancing at her spreadsheet, Adame noticed that the local engineer was last on her list of the 31 engineering firms qualified to administer the project according to criteria set forth by the state. It quickly became apparent to her that the decision had been made ahead of the public meeting and that the other members knew they had majority vote without her vote and therefore did not inform her of their intentions. After Adame's call for discussion was denied by the chairman, she refused to vote with the majority. She felt she must do what was right even though she knew the others would not approve.

I felt so bad. Nothing like this had ever happened to me where I was like an outcast on the board but like a year later I was happy that I had stood my ground and all of these people from the State of Texas when they found out...because the word gets around so you know you have to stand on your own two feet and you have to believe and vote how you believe is right whether you step on people's feet or not, whether it's going to hurt you, because of all of the information that

you have based on the facts and the figures that you're given, and if you thoroughly believe that that's right, vote that way. Then you never have to regret anything.

Later, after problems arose with the local engineer, the state took over the project. As a mayor, Adame is well aware of the importance of having good relations with state and federal agencies. Voting her conscience and doing the right thing saved Adame's credibility with the state agencies.

Family Responsibilities

Several subjects discussed the challenge of family responsibilities, including house and yard, during a campaign that do not go away as the fervor of the season peaks. Many concluded that even though the husband and family may support the woman's campaign efforts, she is still the one primarily responsible for making sure the family is fed, clothes are washed and ironed, and the children's homework is done. It is more difficult for a woman candidate to take care of the family and still make appearances at social functions. Candidates know the importance of being visible and letting your supporters as well as your opponents know that you are still in the race. Being "out there" and attending events is even more difficult for women with infants and small children. Older children get involved in campaigning with their mothers and have tasks such as distributing flyers and placing yard signs.

Because Micaela Alvarez and her husband agreed that one of them would stay home with the children during her campaign for a second term, when she was seen without him, people would question her marital status. When she told them her husband was home with the children, some were not comfortable with that idea either because of the implication of a role reversal.

Husband's Commitment to Campaign

As would agree with Carroll's findings, one interviewee mentioned that before deciding to run for office, a woman must have her husband's full support. For a woman candidate to be successful, her husband must be as committed to the campaign as she is. However, pledging support before the campaign is much easier than enduring the campaign. Another participant revealed that even though she had the approval of her spouse before her campaign started, the marriage was unable to survive. After the campaign ended, the marriage ended. The nature of public life is to spend endless hours at social functions, making it difficult to nurture intimate relationships. The marital bond needs to be very strong.

One participant suggested that if a married woman is considering becoming a candidate, she should give priority to spending a weekend away with her husband long before the campaign begins, giving them plenty of time to discuss the possibility of her candidacy, his role in the campaign, and the impact on their relationship. Extramarital affairs sometimes are initiated during the campaign season. The environment is conducive to forming new relationships as politicking is a very social activity involving meeting new people every day at events and functions where alcohol may be served and being away from home late into the night.

Turning Challenges Into Advantages

When asked what it means to be a Mexican American woman involved in politics, several of the subjects made it very clear that they consider themselves to be American first. A greater number of them believe their race and ethnicity are not significant to politics. As members of the majority population in the RGV, their heritage is an asset to being political actors in the area. As the majority become empowered, the slate of

candidates has changed from being predominantly Anglo to being mostly Hispanic, and each election attests to more women on the ballot.

According to some subjects, Mexican American women's earlier involvement in politics was dedicated to getting the men elected serving as support staff, working behind the scenes, and remaining in the private sphere. More recently women have moved from the private sphere to the public sphere as candidates. Women are helping women get elected. The same women who are candidates in one election may be found helping other women candidates during their campaigns. Conversely, there are women who have no desire to be candidates themselves and choose to work as staff members. Whether they have been candidates themselves or not, women are key to campaigns due to their knowledge and expertise in daily operations, vast networks in the private sphere, and mapping out campaign strategies.

