My time with the Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR) was a personal test to see how I performed and how dedicated I am in the pressure cooker that is reproductive rights and social justice. As an activist with a largely academic background, I initially felt I was going to end up making this experience “too academic” and not enough “grassroots organizing.” I was also worried that this field of work would not be right for me in the future. As I was going into my internship with COLOR, I also became increasingly worried about how I would adjust to living in Denver, a city completely unknown to me before this summer. I was taking major risks in order to test how strong I was as a person, professionally and personally.

When I arrived at COLOR, I was slightly afraid of how I would execute the work that would be assigned to me. With all the changes that were occurring in the office, my projects changed rapidly. Initially when I came to COLOR, I was in charge of Summer LOV (Latinas of Vision) and Hermanitas, specifically updating the curriculum and bringing more attention to consent and sexual assault. I was also in charge of jumpstarting COLOR’s HB 1081 Comp Sex Ed Campaign. This campaign was to encourage local school districts to support HB 1081 and obtain more state and federal grant funding to make their comprehensive sexuality education curriculum more culturally-sensitive, evidence-based, and medically accurate. My goals for these
two projects were to improve the LOV curriculum to be more comprehensive and to have at least one school district adopt HB 1081 beginning the next academic year. Aside from those two main projects, I also helped organize Viva La Diva and provide Ryann, the communications director, with communications support.

As the summer went along, conflicts and changes in the office impacted my work. With the termination of one of the organizers, my role in updating the LOV curriculum shifted from the curriculum to teaching the Hermanitas class. I rolled along with this change with no hesitation; I usually prepared my lesson plans and activities the day before each class. This went well for the first half of Hermanitas until mid-July when the Executive Director, Lorena Garcia, left COLOR. As a result, the LOV coordinator I had worked with throughout the summer, along with another intern, left as well in an act of solidarity. This caused my role as the teacher for Hermanitas to shift to being the coordinator of Summer LOV and teaching both programs. I carried this out until the end of the programs in early August with the help of my LOV volunteers, Fega and Kaila. My campaign for comprehensive sex ed and HB 1081 was also affected by the rapid changes in staff and ended up being put on hold, where it will remain until a new organizer is hired and can take over the campaign.

While interning, I ended up using both my academic and street knowledge in order to carry on the work I was doing. I often drew upon my knowledge of binaries and feminism to teach my LOV and Hermanitas classes. For example, in one of my Hermanitas classes we discussed body image, but specifically in regards to the intersectional identity of Latinas. We as Latinas often deal with the binaries of gender and race along with racism and sexism in our cultures and in society. During this lesson, I showed the students various images of Latinas (both good and bad) and asked them if they were positive images of us. This activity turned into a
large and extensive discussion about the intersectional role of Latinas in society and how we are hypersexualized. While they initially reacted well to most images, on further discussion of each photo, the students were flabbergasted by the hypersexualized and often racist undertones to the images. Images such as a half-naked Latina were seen as sexist, but with further discussion, the racist connotations were revealed to the participants. They reacted in disbelief as they learned about intersectionality and the impact that intersectionality plays on identity politics in society. This session, and others like it, revealed to the participants that as Latinas our voices have been unheard and often undermined by society. With this conclusion, participants began to actively ask more questions and engage in the sessions.

In regards to the challenges that I faced while interning at COLOR, they ranged from obstacles with my work to internal conflict with staff. My work at COLOR often came with hurdles in that continuous changes in staff led to my work plans shifting, from having more involvement with certain projects and assisting with other’s projects to having my main campaign temporarily put on hold. These continuous and at times rapid changes in the office led to my work being unstable and stressful. However, while I was having to routinely deal with sudden changes in my workload, I still maintained calmness and a good work ethic in the office. Regardless of the frequent changes, Cristina and the rest of the staff could depend on me to assist with their work and finish my assignments in a short time. My main priority during the internship was to work in an effective and professional matter, even when in casual discussions with staff and other interns. I was known to be very reliable and on top of things and still be able to do well in my work.

Even though I maintained good work habits and performance, I will have to say that sometimes my work was performed under my standards due to internal conflict with staff.
During the second half of my time with COLOR, I had some issues with one staff member, (which I will not name just to be confidential). This staff member and I had friction between us after an event occurred in which I was attacked by them in an unprofessional manner. This tension persisted throughout the latter half of the summer and escalated nearly at the end of my internship. As a result, this staff member and I had a mediation with Cristina in order to resolve our conflict, and if not at least find common ground for us to continue our work. We managed to find common ground and maintained our professionalism until the end of my time with COLOR. As much as they were at times discouraging, I learned from the hurdles I faced. They helped me become emotionally stronger, as well as motivated me to pursue the field of reproductive rights and gender and sexual liberation.

