

University of Texas at San Antonio Archives and Special Collections

MS 317. Archives for Research on Women and Gender Oral History Project

Graciela Sanchez Transcript, June 16, 1997

Tori Beckman-Wilson: This is Tori Beckman-Wilson, it's June sixteenth, nineteen ninety-seven, and I am at Esperanza talking to Graciela Sanchez.

Graciela Sanchez: So you want to try to go back years ago to Yale.

TBW: Yes. The main thing I was thinking about, as I was listening to the tape, as I was transcribing the tape, I'm thinking what kind of a different, a whole different state of affairs that must have been. Coming from such a strong family background, coming from such a strong feeling of neighborhood, cultural identification and all the sudden, there you are at Yale. How did that affect you?

GS: There are a few factors. One, that strong family also traveled a lot, so I was exposed and that just becomes another experience. So I think, early on, Yale had a program, I'm not sure if it still does, but we were sent as people of color. Some were selected to go to an orientation a week or two before, so that allowed for those individuals to be ahead of everybody else, be oriented to the school and to connect with other kids that were also coming from similar backgrounds. And so, it was already interesting enough to see the middle class Chicana that came out of the L.A. suburbs who's now an important person as well, in her own right, but not seeing those differences within Chicanos and finding out about Puerto Riqueños (sp?) and other Latinos and people of color and really being in for the first time with a whole bunch of African-Americans. Because, again, San Antonio has no African-American presence, I mean, seven percent, but it's small. So that helped connect me to that environment and it was for me, I don't remember Yale when I went there as a twelve-year-old to visit my brother's professors. So it was kind of—the architectural design, it was amazing, it was profound. It was exciting there for me. I think other people have probably gone there and been scared by it, but for me, it was positive on that level. I

quickly connected to friends, again connecting with the folks I met earlier in this programs, and also making connections with this roommate that was from Park Avenue, who talked a lot, had lots of money and the other roommate who's dad had worked in the Johnson administration and then the others. So all those differences, I didn't know how to be scared about them, I think now as a whole different person reflecting back, I think I get intimidated more by those differences more than at that moment. At that moment, it was exciting, 'Oh my God, I know blah blah.' So it was good and I was able to keep both sets of friends, but they were definitely separate. And coming from San Antonio, we were all so—again, this is a town that negates somehow the cultural differences between us, it's also apparent that at the same time, we're about trying to bridge communities and build communities. So there was the Chicano group at Yale. Yale also, historically was the first college on the east coast, in the Ivy League, to accept Chicanos, I think. In sixty-eight or something like that. And they were the big school of the Ivy Leagues to go out and recruit a lot more, so did Harvard and Princeton and all of those, but I think Yale seems to do more financially. So that strong MEChA presence, Movimiento Estudiante Chicano Aztlan, was there and on some level I was involved with them the first semester peripherally. But by the second semester, I was quite more involved. Again, to be a Chicana in San Antonio was negative. So I had to get beyond that and be able to—and by the second semester of my freshman year, I understood it. Freshman year, the first semester was the first time I understood like, what we hadn't been taught in our schools, and I think it was a shock. I didn't know how to balance again, the social world, political world and study world. I didn't have any of the skills that all these other kids that had gone to private schools, and a lot of these kids went to private schools. So I was working harder than anybody else, I was the only one in my dorm area that was also having to do work study, where everybody else didn't have to do that, and I think that first semester I didn't really internalize that until later. So again, I'm able to survive, but that's the first time in my life I get Bs and Cs. I got As all the time, at least from seventh grade through twelfth grade, I didn't get Bs and Cs, I only got As. It was a matter of A minus or A plus

and A. It was hard, because again, this also about what does that mean in terms of the West Side, and who I favored, was the challenge for me as a student. But regardless, the first semester I get Bs and Cs, and the second semester I learned how to conquer that. It's like, O.K., this is what it means: I can't work forty hour weeks and also study and also do all this stuff. So I found myself and I got As and Bs the second semester, and I was involved with MEChA and I was starting to connect politically, that way. I think being away two thousand miles, or whatever the distance, allowed me to recognize more about who I was as a Chicana, as a Latina, which was good. I was definitely missing the tortillas and all that stuff, but I was also missing that cultural connection with community, and there, definitely people are about themselves and for themselves. I was dealing with that sort of culture shock, and I remember in sophomore or junior year, I wrote an article talking about something, and my professor in psychology was like, "Come to our house, visit with us. Are you O.K.?" I never even took her up on it. I felt very awkward because I also thought she thought I was going crazy, that it was—talking about altruism, and whatever, and I just felt I was talking about it in terms of class and education and how working class and lower class people tended to be more accepting and loving and altruistic than those who have been more educated. It was a fake paper, a psychological paper, I had to make it all up. So it just, for this professor, she read more into it. It probably was right, I was struggling with those differences that I didn't understand why they happened. And I still see it, just in general in society and wonder about it. But by sophomore year, I'm doing fine, very involved, got super-involved in MEChA. Went from treasurer to vice-president to chair of this little MEChA organization over there. By my junior year, senior year, this is eighty-one, eighty-two, the lesbian and gay community started to organize at all of the Ivy League, probably at all college campuses, and Yale has it's first lesbian gay whatever. I'm not identifying at that moment, but I'm definitely pushing the Chicano group to accept the lesbian gay concept within MEChA. There was homophobia within that group.

TBW: Sounds like, at that point, you're becoming more politically aware and involved.

GS: Yeah. And again, for whatever it's worth, each class has about eight to ten books that you have to read from, and I think I kept comparing myself to students that maybe have attended—I mean, it was many more papers, many more books and that. But I was allowed to read a very Marxist analysis on education and the school system and then something down the middle and then be able to, on my own, say 'Oh, this is the one I connect to.' So consequently, yeah, I developed my thinking with a little more of a basis. And that was an active sort of, student community. As a college, it's very undergraduate based, where as, Harvard, say, is more graduate based and the whole thing. So that was good. And I wouldn't have known the difference. So for whatever reason, I went to the right school, in my opinion. So then got involved with apartheid, which was a big thing then, Central American crisis was going on, the wars over there, so I got involved with that, as well. I became, suddenly I wasn't as naïve in thinking that I'd like to come back and be mayor of San Antonio to resolve—it was now quite the opposite, I didn't want to become the mayor of San Antonio because of what politicians become and who they represent. So, the good experience, again, is even traveling far away and connecting with other students. I think I would like to have been able to go back with all the knowledge I have now to be able to go to the same places and see how I would have been able to do things. Would I have been able to deal with it? Was I so naïve and trusting that I was able to survive that way? Because now—was I—in freshman year I was going with my other rich friends as well, going to debutante parties that I never went to before. The Park Avenue roommate got to come out, so she came out at this, what's the name of the hotel? One of the big hotels in New York. Dancing with ambassadors sons and whatever.

TBW: What was that like? How did you feel while you were there?