Mother's Influence

The early influence of the Mexican American mother remains with women throughout their lives. According to Hermila Anzaldua, "We are reared at our mother's knee and we reflect forevermore how our mother's milk influenced us throughout our lives and so we have a really, really well-defined philosophy." She continued to explain that the philosophy is a cross section of a sense of identity, spirituality, integrity in doing what is right, family interdependence, nurturing, and reaching consensus. This woman likes to see things done "in a good, productive, decent kind of way," Hermila explained, "That early influence and family influence are going to be strong in the Mexican American woman and she will carry that into her public life. She will carry that sense of responsibility into her role, (and) her work."

Education and Emergence from Private Sphere

Some interviewees mentioned the disproportionately low number of women involved in politics. However, this is changing and the change is attributed to more women acquiring degrees in higher education. In the process the women become aware of their potential in the public sphere. Along with the education comes higher self-esteem and confidence in one's abilities to affect change.

Sandra Rodriguez commented that it's great to see women running for public office instead of working as support staff, i.e., clerical help, food preparers, vote haulers. The move from support staff to candidate breaks the myths of Mexican American women staying in the private sphere and allows them more direct involvement in decisions and policies affecting family and community. Rodriguez believes higher education has changed women which has lead to a higher belief in themselves and their abilities to be actively involved in community betterment decisions. Rodriguez noted that she observed the increase in women's public involvement about ten years ago.

Hermila Anzaldua believes a woman needs to be educated to cause change. Education coupled with experience enables political actors to empower others. Anzaldua believes that there are many Mexican American women who are interested in politics but choose to remain in the private sphere. She emphasized that if a woman's self-perception is that she is not prepared for public life, perhaps through lack of higher education or public experience, she is not likely to apply her skills in the public arena. As a cultural norm, Anzaldua believes women are very sensitive to opinions from the "male establishment" on how women look and sound.

There is a great deal of strength, validity, empowerment pass from family to the Mexican American woman. We're still in the process of learning more about ourselves in the sense of how to translate what we have in richness, if you will,

how do we translate that into becoming truly secure about what we can do. And sometimes we view others as hostile and therefore we go back. Being in this area obviously as you well know we're the minority who's in the majority but the Mexican American woman involved in politics as far as I can see is still more of the observer rather than the pro-active element.

There is more opportunity for formally educated Mexican American women to gain power in the political arena. Knowledge is a means to empowerment, according to some participants, and additionally it is important for women political actors to know all facets of the political process.

Team Player

Comments by the women interviewed would agree with the collective decision-making styles of women in the feminine style of communication. Although it is very important to women to vote their conscience and not be unduly persuaded by others, they realize the importance of maintaining social harmony in decision making. Participants believe that once in an elected position, whether it be a school board or city council, a woman must be a team player to earn the respect of her male colleagues. They will be alienated if she acts too aggressively or attempts to railroad a personal agenda through. If a woman tries to make too many changes too quickly, she will be labeled a troublemaker.

The participants are highly aware of the significance of strategy in proposing solutions to a problem during the decision-making process. One subject told of having to compromise her feminist beliefs by playing the role of the damsel in distress in order to accomplish an agenda goal. She found her male colleagues were more likely to cooperate when using this approach. Another useful approach was to persuade her male colleagues that her idea was really their idea, and then it was more likely to be approved.

One of the public office holders interviewed believes that decision-making bodies which are predominantly male in composition prefer to have only a "token" woman in the

group and do not want women to become the majority with the ability to sway the voting. Women are more likely to give priority to the issues that directly affect their lives and their families. These issues may not have the same priority with their male counterparts.

Gender & Cooperation

Some of the women interviewed emphasized that to be successful female political actors cannot let emotions overshadow rational decision making in the pursuit of common good. Participants noted that women's groups have a tendency to bicker more during the decision making process than men's groups do. Comparatively, men who are not particularly fond of each other will cooperate with each other if they believe there are some mutual benefits in working together. Women are less likely to cooperate with each other if there is emotional discord. Participants agree that women need to learn to work together and support each other if they are going to become a political force.

