

Sisterhood, Defined: The Campaign to Add 'Sororidad' to the RAE

The story of how two women succeeded in changing the dictionary.

By Polly Thompson | pollythompson19@gmail.com | February 7, 2019 9:00am



Photo via El Periódico

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It was this time last year that Tati and Gaby, two young women working in the Buenos Aires advertising industry, came across a shocking discovery: the word **sororidad** did not appear in the *Real Academia Española*. They had been looking forward to the #8M demonstration on International Women's Day, which was to become one of the largest feminist protests ever held in Argentina, and planning what they wanted to do on the day. It was an event borne out of sisterhood and solidarity among women who were standing up for one another in the face of discrimination – everything that *sororidad* represents. And yet, when they checked its exact definition in the dictionary, they found it simply **did not exist**.

- **Video: The 2018 #8M Women's March in Buenos Aires**



Tati (left) & Gaby, founders of #SororidadenlaRAE

For the source with a reputation as the king of all words, the *Real Academia Española* (simply known as '*la RAE*'), the term had no official definition. Gaby explains that their initial reaction was that it was simply "absurd to us that the word wasn't there. There was no reason why it shouldn't be."

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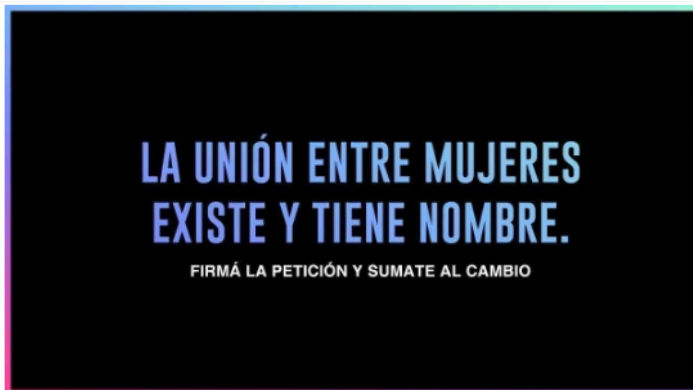
Furthermore, the word's male counterpart, *fraternidad*, had long existed in the reference text.

The two women were aware that the RAE wasn't exactly a beacon of gender equality, yet had been making gradual improvements. Mired in recent calls to eliminate gender stereotyping and exclusive language, it had recently been pressured to change the fifth definition of 'fácil' from "women who seek many sexual relationships" to "people." (Slut-shaming is so 2010 RAE, come on). Tati and Gaby saw an opportunity to take the dictionary one step forward in the fight for equality.

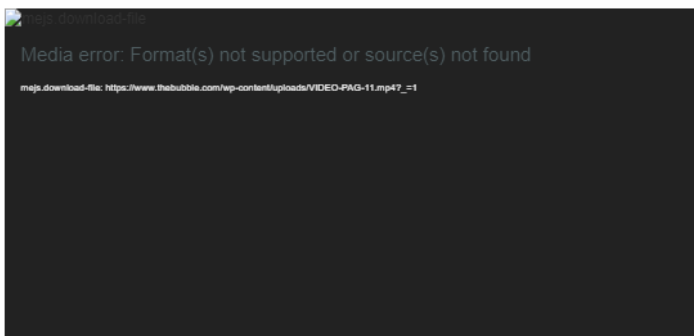


Image via Infobae

You may be thinking that the issue of one word in a dictionary is a small thing in comparison to the passionate demands for legalized abortion or protection against gender violence that took center stage in 2018. But, as Tati argues, the purpose of dictionaries is to record the language that "reflects our culture and the way that people speak." And, unless you've been living under a rock since 2015 when #NiUnaMenos galvanized the feminist movement in Argentina, sororidad has been everywhere. Used between friends, as a call to action in marches, on social media, and across media platforms, it was representative of the context in which they were living. For the RAE to not include the word felt like it was failing to recognize the **political and social relevance** of sororidad to society.



Therefore, despite having no previous experience as activists, the two women harnessed their incredulity and independently decided to campaign for change. They got together with friends Agustina Lopez San Martín, David Vaca, Joselyn De Almeida, Adela Posse and Gretel Müller and got to work as a group. They filled in the official form requesting the addition of a word on the RAE's website, created a petition on [change.org](https://www.change.org), and took to Instagram with the hashtag #SororidadenlaRae. Then, using their own funds and knowledge as creative advertisers, they printed placards and stickers and headed to the #8M demonstration to spread the word.



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The response at the march was astounding. Most women used the word regularly and they too were equally shocked that it wasn't in the official dictionary. Even those that hadn't heard of the term *sororidad* agreed that it was an excellent representation of the times; all they had to do was look around them to see the evidence. The hashtag went viral, and signatures flooded into the petition. Influencers Lucila de Ponti and Viki Donda caught on and shared the campaign with their thousands of followers, a mural was painted, and news channels shared the story.



As the year continued, feminist causes gained greater visibility across Argentina. Numerous marches were fueled by the Senate's rejection of the abortion bill in August, and the emergence of Argentina's answer to #MeToo, spearheaded by the #ActricesArgentinas group, saw the courageous denouncement of Juan Darthés by Thelma Fardín for rape when she was just 16. As women continued to support and fight for each other, it was clear that **2018 was becoming the year of sororidad**. And yet, the word itself still had no official definition.

Then, this past December, Tati was at work in Alto Palermo when her phone grew abuzz with Twitter notifications and texts from friends. Her hands started shaking and tears came to her eyes as she saw the news. The RAE had released its list of over 2,000 amendments, and highlighted on that list was one special word: **sororidad**. It marked an institutional change, a step toward more inclusive language, and tangible success after all their hard work.

sororidad

Del ingl. *sorority*, este del lat. mediev. *sororitas*, -atis 'congregación de monjas', y este der. del lat. *soror*, -ōris 'hermana carnal'.

1. f. Amistad o afecto entre mujeres.
2. f. Relación de solidaridad entre las mujeres, especialmente en la lucha por su empoderamiento.
3. f. En los Estados Unidos de América, asociación estudiantil femenina que habitualmente cuenta con una residencia especial.

1. *Friendship or affection between women.*

2. *Relationship of Solidarity between women, especially in the fight for their empowerment.*

3. *Female Student Association in the USA, often providing accommodation.*

Further to their own victory, the announcement also included an important amendment to the definition of **femicidio**, clarifying that it is murder of a woman specifically involving motives of *machismo* or misogyny. It's unclear as to why that hadn't been included before.



Image via Nueva Mujer

So, what comes next after this victory? In reality, the women aren't too sure. They'll certainly be in attendance at this year's [International Women's Day Strike](#) (March 8th, mark your calendars). And from pronoun use to the *amigues* and *latinx* movement, they support [related issues of inclusive language and sexism](#) in the Spanish-speaking world. Yet they don't think the pace of change will be quite as fast as their campaign. Gaby notes that "those issues aren't as [specific] as ours was, they have a great deal more complexity, and will evolve more gradually over time."

For now they're incredibly proud of this first foray into feminist activism, and are gratified to hear *sororidad* used even more frequently than before. Getting the dictionary to add the word was one thing, but they consider the greatest achievement of their campaign the reinforcement of the concept itself in communities around them. **Women are rejecting the idea that they should be in constant competition with each other**, and are working in solidarity to bring about change. After all, as Tati suitably notes, "It's thanks to *sororidad* itself that our campaign succeeded."



Image via Pinterest

About the Author



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