GS: Well, for me, it was more of an experience. I couldn't define it maybe as class differences, but I was definitely knowing that I was—it's part of the experience, so I'll just deal with it. I don't think other Chicanos were—maybe they were just smarter, maybe I was kind of really naïve and so just, for whatever reason, I did take that on as an experience and didn't stop myself. I didn't know that I might

feel like little Cinderella or anything, thinking, ‘Hmm, I might not be as well-dressed or anything.’ It was the first time driving in limos, it was all those sorts of things, because that’s who my roommates were, and at the same time, I was the nice little Chicanita because I had five other siblings, I was the favorite roommate. Everybody wanted to room with me because I didn’t have all these—I never had my own room. So I still didn’t have my own room. They all had their own rooms and then they had to share, and they all had their idiosyncracies, which nobody else could handle, and I could handle everybody’s idiosyncracies, so everybody wanted me to room with them and everybody wanted me to stay with them in sophomore and junior years. But they didn’t want to live with each other. I think those were things that helped me caused me—and again, why I was invited to places that other folks weren’t. At the same time, I think it was junior year, that same rich roommate that took me all these other places, in junior year, the national laws changed and there was less monies coming through so that affected everything. At Yale, you have to pay x amount before you started taking classes. So all of the sudden, I saw all the people of color at the registrars office or whatever, having to fight to get into classes. And I knew then, there are only brown or black or Asian people waiting in this line. Where are the white kids? And if you weren’t registered, then you weren’t allowed to eat. Mainly it was about not eating. Then suddenly, I could go into classes and keep up with this intensity of falling behind, and where was I going to eat and that sort of thing. My roommates tried to sneak me in, but I had to call my mom and say, “Mom, the money hasn’t been released by the U.S. government, so I know you don’t have five thousand dollars that you could just write a check, but is there a way you could find money for me?” So my mom is working on this end to try to find some emergency funds, but then I have these roommates who are really rich. And it’s like, “Can you lend me money?” And it’s like, “No, I can’t lend you money because that’s the source of our friendship or whatever. That’s what my parents say.” It’s like, so now, where I would have handed over five thousand dollars if I had it, and I’d done it, when I had that money given to friends and not worry that they’ll ever come to me, because that’s the way I’ve been raised. And this

other person, who lives on Park Avenue, and her parents couldn't share that money. So I could have been dropped. Little things like that happened that were different. What I'm doing here in this space is trying to teach Chicanos about being Chicanos, as well as about women and queer and all that sort of stuff. And running into the professors who I wish I could have had as an undergraduate. I didn't have any Chicano professors, or one professor per year, because they weren't there. The students were there at a larger number than the professors were, and if they were there, they weren't full-time and they weren't, they just might have come in to teach classes. And we did find ourselves trying to create those classes by bringing in other professors from New Jersey or wherever they were to create the classes. There weren't enough, and I wonder, again, how much more—because I see—where would I have been if they hadn't been surrounding me? I never thought about being a professor. But I see a lot of Chicanos who are progressive now, they seem to be going on to higher ed and teaching so they can affect more kids. So I don't know about that. We should stop so we can go to the next one, right?

TBW: It's O.K. Well, I am curious about, while you were there and becoming more active within MEChA, was that part of what guided you toward where you are now?

You said you had thoughts of becoming a mayor at one point, or something like that, and so you've completely changed your mind.

GS: I think, except for Maria Berriozabal, and maybe Henry B. Gonzalez, I haven't seen any progressive Chicano politicians coming from this community, from most communities. Because it's about who's funding you, campaigns, all that. And I think as a MEChista, in my sophomore year and junior year, probably seemed that when I had the role of being the chair of MEChA and trying to take care of all the different factions and political thinking, and found myself having to be the diplomat and trying to work things out. What I also recognized was that I was having to give in more than probably what my lefty thinking was, and I think, at some point, I said, 'I'm not going to run for any office, this is really hard.' And yet, here's the contradiction, I'm still the head of this organization. It's not an elected

official, but it's definitely how far can I go to push an agenda for the organization and to what extent, at what cost.

TBW: And you're still working as a diplomat, I'm sure. You have to work between so many different groups that want to use this space and share the resources.

GS: And I get attacked for being very direct and very opinionated and whatever. And people not even recognizing all that I do, you know? I know the twenty-two year old that I was when I came back from college and challenging my parents all the time, being the typical twenty-two year old. Saying, you're wrong, you're wrong. I'm right. I studied, I know exactly what it is. And not having those same conversations with my parents, finding that we disagree about some stuff, but also being able to say stuff and move on towards a—I think I've learned a little bit of those skills. And they never stopped having those conversations with me, because they could have also said, "Get the hell out of here." And I remember Mexico, and that I understood the whole relationship between the U.S. and Mexico and that Mexico had just been another country that had been colonized by the U.S. government and they were just—where my dad would say, "You know, the PRI government isn't all that good." I was like, "Oh, no. PRI was bad, but that was all in relation, it couldn't be as bad as the U.S. government." And he'd say, "Oh, the PRI is bad, and there's all these other things." But my dad who was born and raised in Mexico, at least for the first thirteen years of life, I would challenge him. He was wrong. So, no, I don't think that at all. I think, though, as an opinionated woman of color, keep on challenging too many people in this community that don't want to hear that, and think, that's why we find ourselves in this crazy sort of situation, an institution that I think a lot of people want and desire in this space, but at the same time, 'as long as she doesn't talk too much.' Or as long as she doesn't challenge me. She can challenge that group, she can challenge the white people about their racism, but don't challenge me as a Mexicano man about my sexism. You can challenge straight people about their homophobia, but don't

challenge us about our racism. It's always as long as it's about challenging everybody else. And you speak for us, because we don't want to speak.

TBW: Do you find it hard to bridge all those differences?

GS: You see, for me, it's all those parts of me, and everybody else doesn't always have those realities. Is it fair? My hope is that straight people are definitely speaking up for queer people, and white people are speaking up for people of color, and rich people for poor people. I've seen some of that happen, but I think still that falls on a few shoulders and that becomes a little harder. My role, if you talk about future for me or Esperanza, is that until I can get that educational component that's really working hard so that we're really creating more of—not just Graciela doing it, it's lots of, hopefully not Gracielas, but people with other names of all colors that are saying the same thing and somewhere along the line, that we're affecting the larger city of San Antonio and the larger south Texas and all these other places. It's really frustrating to see that we're still being—that the challenges are still there. Sometimes it's hard to see have we had an effect in this town? And sometimes people say, “Well, yeah, if you weren't having an effect, then you wouldn't be under attack by the conservative forces in this community. You did Mujercanto six or seven years ago, and now lots of other organizations in the art world are considering doing women or bringing back the same women you brought in because they were so successful.” So maybe Mujercanto might not be as popular as it once was, but that's because we might have had an effect, and we hope that's something that we're doing, or it could be just that people aren't excited, want different programs all the time. The other way, we have had some sort of effect.

TBW: I think so. Do you feel like you have?