Virtuous Expectations

Not unlike the original thinking behind giving women the right to vote in the first place, interview subjects mentioned the virtues of women being held in high esteem and also being expected from them in public office. Voters are more likely to vote for women if they become disillusioned with male incumbents who have abused the positions. Mary Lou Duque believes women are less likely to be a party to corruption and more likely to keep their word. Women public office holders believe that women in elected positions must adhere to high ethical and moral standards. Lena Guerrero, a former Texas statehouse representative who mislead the public about her credentials, was mentioned from time to time as an example of a successful woman politician who let others down

when she lost her credibility. Again the importance of doing the right thing surfaced. However, doing the right thing is not always popular and can strain voter as well as family relations.

When Norma Garcia was the mayor of Mercedes, she used to get telephone calls in the middle of the night from her constituents asking her to help them avoid prosecution after they were arrested for driving while intoxicated (DWI). Her policy was that they should go through the system if they violated the law. Upon her refusal to pardon, the callers would typically remind her that they voted for her, and she would ask them if they voted for her so she could break the law. One caller threatened to vote against her in the next election, and Garcia countered by inviting him to run against her. The calls stopped after word spread that she had refused to help her father escape the system following an arrest. Her brothers were furious with her because she would not use her position to make allowances for a family member. Although they pressured her to release their father, she refused because she wanted him to learn a lesson and to understand there were consequences for his actions. "But I, in that respect, I did stand up for what I believe was right even though it hurt," Garcia recalled.

When Garcia's daughter was cited for a traffic violation, again Norma refused to protect a family member. She explained to her daughter that although it was an embarrassment to her, "I'm not going to go out there and pull strings and them say, 'Hah! Look at her. She's just like everybody else.'" Norma believes violations of the law by family members are among the toughest things politicians face partly because the media "have a field day with that," owing to the public official being expected to be a model

citizen. What family members do reflect on the integrity of the official.

As women in this game, it's not easy, it's not, it's not easy...as a player, they pretend to make you feel like you're one of the guys, if you will, but you're not, reality is that you're not and I guess in a way I don't really want to be. I'd rather be known for standing up to my convictions than caving in, and if that means losing an election, so be it.

Garcia was not the only participant who declared that she would rather do what she thought was right even if it meant losing the next election. The subjects who held public office expressed an unwillingness to compromise their moral standards at the risk of not being re-elected. Upholding the integrity of the position was more important to them than being re-elected.

Role Models

Women who have the courage to step into the public arena serve as role models for those who have aspirations of becoming political actors. Even if the women were unsuccessful candidates, the fact that they were candidates and campaigned for an elected position served as inspiration for others. After Sandra Rodriguez campaigned and lost a bid for second term on the school board, women who were considering becoming candidates came to see her. They perceived her as a player, and she lent them her support. Win or lose, the experience of campaigning is a rite of passage for serious political actors in the public sphere.

Almost all of the women interviewed spoke of the need to empower and encourage other women to become involved in public politics. Leticia Hinojosa noted that more women on the ticket mean more women winning. According to another participant, women lose out more to male incumbents with tenure, not necessarily because the men have accomplished great things for their community, but more likely due to name recognition. Name recognition is salient in a campaign.

Role models are needed to pave the way and inspire other women to run. As mentioned earlier, Leticia Hinojosa serves as one of the positive role models for other aspiring female political actors. Ramona Barron predicted that the next election will see more women on the ballot. Women in office are more likely to aspire to higher elected positions, according to Mary Lou Duque. This agrees with Teola Hunter's comments in the *Journal of State Government* regarding future state and national leaders emerging from those who have held office locally (1991, p. 50). However, Ninfa Ochoa-Krueger believes that there is still a long way to go to get women in visible, powerful positions. With the potential to be a stepping stone to higher office, holding public office locally is a start for women political actors with greater potential.

