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# MY GREAT AHA! MOMENT AS A PINAY

BY KIM MENDOZA



**MY GREAT AHA! MOMENT** in realizing and claiming my Pinay identity came through several revelations through my studies and membership in various organizations. As a Chicana/o Studies major at UCLA, I saw parallels between the histories of colonization in Mexico and in the Philippines. I also began to understand that the term “Chicana” was a political term used to demonstrate both a personal connection to a people’s struggles and a political and social consciousness. I began to think of it as a term that included others, regardless of their homeland. With my new knowledge and self-awareness, I was able to identify myself as a “Chicana.” I also began to identify as a “Pinay,” which means that I am a Filipina womyn but more importantly that I am Filipina womyn engaged in political, social, artistic, and spiritual ways which connects me to my voice, struggles, transformation, and growth as a Pinay.

My transformation to openly identifying as a Pinay led to a transformed understanding of my own community and my activism within it. In the fall of 2009, upon transferring to UCLA from Pasadena City College, I joined the Samahang Pilipino organization. Their meetings, events, and activities allowed me to develop relationships with other Pinays who were at differing levels of understanding and identifying with the term. Nevertheless, we all shared an innate resolve to dismantle the molds that have, historically, been placed upon us and to challenge these molds with activism as conscious, self-identified Pinays.

After several weeks of involvement with the organization, I found myself serving as Samahang Pilipino’s Pinays Coordinator. With this position, I sought to create a space where Pinays could come together to engage in self-reflection, to challenge cultural and social norms that defined what a womyn “should” be, and to establish a

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sisterhood of support and further transformation. To this end, I established Pinays collectives in the form of womyn's circles. These were open to anyone and everyone seeking to initiate and foster personal development. Concurrently, I also had a great opportunity to work with Samahang Pilipino's Kabalikat Coordinator, who helped shed light on LGBTQ issues in the Pilipina/o community. Together, we attempted to bridge gender and sexuality through workshops and meetings within Samahang Pilipino. We also helped to mobilize youth and students to attend the annual Queer Pina/oy Conference. Additionally, we are currently working on a resource guide. I am hoping it will provide Pinays at UCLA a guide to resources such as womyn's circles in the Los Angeles area, domestic violence and sexual assault therapy groups, and mental health resources.

I continued working with issues affecting Pinays with another organization called SiGAw!, or Sisters of Gabriela, Awaken! This organization is part of a larger network of Pinay-based organizations known as the Gabriela Network and it serves Pinays in the Los Angeles community while recognizing that the issues affecting Pinays in the United States are connected

to problems in the Philippines. Through womyn's mass movement building, campaigns, education, cultural work, and connection with other local organizations such as Habi-Arts and Anakbayan, SiGAw! also seeks to end violence against womyn. I also work with the Asian Pacific Coalition, another organization that helped me identify as an API (Asian & Pacific Islander) womyn.

Despite being fortunate to work on various campaigns and connect with other Pinays and API womyn both in the UCLA and Los Angeles communities, my consciousness and identity are still developing and I am very grateful for each opportunity that allows me to question, feel pain, grapple, create, transform, and most of all, connect to other Pinays. Gloria Anzaldua, a great Chicana scholar, provides great insight into the concept of a "border," which pertains to physical boundaries in race, gender, status, and class. She says that the "border" is merely an illusion, within which lies a space known as the "mestiza consciousness." It is in this consciousness where borders meet, where identities connect, and where a "third space" lies. In my appreciation for the contributions of Anzaldua, I have learned to accept my identity as a Chicana and a Filipina, or as

a "Chicapina," in challenging dichotomies and creating a space and identity of my own.

**Kimberly Mendoza is an undergraduate student with a major in International Development Studies and a minor in Chicana/o Studies at UCLA. She received a Constance Coiner Award from CSW in 2010. Created to honor the memory and continue the work of Constance Coiner, who received her Ph.D. at UCLA, and her daughter Ana Duarte-Coiner and made possible through donations of family and friends, the Constance Coiner Award supports research on feminist and working-class issues and honors excellence in teaching and a commitment to teaching as activism.**