GS: I think so. I mean, in nineteen ninety, having been at the Esperanza probably two years, I remember myself and my partner would go often to Austin to hang with, say with Latina lesbians in Austin to get some sort of you're good, there's some sanity, you know. We were isolated, we felt isolated in San Antonio. That's why we had to go to Austin. And I would say that now, seven years

later from that moment, I don't ever go to Austin to find that anymore, I find it here. So that means that those friends or those acquaintances have become friends but have been challenged, or we challenged each other so that there's direct and honest communication but they step up to bat for me and conversely as well. People say that I must hate white men, ultimately, and white straight men more than anybody else, because everything that I represent is the antithesis to the white angry man or whatever. But some really close allies are white gay men, I don't know too many white men, because they're challenged by the institution, but they exist there. And the last three checks that we had last week have come from white straight men. Usually it's women of color. But I think they're there and I think white lesbians have been affected, challenged also about not sitting on the fence. Do you take up the challenge? And they've met up with it. I think though, that I want to do more work—I don't want my greatest claim is that I supported and moved white people further along around dealing with their racism. And what about the people of color and their internalized racism and their connection around the other issues of class and gender and all that. I mean that's who the population is, so I think Esperanza's wanting to focus on that. So, yeah, we're challenging our own selves. When we had the elections, we had these two horrible candidates that would love to be mayor, and we have each of these two bad choices and it's like—I was really afraid of Kay Turner. I knew that she ultimately was going to take all the money that we got, money that we got from the city of San Antonio. She was going to take that away, because one of her right hand men was Staley (sp?) who had been working the last three years to defund us and destabilize us. So I knew that if Kay Turner won, that was it. And Peak had never even responded to any of our pleas in the last four years he had been in office, so he wasn't much more. It was very depressing that at some other level, it was like, if we get it, we deserve it, right? Nobody deserves horrible things happening, but maybe it was going to wake up the populous. Now again, we have two years to work with whatever we have. And Kay Turner was able to reach the Chicano community in this town. And what does that mean? That a white woman understands what it is that poor people want,

and that, again, in our internalized racism, all the folks running as Chicano or as Hispanics, elected officials are ready to not speak of themselves as Latinos or about their communities and the suffering and what it is and call it what it is?

TBW: What did you make of Torralvez' showing? I was surprised, frankly.

GS: She didn't speak. I think, again, she was able to garner early on a lot of support. But she never—I think I had to listen to one or two Spanish radio commercials to hear her really speak from the heart, but I never heard those same commercials on the radio in English. And maybe that's where you can put the money because that's cheaper ads, but she never got the message out. Even if you're Chicano, you still listen to the English language TV and radio much more than you do to Spanish. And older people are the ones that are going to go out and vote, but it's like, why do we have to be closeted about being Latinos in this community? And that's what we are. So she focused on the middle class Hispanic and progressive whites to support her and you can get a lot of people to give you money, but if those people aren't going to walk door to door for you and put up signs and call people, you've lost. And she wasn't able to do that. I don't think we actually—were considering wanting to talk to her to do some more analysis on it. She took the same people working with Berriozabal's campaign to work on her campaign, the same people. I don't know if they did some analysis of what happened to Berriozabal's campaign that they could have learned from and moved forward, but I'm sorry. These are people—Latina women my age who are running their campaigns who weren't ever at the same community-based meetings. So they're not connected, so people don't trust them. I think Torralva could have, if she would have challenged herself a little bit more, might have been able to connect. I had my dad and Michael Marinas, one of my board member's mom and all these other people connected to us saying, "Mm, I don't know about Torralva" because they only saw her in her relationship to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The chamber has never supported us, they're not connected to us, they're only

about money and making more money for themselves. Individuals. So you don't feel connected, but she was also a school teacher, but we didn't hear those stories.

TBW: Not much. There didn't seem like a lot to judge. She didn't give us much to think about. So after so many years here, what are you planning to do? What are you planning to do later in life? I don't want to imply that you're ready to go or anything.

GS: For a long time people keep on saying, "Well, what are you going to do? When are you going to go back, when are you going to make films again, when are you going to do something important?" Or, "You used to be an artist and now you're just a [unintelligible word]." Maybe this is my creation. This is fine. It's like, "Oh, yeah, but it's not a real piece of art." I don't know, I think it could be considered art. I haven't considered anything recently, or even in the past. I think I have considered, will I be here for the next sixty years? Well, I know Miles Horton from Highlander Center which brought us all the civil rights and the SDS and all that, he was there for sixty years. Hey, and he's well-respected and everybody loves him and he's a white man, as well, but there are books written about him. I wonder, though, if they challenged him where he was going after twenty years, or even five years. At the same time, do I have to be the constant person here? The idea is, the fact that I have four staff people now is important and how to share all that responsibility among them. Trying to make sure that we have some training on human rights education, because Esperanza's been selected as a site organization to teach human rights education in relationship to the fiftieth anniversary of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. So do I go, do I send Jennifer, or who do I send? Hopefully they'll help me make that decision, but I know that I can't with my responsibilities, be the person to do that.

TBW: That's kind of what's driving this question, not any idea that you should do one thing or another, believe me, it's more a question of, I would imagine that running an organization like this, having so much responsibility, being called upon to be such a diplomat between all the different groups that that must be a load.

GS: Yeah. But it's more woman's tendency to share responsibility and less ego than the men around us. I think I've—if I wanted to, if my ego really pushed me, my name would have been in the paper a lot more and I could have just—I know the resources to have created me in a different way, I also know I could have been a millionaire early on in life. But I know what it takes to do that, to have to—and I wasn't willing to do that. I think everytime the newspaper calls and says, “Graciela, here's the issue, what do you think about it?” And I tell them, “Here's what I think you should do. I think you should call five other people.” “Yeah, but that's going to take too much time.” “Well, you know.” [end of side one] [beginning of side two] So, is it good or is it bad? In the lesbian gay community, which I think Esperanza has helped to promote a progressive lesbian gay community in this town, what we were trying to do is to avoid the one figure, the one person that was going to represent the lesbian gay community. I think we were successful early on, except we still can't control everything out there. We went before the Express-News, we went before the San Antonio Light and they said, “Give us names.” So we would give them twenty names, “Here's somebody on health, here's somebody on AIDS, here's somebody on parents and everything.” “No, we want one person.” “No, we're not going to give you that one person.” But eight years later, five years later, there is that person, the white man who has the ego, who says, “I'm the person.” And that's what's happening right now. There's that white gay man who's been desiring that, or five or six white gay men who have been desiring that, and that's what we got now, he's the person who gets quoted all the time. And it pisses us all off. Because politically, he doesn't represent our viewpoints.

TBW: That would be like appointing a spokesman for all women. Like they're some monolithic group.

GS: But the newspaper folks want that, they've always wanted that. So should we have been smarter and thought, ‘O.K.’ In retrospect, should we have given them their five people, because then they would have gone back—but at the same time, I think we make things a little more difficult when we go in and talk to the Express-News and say, “You're not only homophobic, you are racist and sexist and classist.”

It's like, "You came to talk to us as gay people, we don't care about the races." "No, you have to be challenged." Again, they were just interested in very singular issues specific and how they react to that. And so we tried that, and they didn't want to do that. So when they call me up, I'm going to give them this other analysis, and they don't want that analysis, they want one sentence that says something.