When Norma Garza was mayor of Mercedes, she was pleased to see other women mayors at conferences, particularly Hispanic women mayors. Not only are role models important for other adults, they are significant to children and adolescents as well. Women candidates may not be aware of the scope of their influence and its far reaching effects until some day someone mentions how their presence in public politics has encouraged a family member, perhaps a daughter or a sister, to run for public office. Children of candidates who get involved by passing out campaign literature, helping with yard signs, and attending social events get a good idea of what campaigning is all about, as well as a hands-on education about the democratic process.

Gaining Momentum

Regarding Mexican American women becoming more confident in their capabilities as political actors in the public arena, Hermila Anzaldua summarized:

I think the Mexican American woman is dynamite if we come to the point, and we're getting there, to the point of using our knowledge, using our culture, using the strength that we draw from primary group existence, bilinguality--if that's a

term--bicultural experiences and translate that into the public forum. I think women are in a tremendously advantageous position to be influential about politics if we can convince ourselves that that's a very important role that we have, and we have tremendous talent to do it if we can develop that as well.

Being bilingual is significant to candidates in the Rio Grande Valley. With a significant number of the population speaking Spanish as a first language and English secondarily, it is imperative for candidates to be able to speak both. For many it serves as the measuring stick of truly being a member of the culture. To repeat Mary Lou Duque, being bilingual means being able to ask for votes in two languages.

Influence on Agenda Setting

Education is one of many issues that concern women office holders. As Susan Carroll noted, with more women office holders comes an agenda that reflects their concerns for women, family and community (1991, p. 45). The presence of the women and the content of their discourse create an awareness of these concerns by putting the issues before the public which gives the public the opportunity to address problems and discuss solutions. Regarding agenda setting, Anzaldua believes that women can influence statewide agendas, particularly in the area of education. "We're a young, national group multiplying very fast," Anzaldua reflected, "And a force to be contended with, and I think the sooner that we among ourselves can really appreciate that, that brings tremendous responsibility...we have a greater responsibility to help educate our children and ourselves as an ongoing activity...knowledge is the only way to freedom." In addition to education, other issues of concern are health care, living standards, juvenile crime, and quality of life issues such as beautification of the community and public services. As mentioned earlier, women's issues affect everybody.

Always Challenges Await

Seasoned women political actors realize there will always be challenges awaiting them in the public sphere. They must be as players remaining in the game no matter how grueling it gets. Once a woman becomes a candidate, her private sphere is transformed into the public sphere and the two are no longer separate and distinct. Most probable those who are closest to her in the private sphere will also be supporting her in the public sphere. This support along with the support of other political actors will see her through as she withstands the tests of becoming a legitimate political actor in public politics.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY

Gathering data from the participants' responses to the questions from the interview guide provided the study with a wealth of information on Mexican American women's political involvement. The findings would support Carolyn Hardy-Fanta's argument that political involvement beyond electoral politics does exist as part of the United States' political system and therefore should be recognized and validated. In the process of analyzing the data, the objectives of the study began to take shape and answers to the research questions began to appear.

Notwithstanding the stereotypes of Mexican American women being found only in the private sphere, the study revealed that there are many more women involved in political activity than electoral numbers reflect. The sovereign power of women in the private sphere is revered and respected. Women rule the household. Their private-sphere political clout has import into the public sphere. Political activism is not a recent phenomenon for the women of South Texas. Struggles involving race, class, and nationalism have been fueled by the drawing and redrawing of politically imposed boundaries. High on their list of priorities are better quality lives for families and improvements within their communities. For this reason, women are motivated to step forward from the private sphere into the public sphere to challenge the status quo and

contend for more voice in the decision-making processes which govern their lives and affect their households. Additionally, the women in the study are knowledgeable and informed about participating in this country's democratic system of government. They are aware of the rights and privileges associated with a government by the people which affords them the freedom to participate and the right to speak up and be heard. The participants spoke of the bane of corruption and the desire for fair and impartial elected officials who focus on serving the community rather than padding the pockets of their compadres.