Despite the hurdles I faced at COLOR, I do have some highlights from working with the organization and being involved in reproductive rights work and activism. In regards to my work on HB 1081 and coordinating Summer LOV and Hermanitas, I made great progress in setting the platforms for those campaigns as well as organizing their strategies and aims. While I was not able to carry out the campaign to the streets and do the grassroots work, I still managed to write up and organize the materials necessary for the execution for the campaign. Now the campaign is ready to be handed off to the next intern or organizer, who will have all the necessary materials to execute the next phase in the campaign: street teaming, canvassing, and work on the front lines. In regards to Summer LOV and Hermanitas, I left COLOR knowing that the participants of both programs learned a great deal of necessary lessons that I hope they will value and use in their futures. I recall a moment in which a parent talked to me about the program and what her daughters learned. I was surprised to learn that her daughters were very welcoming of me and appreciated my work in teaching them about issues that they rarely think about; they appreciated
the time and effort I put into talking to them about such issues, even if it involved sharing past experiences in my life. She thanked me for helping her daughters become more open to her regarding issues of puberty, sex, relationships, and body image. Before my work with COLOR, she was unable to talk to her daughters or even listen to them if they were brave enough to talk, which at times caused tension. Now they are working towards being more open and accepting with each other in order to strengthen their mother-daughter relationships.

While I took the internship to see if I could pursue my passion for gender and sexual liberation, I also wanted to see if my passions were from an academic standpoint, grassroots “on the ground” work, or both. With my internship finally over, I can say that my academics, especially from Hampshire, helped me tremendously in my work with COLOR. As much as I expected for academia to not be as useful in this internship, it was actually very helpful in understanding the politics and issues surrounding reproductive rights, especially in reproductive rights organizations that mainly focus on the autonomy of women of color. I was also able to use my academics to teach Summer LOV and Hermanitas, as well as to promote more frequent and engaging conversations regarding issues in gender inequality and rape culture, such as consent, sexual assault awareness, usage of preferred gender pronouns, and intersectionality. While these conversations were difficult for the participants and myself to discuss and engage in, the students learned about the importance of such issues, from being necessary for growth and maturity, acceptance of others with different identity politics, empowerment, and the power to make one’s own decisions that are in their best interests.

While this report is not a complete summary of my time with COLOR, it is a summary of what is worthy to be pointed out and discussed. While reading this report can seem a bit discouraging and stressful at times, in essence, I enjoyed my time with COLOR greatly. Despite
the various obstacles I endured this summer, I must say that I became stronger and more dedicated to reproductive rights work and women’s autonomy, especially autonomy for women of color. COLOR staff were great in supporting me throughout the summer with my work, private life, and settling in Denver, which I fell in love with in the end and I miss dearly. They were support networks for me to go to if I ever needed help, felt discouraged, or needed help with my housing situation (which frequently became a problem for me throughout the summer). Among the staff that I truly respect and appreciate is Cristina; she was very supportive of my work and emotional well-being while at COLOR. In addition to being close to Cristina, I also became a support network for her. While in the midst of transition at COLOR, I often checked in with her to make sure all was well and encouraged her to carry out the transition with full force. Our buddy system worked out great for us and we became close; by the end of my internship, leaving was upsetting and emotional for both of us.

All in all, while my time with COLOR was a roller coaster, complete with ups and downs, I am truly appreciative of my time with the organization. Working for COLOR this summer has further sparked my interest in reproductive rights and gender and sexual liberation. I now know what my passion is in life: to fight for the autonomy of women and LGBTQ folk in order to achieve liberation and equality for all in an oppressive society. In addition to that, I also want to continue working with COLOR in the future, by means of interning or perhaps organizing for them after I leave Hampshire. As far as future COLOR interns: while it is quite an exciting workplace at COLOR, you will learn and become more passionate around reproductive rights and social justice. Work will consist of blood, sweat, and tears (literally), but you’ll become a stronger individual. If you’re up for the ride, you should jump on it and fasten your seat belt. It’ll be a bumpy and fun ride.