TBW: They don't want to call or have the benefit of any of your other connections with anybody else, your identity, really.

GS: So even though now, I still continue to challenge them, I say, "Call these other people." But it's easier to go to them, Castor because Dan's going to give the information they want. "Yes, we commit suicide a lot. Yes, we're whatever it is."

TBW: That must be frustrating to you to see the gay community portrayed as this monolithic group of people who all think the same way, simply because they're gay. That makes no sense. What that what you were trying to accomplish, speaking to the Express-News?

GS: I think speaking to anybody. And organizing within the queer community, they also couldn't think that way, either. Especially in a town which is sixty percent Latino. That there, the majority of queer people in this community were going to be Latinos. So sixty percent of that ten percent, if you want to use that, was going to be Latino. Then that proportion was going to be more poor and working class than the rest, so those voices needed to be heard and then those voices also needed to recognize all the other issues. Because they were affected by those issues. I don't think institutionally, Esperanza has had the resources to do that part of it, so I'm not killing myself by saying, "We could have done it if we just had..." We know what we have to do, but we just don't have the resources to do all that stuff. I just, Friday got a message from the Ms. Foundation that was trying to do this, we were selected to apply for this democracy, I don't know the title, but about how the right wing was attacking and how we had to fight the right wing, and we were challenging that, too. The right wing doesn't have to be seen as the Neo-Nazis or whatever, let's talk about the stuff that's going on closer to home. So we got a second

interview, but ultimately we got turned down, so again, what that grant was to do was more intense educational piece. Popular education whatever that component is that brings people together for a long period of time so they can talk about all these issues. We keep getting turned down all the time. So funders aren't at the same place that grass-roots based organizations are and their vision of what the right wing is is different than mine. We're here, doing the work, and they're not, so that's just the content. It's not just typical of Esperanza, it's other organizations finding themselves in that, or they're only going to give to nationally-based organizations. What defines national? Somebody who sits and works with a staff of two in Washington, D.C., so they're national, because they're in Washington D.C.? Are you regional because you say you're working in Texas, but really you're only working in San Antonio? I think San Antonio has a lot to do. So, yeah, it's been difficult to see that we're trying to move a community to a certain place, and we have always been pushing against this and fighting this all the time. Is it any more different? I don't know that there have been equal to influence, maybe on some level the Latino community has been influenced a little bit more by our presence. Because people working in the Latino community in those non-profit organizations come from a history of civil rights work. So some of the players are still around from the sixties, some of them aren't, but especially those who are around, even though they're in their fifties, sixties and seventies, can make those leaps again, about issues. It may be hard for them to deal with issues around homophobia, and they may just see me as Graciela the lesbian, which is hard for me, because that's not all I am, and I'm not here to represent Chicana lesbians in this community, I'm here to represent all Latinos here, but you need to talk about all these other—you need to look at Latino organizing in this community, a holistic vision, not just in relationship to poverty or homelessness. We can talk about poverty and homelessness around Latino gay men dying of AIDS who have no place to go, so let's incorporate this larger vision. So I think they've kind of moved a little bit further along than I can say the lesbian gay community, which is a younger, not in terms of age, but have not been politically involved as long as the Latinos have, who

might have history since the U.S. took over Mexico, or whatever, or when the Spaniards came in and invaded this continent, five hundred years. But they have a deeper sense than in the gay community, at least locally, hasn't been organizing for a really long time.

TBW: But I'm noticing a lot more, it seems on the surface, a lot more effort to organize the gay community in San Antonio.

GS: I don't know that that's actually what's happening. I think individuals with egos are getting involved a lot more, and we've, the larger national lesbian gay organizing has filtered down to folks in the media who are more sensitive and want to go ahead and say, "Well, they're talking about this in the New York Times or CNN so we want to find out what that case in Colorado is affecting local folks." Well, again, we've done some of that work so they know how to contact us. But there are new people who are...

TBW: Stepping up, basically.

GS: And they're all men, and they're white and they're all middle class, and that sort of stuff. And they're not interested in saying "I'm sorry, I'm Dan Castor, but I won't speak this time. Why don't you talk to some Latina women, because they make up the majority of the group of voices in this town." No, he's not. He's more interested in—and it's Ted Sweitzer (sp?) and it's the professor at Trinity University who's a rabid Republican and wants to make sure that that conservative voice comes out. It's a very hateful group of people who are getting involved and it comes—when you talk about how does a national trend affect us, it's similar to the national. I see in nineteen ninety-four when Newt Gingrich gets elected and there's all this very conservative win in the elections, it has an effect on local stuff, because you know you can be racist more overtly than you were ten years ago and that wasn't just Newt, it was Reagan, it's all the work that's been going on for a long time. And again, we've internalized this. I'm an affirmative action baby. Well, I'm not going to say that, because then people are going to think that I'm not as smart as them and I got in because I was just a little quota. But no, I think I'm smart. I

think I work as hard. But you know, the doors were only opened because there were laws that were changed that allowed us to get in, and now they've closed back down again. The lesbian gay conservative men have been attacking the Esperanza and other groups that have this progressive vision, and you look very specifically at their written word, as well as what they pontificate in any communal setting, that we're reverse racists. And they're looking for the white man to sit on certain boards. So they're sounding just like Newt, as least since ninety-four. And it's O.K. So it's just a reflection of what's happening nationally. If you read the gay public books that have come out from all these new leaders, they're challenging on the same level. So the local folks say, "Well, blah blah said that in this book, so I agree with it." And who cares that [unintelligible name] said blah blah, of course she's a woman of color, such and such says this, he's a white man, so now they have something to allow them to speak as racists and sexists. Because that's what they are. I am now scared, I mean, I was on an airplane yesterday coming back from upstate New York, and they were all crowded, the airplanes were crowded. So I either found myself sitting next to people I didn't know, but I saw a white man that reminded me of Ted Sweitzer or Glenn Staley (sp?) I was afraid. I was afraid for my life. I can't see white men in the same way that I used to. Because before, I trusted everybody, and now I am scared of certain people. So then you wonder, this is how racism works. You've been told all your life that black people are scary and whatever, you see a black man and you get scared. I have had to deal with what I've always dealt with. All these other people have had charming relationships with them, and now I fear for my life to be sitting next to someone. I don't want to sit next to that person, but I can't do anything, I just have to know that it's not that person.

TBW: What happened? Was there a specific incident?

GS: Well, these gay men at the Witte Museum, again, they are fighting the organization for what we represent. I don't know how much I've told you, that's why I'm even afraid to say stuff. Like in nineteen ninety-three we had an art show at the old space, where we were eventually kicked out, but a

Chicana lesbian does a piece, an installation called, I don't know what the name of it was, but some gay men come in and photograph the art show. That's why nowadays, if you look downstairs, we say, no photographs will be allowed unless you ask for permission, because at that moment, they could go in and take photos. Like they've done with all the other erotic gay stuff that's come out with Maplethorpe and all these. They took a photo of an excerpt of this woman's piece and it talks about her dream, she has a dream sequence. Her name is Ana Fernandez, she's a student at UTSA. She talks about her relationship with her mom in one of these things and her relationship with—mainly it's her relationship with her mom. In all these little diary extracts and the photographs behind the written word and those are her photographs that she's taken. And one is about a dream that she's had, where Kay Bailey Hutchison, senator of the state of Texas, is in her dream, and she's fucking her. And so that's enough. So what a gay man did was to photograph it, and take that and excerpt just the stuff that is what they would consider pornographic and say, "We can not fund the Esperanza, because they're promoting pornography." So it's not a conservative religious right wing, John Hagee (sp?) who comes into our space that takes that photograph, it is a gay man who is so hateful and spiteful of the fact that this organization is run by women and women of color, particularly, and lesbians. They don't like that we have this power, I think.