As political actors, Mexican American women are involved in various aspects of the political system. In both the public sphere and the private sphere women are motivated to participate in politics with goals of changing the status quo and making things better for their communities and their families. Private sphere concerns are likely to spark participation in the public sphere. As previously mentioned, women are likely to step forward into the public sphere when issues directly involve them and their household. In most cases the participants do not regard themselves as career politicians but as agents for change. After they accomplish their goals, they are likely to retire from public office.

The discourse of those who aspire for public office, or who already have experience in public office, reveals symbolic convergence on virtues and communality as reflected in terms of the **righteous master analogue** and the feminine style of communication in political discourse. Expressing concern for doing the right thing indicates a conscious effort to consider the impact of policy decisions on others. Goals of improving the quality of life in the community and within the family were mentioned.

Making changes in the manner in which public business is administered and ridding public office of corrupt practices took priority in the women's discourse.

The number of politically-active Mexican American women is not accurately reflected in electoral politics. One of the more salient reasons for this discrepancy is that most women are not willing to make the sacrifices that a woman candidate must make in the private sphere in order to participate in the public sphere. As the campaign trail consumes enormous energy and resources, familial relationships may suffer. Time is always at a premium and household responsibilities must be delegated or left undone. As a compromise, a woman may choose instead to participate in public politics as a campaign worker rather than run for office herself. In order for a woman to successfully run for public office, she must have loyal and dedicated campaign workers in addition to excellent campaign management. If she is married with children, she must have a solid support network in the private sphere.

The phenomenon of politiqueras is another aspect of participation not reflected in electoral politics. Politiqueras have evolved from neighborhood housewives to businesswomen who charge fees for their services. They occupy a unique place in the political realm because they work the private sphere for electoral candidates in the public sphere. For some participants, the politiquera label has a negative connotation as some of them consider the activities of the politiqueras to be unethical. Others did not condemn the politiqueras for benefitting financially from political races. Yet a county-wide candidate who does not employ politiqueras is more likely to lose an election. It can be a double-edged sword. More harm can be done to a campaign by the politiqueras who are hired by an opponent's camp. With South Texas voting predominantly Democrat,

candidates on the Democratic party ticket usually face stiff competition in the primaries. The primaries are where the action is and the general election is more of a formality. Politiqueras play a significant role in which candidates advance.

Findings revealed that Mexican American women have additional challenges associated with race, class, gender, and culture. Although Mexican Americans constitute the majority in The Rio Grande Valley, women do face challenges particularly related to gender and culture. The women expressed patriotic sentiments, including identifying themselves as Americans above all else. Some of them found the Mexican American label to be distasteful. The participants exhibited an in-depth knowledge of the democratic process and held it in high esteem. Many expressed disdain for any activities that would tarnish this system, such as corruption and vote tampering. Over the past few decades, Valley Hispanics have been actively involved in the process of self-empowerment which has lead to more Hispanics on the ballot and more Hispanics being eligible to vote. In step with this trend, there are more women candidates in electoral politics.

The study found that Mexican American women do exemplify most of the characteristics of feminine style in political discourse. Lived experiences and personal observations very much affect political judgments and the degree of involvement. Some of the participants were affected by discrimination and unfair public policies in their formative years. Others grew up around politics due to family members' political involvement. There were some participants who did not become involved in politics until they were mature adults and realized that in order for Hispanics to make progress, they must fight apathy and cynicism by promoting self-empowerment.

Women put a high priority on including others and considering others in their decision making. The purpose of public office is for serving and empowering others. Decisions on policy formation are based on a more holistic approach, i.e., consideration of “little picture” and “big picture.” Women’s issues are one area where the participant responses did not agree. Community issues took priority, and women’s issues were more likely to be viewed within the context of community issues.

The participant responses agreed with the literature, in that, they predicted there will be more Mexican American women involved in public sphere politics in the future. Responses from participants indicated that earlier Mexican American candidates—whether they won or lost—paved the way and served as inspiration for would-be candidates. As Teola Hunter predicted and some of the respondents mentioned, more women incumbents mean more women being re-elected. Also, more women on the ballot increases the possibility of more women holding public office. This means that more Mexican American women will be running against each other in political races. If there are no exigent issues during the campaign, then the backgrounds, personalities, and persuasive appeals of the candidates take center stage. As one interviewee mentioned, women need to do a better job of cooperating with each other and focusing on common goals.

Women in public office need to be mindful of virtuosity as it relates to public image because they will be held to a higher standard than their male peers. Constituents expect them to have a high code of ethics and pristine morality. Some respondents believe a woman’s activities are watched more closely than a man’s once in office. Participants who mentioned Lena Guerrero remember well her fatal political blunder of misleading the public about her credentials and accomplishments. For women political

candidates there is a narrower prescript of acceptable public behavior when campaigning than for their male counterparts.

Conclusions

The classifications of the participants' political activities could be categorized into three major areas: public, private, and agency. One of the classifications is women in the public sphere, elected or running for office. It is not an easy road for women who make the decision to move from the private sphere to the public sphere as candidates. Having assisted with others' campaigns is helpful in gaining experience to survive their own campaigns, however, this does not assure success. Participants believe that women office holders make a conscientious effort to make things better for their communities by employing a more inclusive decision-making style and making the choices that cause change. Their priorities for the public agenda are likely to focus on the health and welfare of those who live in the community. These women are likely to take the future into consideration during the decision making process rather than focusing on personal financial gain.

Another category of political involvement is that of women in the private sphere. The women in this category are likely to serve on others' campaigns in various capacities. Duties in the private sphere are numerous, for example, they may entail only neighborhood involvement where someone goes door-to-door with campaign literature, hosts a neighborhood coffee for the candidate or coordinates transportation to the polls on election day. The activities of the politiqueras would be included in the private sphere category.

The third category consists of women who serve as agents for empowering others. This category involves those who work with an organized group. Women in this category educate others and provide information on the purpose and function of public entities. Those in the private sphere learn how to obtain public services and work within the system to achieve their goals. They are provided with leadership training and skills in self-empowerment. The empowering agents are more than likely known by relevant decision makers and those who administer government programs. Although these women do not hold public office, they are involved in politics serving as a link to the public sphere for the private sphere.

Implications

Chicana writers Irene Blea and Martha Cotera note that political activism is not unfamiliar to Mexican American women. The lack of recognition or validation in political studies is no indication of the potential of these women as political actors. Described as a minority within a minority, Mexican American women's contributions to politics have many times been eclipsed by a focus on minority men's involvement in political movements, according to Carol Hardy-Fanta. The omission of gender in minority political involvement is also mentioned by Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen. The silence of minority women's political voice in political literature in no way indicates an absence of contributions or significance to the political empowerment of their communities. The scarcity of available research data on Mexican American women in politics would suggest that their contributions to this country's democratic process are being overlooked. There is great potential for studies on the political activities of Mexican American women to reveal this discrepancy.

As Hardy-Fanta discovered in her study of Latinas in Boston politics, electoral politics is not separate or hierarchically superior to participatory politics but interdependent. She argues that more women are actively involved in private-sphere politics than in public-sphere politics and that their contributions should be validated. Political mobilization in a community is based on interpersonal relationships in the private sphere. Through extensive relationships in the private sphere women political actors have the power to affect change by getting others involved in political issues. This may include building support for the political candidates whom they believe will do the most for the community. Having an active voice in the democratic process of government leads to political empowerment. As political actors, Rio Grande Valley women are aware of this and take a pro-active approach, such as registering voters and supporting candidates in every facet of their campaigns.

Rita Mae Kelly and Mary Boutilier advance that women are motivated to become active in politics where the issues affect their life space, or daily existence, including their family, community, and future generations. Hardy-Fanta found that for women, politics serves as a vehicle for community political empowerment. Her findings would agree with the responses of the participants in this study who believe that women get involved in politics not to seek power but to affect change and empower others. For those who make the transition from participatory politics to electoral politics, their goal is not to become career politicians, but to get elected and focus on making changes to improve the quality of life in their communities.