TBW: So they deliberately set out to...

GS: So they have spent, since nineteen ninety-three to present, to defund us. And two years ago, they helped to defund us, and it was about the pornography that we were promoting in our programming. So that was the first one, and then we showed 'Ninth Grade Kisses,' which we co-sponsored with another [unintelligible]. 'Ninth Grade Kisses' by Barbara Hammer, who's a well-known filmmaker, if not the best-known lesbian filmmaker, white lesbian filmmaker in the country. And there's a lot of erotica, but when the gay men are there, they're stuck to the screen watching it, and I guess that my problem was that I saw the person who said it. It was Bob Blanchard, from Trinity University, professor of

communications who got up from his—no, who sat just a few seats from me, but was very open and blunt about his feelings, saying, “This is ugly, this is gross, this is lesbians. I hate lesbians.” Getting up from his chair, walking out, thinking he’s gone, but being blown away by his direct comments about how he felt about this lesbian sex scene, when I had seen him be silent around the gay men’s sex stuff. And he actually comes back when the gay men’s sex is going. It’s not even just about sex in this context. So then my problem was that I challenged—you can’t just get away with saying this and not get challenged. This is the same man who, when the UFW calls the Esperanza and asks can we go march with the union. And I say, “Sure, as long as you support the gay community’s organization.” Then Blanchard, again a professor, says, “What the fuck do grapes have to do with your issues?” And says it loudly for five or six people to hear. And I wasn’t there, but I hear it from other people, and it’s the same person. “What are they, gay grapes?” So that, ultimately is racist on some level, and misogynist, because the attacks from these gay men have also centered on women’s work. They haven’t attacked the gay men’s groups. The most recent one, was last year we had an art show that was around sexuality and gender. I don’t remember the name of the show, but it was Mexican and U.S. artists talking about gender. And so we had a Latina lesbian, Lara Aguilar (sp?) who’s been collected and is owned by the Stanford archives, who’s been at the Smithsonian, all over the place. Heavy woman. There’s a Cuban gay man who does, takes prints of very masculine men, kind of plays around with challenging heterosexism and all that. My interest was to take one of Lara Aguilar’s works and just kind of highlight it. But we decided there were only three artists, so we’d just do one photograph promoting each of the different artists. My curator Michael was concerned about the gay man’s stuff, because it was open and apparent, that that would be the one that would be attacked. Well, of course not. It wasn’t, because when it was sent to Roddy Stinson by the same conservative gay men, both Roddy and whoever gave him the information focused on the fat woman.

TBW: I remember that whole thing.

GS: It was the fat woman.

TBW: That's exactly what I thought. How sexist.

GS: Right. And he said, if it was a thirty-six, twenty-four, thirty-six nude, we'd be fine.

TBW: Nobody would ever have said a thing.

GS: He wouldn't have. And he said it. Roddy Stinson says we would have been fine. "It's six days before the Esperanza going to get funded, so why don't you call your city councilperson and try to challenge that." But beyond that, I speak, I was speaking at different places and being challenged. I go to the Witte to talk about the Holocaust and how it relates to current events, and they're there. Four of five of them, taking voracious notes and taping everything and photographing me. And if they could challenge me within those discussions, they did.

TBW: So you're seeing the same group, again and again. Well, no wonder. I'd be nervous, too.

GS: The same group. Except three of them, four years ago, and now I'm seeing fourteen of them. Because they played off of not only understanding and believing that they're under attack, like again, the Timothy McVeighs of this world, so they've gotten more of them, so there's not three anymore. People say, "Well, it's only Glenn Staley." I say, "No, it's not Glenn, because he's being supported by all these other people. And your silence is allowing him to grow stronger." So when, at first, it was just Glenn, Ted and Bob Blanchard, now it's those three plus Dan Castor, plus Monty, plus others. And now they have those two gay pride picnics, and the newspaper says it's just a feud between them and still gives promotion of the one event that happens, by the white men. Not the people of color event. So they've all played into it and it's even straight Latino women that write the articles that support, and I want to sit them down and say, "Look who the players are in this group, then look at the players in this group. Let's see about the issues that are being brought up."

TBW: It's all about who gets the play. That's telling.

GS: And this place has been, people have broken into—I was out of town and part of the concern was not to let everybody know that I was going to be out of town, because of safety considerations. It seems that while I'm gone, people feel more secure about being able to come and take and break and do things. So we kept it quiet. The staff knew that they were going to, whenever they were in the neighborhood, drive around, drive around. Check, make sure everything is locked. Because in the past three gay pride picnics, this place has been, windows have been broken, we get called at two o'clock in the morning and told the alarm's going off. And that happened for a long time, about two years, the alarm would just go off every month, at least two or three times a year. Sometimes two or three times in a week. So we have more security than we've ever had, but it also means that at two o'clock, or whatever time the phone rings, I'm scared. What does that mean? Is the place on fire? Did something get broken? Did we lose all our computers? Two or three years ago, Michael, who started coming into this space as a board member, did it more so because he saw two bras that were filled with feces where the two women on staff parked their cars. He tried to hide that from us, because he didn't want us to get scared, but eventually told us, and we were like, "You have to tell us. This is our lives, you can't hide that information." But it was like his role to say, "I am now going to be here, because at least if there's a man, they might think twice before." That was his rationale, and for whatever reason, we had a new staff person. But he's a board member. But all that sort of stuff was constant. When I went to speak at Trinity, these same guys were calling up saying, "Do not allow Graciela, she does not represent the gay community. She is not one of us. She's a communist and a tyrannical monster, she's this and this and this." And this is because Lisa Reitzes had offered me as the local person to speak around the arts. I don't know if she liked me or not, but when I came out, it was a day-long session and the other three people on the panel were professors. Did I fulfill my role? They could all talk from, pull out their syllabus and here I am, kind of... But weeks before, or even the week of, I'm getting, they're getting all these calls saying, "Do not allow this to happen. Do not let Graciela in. We are going to boycott if she

is going to be there.” And the day of , the day before, the eve of this event, we’re gathered together, all the speakers, and that’s the first time I hear from their staff. From the professors that they’ve gotten all these threatening calls, that they’ve beefed up security, that they’d never had security and now they’re going to have six security members there. And you know, so how does that make me feel on the day of the event? I’m freaked out. And there they are, with the tape recorders and the camera. And when the question and answer period begins, “Graciela, what do you think of this?” And then other people say, “Well, I can answer that.” “No, I want to know what Graciela thinks.” So there’s that constant, an eight-hour session and I’m the one being attacked. Then everything I said is pulled out of context and put in the gay press. “Graciela said,” and “Graciela continues to say,” “look how she’s attacking white men.” So that sort of stuff has been very hard on all of us, and now again, it’s just expanded to include any, SALGA (sp?) this feud is just the continuation of it, where they are being very deceitful. They were in front of the Sunken Gardens, I wasn’t in town but I heard it, there was this five or six men, as people walking in, “Don’t go in, they’re charging ten dollars. Boycott this picnic.” And that at their picnic they said, “The SALGA picnic is going to charge ten dollars.” And what was interesting, people did come and say, “Here’s your ten dollars.” And it’s like, “No, there’s no cover charge.” They said, “Well, they told us at yesterday’s picnic it was ten dollars.” Or “They just told us outside it was going to be ten dollars.”

TBW: And it didn’t stop anybody.

GS: It didn’t stop certain people, which is great, but from the community I was hearing that they were right outside, fifty feet or a hundred feet away, that they were telling lies. And when they actually walked in themselves, they were handing out fliers saying, “Boycott this picnic.” So that they’re having to be escorted by security guards, saying, “You can’t do this.” And again, these are the guys that called Budweiser and said, “You can not sell beer to SALGA because they’re not an official or real organization.” Budweiser, thank goodness for it’s capitalist sentiment says, “Fuck you, we don’t care

what you say, we're going to make money." But Budweiser told SALGA that this is what they're telling us about you all. They also called the masseuses saying, "SALGA's picnic is not happening, Budweiser pulled out." Budweiser didn't do that, but there were just continuous lies and deceit. So that's very direct, very hateful, very apparent and they don't care. So that's why I see those white men looking like that and I don't trust anybody and I'm very scared of that nowadays. And I think again, as a privileged light-skinned white woman I didn't have those same white people as a kid be ugly to me because I was a brown kid. So, this is that naïvete, that I wonder how I would have survived differently at Yale had I been that brown-skinned person and the reactions that those white-skinned people had of me, was I accepted more because I was a light-skinned Latina woman? Would I have been treated differently? But I do know I have a different perspective, and that's kind of scary, because you still want to be able to do the work you do.

TBW: Is that a first for you, to have those kind of worries?

GS: In the last three years, yes. I have been feeling very nervous. I had no problems sitting next to the black man next to me. You could see my body on this side next to this white man on my left side was a little harder. Or when I was with the women around me, we were all talking and chatting, just fine. But when they come, it's kind of scary, you don't feel safe anymore. That's based on again, the reality of being attacked for three, three and a half years and still the community not wanting to recognize and saying, "What did you do to him personally?" Because they've seen me being very—if we continued to talk and you said something, I would challenge you. They say, "If you weren't so angry, Graciela." And I say, "Just wait until I get angry."

TBW: It doesn't seem to be affecting you. Have you decided it won't?

GS: I don't think I have the time to do that, which again, is good or bad. We have one event after another. After the nine-day film festival, we had an art show and I was out of town, I had to go to New York Thursday and I helped to do all these interviews between that time with people I'm going to be

giving out money to. Then I have to come back, then going, and so there's one thing after another. I don't have time, I want that time, I think part of our staff meeting was how do we make sure that we continue to be human beings and take care of each other and not do...but recognizing that this is not just anyplace else you can work out, and these are the realities that are going to come out of it. And I think other activists, especially women activists in other communities say, "Take care of yourself." They send me information, "There are these retreats, I think they're looking for women of color in particular, apply, apply apply." I'm like, "I don't have time." So I think I would like that. I would actually like to have some time to spend to write about what's happened here, but I don't know when.

TBW: We're going to have to go on to another tape. I'll try to keep this brief. Especially keeping in mind what we just discussed about making one group of people out to be a monolithic, one-opinion, one-dimensional. It's not that way, I understand, but from your vantage point, all the different influences in your life that brought you to this place, how do you see the situation for people of color, how do you see the situation for gays and lesbians in this community? Is it improving, in your opinion? Are people starting to understand each other any more?

GS: I think, again, it's happening different ways. I think definitely, I see younger folks connecting to the queer stuff a lot more. I've got a twenty-three year old working on staff with me and she's straight, as far as I know. She's married, has a child and has no problems being right there with the other three of us who are lesbians and not saying, "I'm straight." And that makes me feel good. I've had so many forty-year-old women saying, "Don't try to make me that way." It's like this whole challenge. Or definitely saying, "I'm straight." That whole movement is to try to have straight people say, ¿Y que? So what if I am. Then you're going to have to deal with me as a lesbian. So it's nice to see that twenty-three-year-old never having, if she's being challenged, she's taking it somewhere else, but not bringing it up within the organization. So I see, again, youth doing it. I'm also seeing more youth, also, claiming they're bisexual [end of first tape] [beginning of second tape] So, I think that's happening. These last

few years have also been a lot of work done nationally around gay people, but again, who is it that's promoting the gay agenda on the national level? It's still the white people who are doing that, and you can see now that gays are probably in more TV shows and movies than Latinos and African-Americans are, and even just women as central figures or protagonists and seen in positive way. Because it's still white men who are making the movies and promoting them. It's very—I just saw that movie, that horrible movie, *Valor and Compassion* or whatever. I hated it. It felt like an old movie. Again, it was very white, very male and there was the Latino that comes in and he gets called the Chiquita Banana or whatever, and all the other gay men are in this upper-class grouping just laugh it off and nobody challenges them for being racist. And the audience loves it. And the men were there, and they hadn't been at the *Watermelon Woman*'s screening two days before, but there they were. And people laughed, everybody was happy. It was a good movie, if you read the newspaper. And that's it. So that's what continues to be promoted. And Ellen comes gay or lesbian, that's where she's at in terms of her political thinking, identifying. Fine, I mean it's good that she's done that and we were all watching this program, but they've already advanced it. You can see on some level the education and class differences because it is that very diverse grouping, but you're really hearing the voices of the white gay lesbian bisexual people. There are no bookstores that are Latino bookstores like there are lesbian gay bookstores. There are no black bookstores, except in certain pockets where there are enough people to support it. In this town, there is not a Latino bookstore, and I don't even know if you could find enough books, because they're not getting published or because, again, when you look at Chicanos by themselves, I think three percent of all Chicanos in this country have gone to some form of higher education. Based on that...

TBW: That's all? I didn't know that.