Limits of Study

Studies involving minority populations as the majority may not be generalizable. More studies on women in local politics would have to be done throughout the population. Studies of border populations as well as other U.S. geographical areas where the minority are the majority of the population may yield varying results according to the region. This study concentrated on local politics within one county in Texas. Extensive studies may show different findings. However, the literature combined with the data collected in this study reveal that women continue to be the main caretakers of family and household which presents a major challenge for public-sphere involvement generally.

Suggestions for Future Research

The focus of this study was limited to Mexican American women involved in local politics in Hidalgo County, Texas. Further research could be expanded to include Mexican American women politicians in the entire Lower Rio Grande Valley area which would include the counties of Starr, Willacy, and Cameron in addition to Hidalgo County. The thrust of the questions should be modified to focus more on the experiences and advice from those who have campaigned for public office. This would benefit women who are considering running for office and those who play key roles in her campaign. As more women step forward into the public arena, practical advice from those with public experience is invaluable.

In order for women to achieve public office, other than being appointed, they must campaign as a candidate. There are three areas within a campaign that could be developed in future studies for women in public politics. The first would focus on the public experiences of women who have actually run for office. The long-term public

office holders in this study were more likely to share stories about their experiences on the campaign trail and while holding office. Stories are significant to learning about the public's expectations of women candidates as well as the lessons they learned from their mistakes. The responses would be measured for similarities of experiences. The research question could relate to whether or not women share similar public experiences while campaigning.

The second area of potential development would be how the participants' personal lives are affected over the course of the campaign season. A candidate with a husband and children may find it nearly impossible to meet all the expectations of her personal life and her public life. One of the greatest challenges during the campaign is spending quality time with loved ones. It is not easy to strike a balance between home life and public life during the campaign as almost each day revolves around the activities and commitments of the political candidate. The rigors of the campaign can easily consume the candidate both physically and emotionally. The research question here could relate to how women candidates balance public life and private life.

Campaign finance is highly significant in the success of a campaign. This area of a study would concentrate on how a woman finances her campaign. A candidate hopes to break even at the end of the campaign and not be strapped with campaign debt. Another consideration is whether she should use her personal savings to help finance the campaign. Women candidates cannot be hesitant when asking for money. However, they may find that women supporters are more comfortable in giving their time to the campaign than giving their money. The research question could focus on how a candidate finances her campaign.

The political activities of women merit further research. Women are involved in politics at various levels, both formally and informally, and their experiences should be included in scholarly studies. Their involvement shapes the quality of life and potential opportunities for citizens in the communities where they are politically active. These women contribute significantly to the democratic system of government and believe in the process. The women interviewed in Hidalgo County, Texas, constituted only part of the women involved in politics in the county. There are great opportunities awaiting researchers interested in studying women in politics.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) What prompted you to get involved in politics?
- 2) What does the term “public politics” mean to you?
- 3) Explain the difference between public politics and private politics. Where would you draw the boundary?
- 4) How would you define “political power”?
- 5) How would you define “political empowerment”?
- 6) What does it mean to you to be a woman involved in politics?
- 7) What does it mean to you to be a Mexican-American woman involved in politics?
- 8) What is the role of a *politiquera*?
- 9) How do women influence political participation?

Locally?
Statewide?
Nationally?

- 10) How do you know when you have, or exert, political influence?
- 11) How significant is *pachanga politics* to a woman’s political campaign?

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Lupe Aboud, Member, Mujeres Unidas Board of Directors, and Court Coordinator of the 139th State District Court. Personal interview, McAllen, Texas, May 1, 1997.

Hilda Adame, Mayor of Donna, Texas. Personal interview, Donna, Texas, June 19, 1997.

Micaela Alvarez, Attorney at Law and first female judge appointed to the 139th State District Court. Personal interview, McAllen, Texas, March 5, 1997.

Hermila Anzaldúa, Retired. Licensed Master Level Social Worker and former staff member for U.S. Congressman Lloyd Bentsen. Personal interview, McAllen, Texas, September 23, 1997.