GS: That's all. Yes. And of those three percent, probably one percent have gone on to get doctors and all that. So once you get them through—Antonia Castañeda talks, a fifty-something woman of color Latina, is one of fifteen Chicanas in this town that are historians. Just one of fifteen. I know friends that

went to college with me, they were the only, the first students to be the political scientist graduate student at UCLA. Los Angeles. Maybe there are now two of those. If they're the trailblazers and doing that, and having to deal with the fact that they're under attack also, and their programs are under attack and are they going to spend their time working with youth, their students, helping them around because affirmative action is under attack and they're under attack. Or are they going to spend that time writing those books? Or spend that time working with community activists who support the work? So all of us are there. I sit on some national boards and I have to fight those national boards all the time because they want me to sit on six or seven different committees, because again, I fit the woman of color from Texas or San Antonio. I fit in too many categories. They need to fill their quotas and I say, "Wait a minute, you're asking me to sit on six, and you're only get to sit on one. And in the long run, I'm the one that looks bad because I'm not fulfilling my part as a board member to raise this money, to be here or sit on these committee meetings. Where's the money coming from? Either my pocket or my organization's pocket and I don't have an organization like that or my own financial status isn't great. Instead, I'm the one that looks bad in the long run because I'm not responsible." And I'm a very responsible person, so I hate that sort of thing. I just have stepped off that National Gay and Lesbian Task Force board. This was the progressive task force, organization, but I left feeling very...it wasn't positive, so I'm not going to go into that at all. It was tough because I find, on two or three occasions that as I've sat on those national boards, this is what kind of happens to me, and nobody wants to be challenged.

TBW: So you're representing so many different groups you're being pulled in six different directions.

GS: And people don't want to recognize that that's happening. People say, "Well, I'm busy." This is what happened with one of the task force board members, she was saying, we had a major discussion before I stepped off a year ago. She said, "Well, you're not coming to our nomination committee meetings." I said, "Well, I'm busy. I'm running this organization and I'm the executive director. You

can't just pull me away at noon every Monday for whatever, because I have to do other things." She said, "I'm busy, too." This is a woman who has inherited wealth. Who has a loft that's probably this size or even bigger in New York City. Who's never worked, her mama's paying all this stuff. And yes, she's busy, but it's based on her decisions of what project she wants to do at whatever moment in her life. So I have to challenge that, and she challenges me back and there's no way for me to, over an hour's time, besides getting pissed off or angry or crying. And in the end of the conversation, she thinks she's right, I think I'm right, because there's no long-term relationship that will be developed over the course of that conversation. That's how they feel. I'm not being responsible. And I'm very much a responsible person, so I don't like that pushed on me, people don't want to recognize these other things that are going on.

TBW: How long were you on the board?

GS: A couple of years.

TBW: And that's the National....

GS: The National Gay Lesbian Task Force. Kind of representing San Antonio, South Texas. But I was also there, I thought, representing grass-roots based organizations.

TBW: But then again, you're there in one organization, how many different groups are you representing?

GS: That's right. Well, the point was I think that their vision is, if you look at their board presently, it's also a lot of rich people sitting on the board. I've been going to their Creating Change Conference, which is their annual conference and they had a leadership club meeting, and it's constant, everybody who's a leadership club member has to pay twelve hundred dollars or more. One hundred dollars a month. I'd like to have some of that here in Esperanza and actually have a couple of people who give a hundred dollars a month under some other name. I had to be there as a board member and it was easy for one of the board members to say, "I'm going to give five thousand dollars, and this is my

commitment.” Somebody else says, “I’m going to match that five thousand dollars.” Boom. Somebody says, “I’m going to give twenty thousand dollars.” These are all board members. I’m like, twenty thousand dollars, that’s it, there’s no way. And I remember talking about that same other board member, who has inherited wealth, and also lives in New York City. We can have the same fundraiser thing, and she’s done a fundraiser where she gets a gay film and invites the filmmaker because she’s living in New York City and the filmmaker lives there and then she can charge a hundred bucks or whatever, and fill it up for three hundred seats and raise thirty or sixty thousand dollars. Because their budget was to raise sixty thousand dollars. I take that same film, show it here and charge ten dollars, and I can only raise three thousand dollars. So if I have to raise the same amount she has to raise, I have to have ten of those events. She only has to do one. That makes me work harder, don’t you understand? At that time, they were trying to define the minimum amount that each board member had to raise. Here at the Esperanza, my board members define for themselves what they can, and each of them has to—but if that means it’s a student and the most they can do is five dollars a month, it’s important they think of those five dollars. But that doesn’t mean that they’re any less than the person that gives a hundred dollars a month. So, you know, you have to challenge all that sort of stuff. So anyway, going back to your original question, I think that right now in this society people of color are really under attack. And in this town, they have really just held back, I think. They’ve just held back. People react under crisis. We may not see it soon, but soon enough, when Kelly closes and if things don’t really happen well, and more people are really—right now, everybody says it’s only four percent unemployment rate, everything’s fine. Let’s build more domes.

TBW: But what kinds of jobs are they providing? Six dollars an hour is not quite the same as a maintenance technician at Kelly.

GS: No. I don’t know at what point is that critical mass whenever that is. So when you do that, you wait until it comes out. That was my concern about Kay Turner, that’s what we need to spur us to some

other—even though we support her because we think she is speaking for us, maybe we'll find out that she wasn't really speaking for us and we'll see all the negative stuff that she promotes and then we have a real enemy to fight against, and that's what moves the community forward. Henry Cisneros was the perfect politician that helped the community. What people have said was that he came in and restored the community, that racism disappeared, that people were willing to work with each other, and that was his role. To bring people together. And COPS, up to that point, had been always under the attack and people were nervous about them and they hated them. They were the big enemy. Well, COPS is loved now. It's headed by a retired military general, four star, three star, two, I don't know how many stars he's got. So they've been able to work together through all that stuff and COPS is given its due all the time. I still want to have those cops around that keep challenging the larger community. I go to city council meetings and never does anyone say the word racism in this town. And yet, I've been there, and it's like, "Call it for what it is." And people, I've heard Juan Solis just avoid it, talking around about the concept of racism, but also being very, his whole thinking then, was diluted. So then you have, you build that strength up within the white city council people become stronger to be able to push that. I heard them again, diluting their discussion around racism or whatever the problem was, I saw the Jeff Websters and all these other guys who were being bolder and bolder about their racism and nobody called them. It gives them that sort of power. So, I don't know what that means. I think at some point, I hope at some point, there's just more of a challenge to that process.

TBW: Why wouldn't anybody, it seems strange. The word itself is so, it has the potential to be very inflammatory and can be hurtful, I suppose. Do you think that's why—who are you saying it to?

GS: Here's a story I just heard this weekend. This very outspoken African-American woman who's an ACLU attorney in Mississippi right now said she was at this meeting with a whole bunch of men, she was probably the only woman that was there, or one of few. She finally challenged them, and all the men held firm. She said, "This is a community hard-on," or something like that. And the people who

liked what she had to say were just giggling and laughing along and the guys said, "How insensitive you are." It's like, "Everybody else would have considered that witty and charming sort of thing for me to say, but because it's offending you, then it's a problem." When we play around and talk about racism and call it a name, we're going to laugh amongst ourselves, but then if it's about you, you're going to have to deal with it maybe. It's the same thing with sexism and all that.

TBW: And rather than risking that, perhaps, is why the issue is danced around so much?

GS: Well, no, indigenous people, if you look at the Navajo or Hopi, maybe it's their survival, however they feel they can survive. But is it part of the cultural realities that they were about sharing and teaching and working. And I think all, I don't know about your ethnic background, but probably that ethnic background had it within it's community at some point or even just as recent as growing up. But we lose that because the larger U.S. dominant society's vision is about the individual and about this, being selfish and we forget about those other things of respect and sharing. So that's been lost, and how do you recapture that? In this town, the five missions came in in the seventeen hundreds, five military bases are here now. The missions educated our people from the indigenous language to the Spanish language and converted us and all that sort of stuff, but to survive, we had to say, "Si, señor," and then we had to do our little revolutionary stuff. When you go to the missions and see maybe some of the indigenous work that sort of challenged those sorts of things, but you have to look closely. You see it in Mexico and you see it in San Antonio. They have to survive, and this is about survival at some level, and we have to revolt. I don't know, San Antonio's just a weird city. It is the cradle of the Chicano movement in some very overt way, and at the same time, this is the town, even though we're in the majority, we have less Chicanos speaking the language. We have internalized it. Our parents or grandparents don't want us to go through the same attacks, so we don't teach them the language. All our white counterparts are taking the language and speaking Spanish better than we are, telling us about our culture and our history, because they've been studying it, because they know because of NAFTA or

whatever, they'll be better educated if they speak two languages and they'll know how to do the bargaining and wheeling and dealing in Monterey, Jalisco and all those places, so they have to know all that stuff. And we're so caught up in our internalized stuff that, "Why do we have to speak Spanish? Why does it have to be called Esperanza?" So we have a lot of work to do, so that's why when you ask what I'm going to do, I think there's still a lot more to go to create that many more of us, creating some sort of way to help people think critically as a people, so that whatever it is that affects them individually or within their neighborhood and their family that they're able to see the problem and not say, "Well, it's my fault that I wasn't whatever, and I can see this in a larger context." And so having more people do that. There are no neighborhood associations in the neighborhood I grew up in and the neighborhood I presently live in. People in my case, and both cases, where growing up, my parents owned their own home, but we lived two blocks away from the Alazan Apache Courts, which is the largest housing projects in the city where the poverty is really high. Neither my parents, owners of their own home or in Alazan are there any neighborhood associations. Where I live, one block away from Victoria Courts, and Victoria Courts and my neighborhood association, there aren't—actually there are neighborhood associations two blocks away in the other direction, the LaVaca and King William, but LaVaca is my concern. They're concerned about gentrifying the space, getting rid of the Victoria Courts, bringing in other people, raising the value of their homes. And I was excited about that neighborhood was that it was community and you knew your neighbors. They cut my grass, because I'm never home, and it's nice to know somebody cut my grass who must be my neighbor. Those things are lost. If we're not getting our kids educated through colleges, then what role does Esperanza have in getting them educated for free, or for a minimal amount to be able to at least think critically, which again, is what my college education allowed me to do. To give me options of things to read, and my made my own decisions. So I think if there are more of us saying it, it's possible. I don't know how long down the line that will be. And I don't know, again, it will be moving forward at a quicker pace based on the suffering that they

people are doing. But I hope that again, that people aren't rushing to resolve things in the wrong way. Because that's what happens in crisis. You come together, fix the problem and then go away.

TBW: You disband again, and lose the power that you've gained.

GS: So I think that's for us whites, is long-term, we're never going to see the revolution. That's O.K., I never came into the job thinking that's going to happen, but you just kind of move forward. There's an agenda that's a human rights agenda for the city of San Antonio that includes not only political and civil rights, but also economic and cultural rights and social rights. So that English only is not a concept that ever comes through this town because the city will know that according to the human rights declaration, you have a right to speak your own language and have a right to your own culture and whoever you want, whatever.

TBW: Here's the last question, I promise I'll be out of your hair soon. The question is what advice would you have for a teenaged girl coming up that's wondering about the best way get herself situated in life. I'm leaving that broad deliberately, because I want you to interpret it.

GS: The toughest part of having done all this work is being a Latina woman in this community. And I don't think there's anything here, really, for Latina women as women and as Latinas. I don't know. It's tough to consider answering that question. One thing that my dad did for us was to say, "Be different." He didn't want us to get pregnant, the girls and he didn't want the boys to just go out. Be different would be my advice. And that's hard, because you have to have somebody supporting that concept so that when you do go against the principal and the teacher and your friends and challenge them, you also hope that there's someone there to say, "You did fine. So everybody hates you, you did fine. You stood on the line, you stood by your morals or whatever it was and you challenged, and that's O.K." You hope that that's there for you. I was lucky enough to have that, I'm still lucky to have that, not only with my family but supportive friends I have. But I think that's also important just to know, to have a sense that it's O.K. to challenged the status quo. This society raises us to be just like everybody else.

TBW: Good little sheep that spend our entire paychecks on clothes and furniture.

GS: And I think growing up in this town is—why do we have the highest teenage pregnancy rate for thirteen to fourteen year olds in the nation? And no one is doing anything for young girls in this country. And in this city, that's what I asked now-Mayor Peak before he was elected. "What are you going to do for young girls?" "Well, we have these programs. Basketball programs at midnight." Well, you don't find little girls out in the streets at midnight. It's all about little boys. He said, "Well, I've never really thought about what we're doing for young girls." I'm glad I asked the question, I hope that he has something to think about. I would look for those women in their community, their mothers, their grandmothers or their great-grandmothers or the teachers that give them some sort of spark. Not to be afraid of them, because sometimes we don't seem to have enough time to think of that grandmother or that teacher as friend. And really push those women that they really connect to, to demand of them that they pay attention to them. To find a mentor and to ask all the questions that they've ever wanted to ask. I find myself still doing that, I want to say to Antonia Castañeda, "Antonia, you have to spend time with me, because I need to learn everything that I know from you. And you're teaching everybody else and I've never had that teacher teaching me." Yes, I'm thirty-seven now, but I want to learn. So I would say to all those young girls to do that. Challenge anybody they like and for the most part, it may be an embarrassing sort of thing to do, but we as the adult mentors or whatever, are charmed and like the attention. We shouldn't see that as a bad thing, but something safe to do.

TBW: So educate yourself any way possible, is what I'm understanding.

GS: Yes. And read, read, read. I find myself still, not having enough time to read. So when I do, I try to read women of color. And I would say this for white women, young girls, to read women of color, especially. I think they're the ones since the late seventies to present who have been just, because of their connections to race, class and gender because they have this larger vision. It's an inclusive vision and it's challenging, but it's an important thing to do. So that's what I read when I have time to read.

There's never enough, you may run out of things to read in the first year, or six months, depending on how fast you read, but to do that and to share that information. People say, "Who do I read? Teach me, teach me, teach me." That's something that's there, and demand that from the libraries in this town, their high school libraries or junior high libraries. Demand that. Come to the Esperanza, we'll help. We have programs that will work with them. I say that because of that overt political status we have because of the overt outness we have in terms of being queer. Whatever people tell them not to. It's taking those risks, it's being different, do things that you feel good about. Walk into their space and challenge the people at Esperanza to deal with this.

TBW: Well, is there anything we didn't discuss that you feel needs to be said?

GS: I don't know. I'll probably think of something later.

TBW: Thank you. I really appreciate you spending the time to talk with me.