Ramona Barrón, Parental Involvement Specialist, RGV Texas Migrant Council, and former candidate for Alamo City Commissioner. Personal interview, Alamo, Texas, March 12, 1997.

Carmen Castillo, Field Director for Leticia Hinojosa's 1996 campaign for judge of the 139th State District Court. Personal interview, McAllen, Texas, September 24, 1997.

Norma Davis de la Fuente, Mission City Council Member; Mayor Protem; and Migrant Services Coordinator, Mission Consolidated Independent School District, Mission, Texas. Personal interview, Mission, Texas, October 30, 1996.

Ofelia de los Santos, Edinburg City Commissioner, Mayor Protem, and Attorney at Law. Personal interview, Edinburg, Texas, October 31, 1996.

Ruby Delgado, Political Consultant. Personal interview, McAllen, Texas, March 7, 1997.

Mary Lou Duque, Precinct One Chairperson, and Sylvia Handy's campaign manager. Personal interview, Weslaco, Texas, May 1, 1997.

Aida Salinas Flores, Mediator and Attorney at Law, Mission, Texas; and former and current candidate for judge of the 206th State District Court. Personal interview, Mission, Texas, October 18, 1996.

Norma Garcia, Hidalgo County Treasurer. Personal interview, Edinburg, Texas, March 10, 1997.

Alma Garza, Assistant District Attorney, Hidalgo County. Personal interview, Edinburg, Texas, March 25, 1997.

Pauline Gonzalez, Hidalgo County District Clerk. Personal interview, Edinburg, Texas, March 11, 1997.

Sylvia Handy, President of Donna School Board, and newly elected Hidalgo County Commissioner, Precinct One. Personal interview, Edinburg, Texas, November 14, 1996.

Alida Hernandez, Vice-Chairperson, Hidalgo County Republican Party; Co-Owner and President of AAA Personnel Agency, Incorporated, McAllen, Texas. Personal interview, McAllen, Texas, October 25, 1996.

Leticia Hinojosa, Judge of the 139th State District Court. Personal interview, Edinburg, Texas, March 25, 1997.

Maria Leal, Member of Mission Consolidated Independent School District School Board of Directors. Personal interview, Mission, Texas, October 25, 1996.

Ninfa Ochoa-Krueger, Border Association for Refugees from Central America (BARCA). Personal interview, McAllen, Texas, March 26, 1997.

Mari Zamora Pulido, Field Marketing Specialist, Texas General Land Office; former candidate for Edinburg Independent School District Board of Directors; Campaign Manager for Eloy Pulido, Hidalgo County Recorder. Personal interview, McAllen, Texas, March 5, 1997.

Sandra Rodriguez, Law Enforcement Teacher, Mission Consolidated Independent School District. Campaign committee member for Rose Reyna Guerra, candidate for judge of the 206th State District Court. Personal interview, McAllen, Texas, June 12, 1997.

Dora Saavedra, Assistant Professor, The University of Texas - Pan American; Vice President, McAllen Independent School District; Member, South Texas Community College Board of Directors. Personal interview, Edinburg, Texas, March 10, 1997.

Rosa Treviño, Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2, Place 2, Pharr, Texas. Personal interview, Pharr, Texas, June 23, 1997.

Juanita Valdez-Cox, Coordinator, United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO. Personal interview, San Juan, Texas, November 22, 1996.

VITA

Linda Buxton was born and raised in Union County, Iowa, and received an Associate of Arts degree from Southwestern Community College in Creston, Iowa, in May of 1986. Eight years later in December of 1994, Buxton graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, majoring in communication studies. Upon being accepted to The University of Texas – Pan American, Buxton moved to south Texas and began graduate studies in speech communication in August of 1995. She was awarded a Master of Arts Degree in May of 1997 and continues to teach entry-level college courses in communication fundamentals. Buxton has sojourned in Mexico where she studied Spanish and tutored business professionals in English.

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