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*Qualitative Inquiry* 2010 16: 804

DOI: 10.1177/1077800410383123

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# Transitioning From Doctoral Study to the Academy: Theorizing *Trenzas* of Identity for Latina Sister Scholars

Qualitative Inquiry  
16(10) 804-818  
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DOI: 10.1177/1077800410383123  
http://qix.sagepub.com  


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## Abstract

This article focuses on multiple truths pertaining to doctoral education as expressed by three Latina doctoral recipients. These scholars successfully navigated various educational processes with the support of one another, their families, faculty, and their chosen discipline. The authors, as sister scholars, retell their educational journeys through *testimonio* and analyze how their *trenzas de identidades multiples* (multiple strands of identity, that is, motherhood, social class, and public intellectual) now inform their work. By interrogating the extent to which intersections of identity affect educational and career pathways, the authors use *plática* (dialogue) to theorize their doctoral experiences and examine how their challenges and successes manifest in their professional lives in academia.

## Keywords

Latina, doctoral education, intersections of identity

As Latina<sup>1</sup> doctoral students, our journeys were often complicated when the multiple strands of our identities collided with institutional cultures (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003). The Latina scholarly space we constructed across institutions was a familial space, liberating us from isolation and fostering our identities, research interests, and professional aspirations through trust, reciprocity, and respect. As we sought literature that would inform our understanding of socialization processes, faculty interactions, and attrition in doctoral education, seldom did we find studies disaggregated by social class, gender, race, or other identities (Antony, 2003; Baird, 1993; Dorn & Papalweis, 1997; Lovitts, 2001; Weidman & Stein, 2003). The lack of representation in the literature reflects a grand narrative about doctoral education that simplifies complex issues and presents individuals as one-dimensional rather than recognizing women and men as social actors with complex identities, experiences, and cultural lives (Trueba, 2002). As a result, we strive to trouble scholarship that focuses on the doctoral “experience” by exploring how intersections of multiple identities expressed within the context of graduate school are further reflected within faculty cultures.

We reject “objective, neutral truth in favor of a truth situated and partial . . . that define [our] perspective and provide the location for meaning, identity, and political commitment” with regard to Latina doctoral student experiences and transitions to the professoriate (Harris, 1993, p. 1727). As sister scholars, we also offer a methodological approach based on

*testimonio* to theorize our lived experience through *pláticas* (dialogue). We begin the retelling of our journeys with theoretical and methodological considerations. We weave the literature throughout the article, similar to how we weave together our *trenzas de identidades multiples* (multiple strands of identity).

## Theorizing and Analyzing Our Experiences

In an effort to theorize individual doctoral experiences as part of a collective consciousness of Latina persistence and support, we drew from critical race theory and pedagogy of sisterhood (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Critical race theory (CRT) provides a useful vantage point from which to ascertain the various ways in which race, social class, and gender shape Latinas’ graduate school experiences and affect the tools that enable them to succeed. First, CRT allows us to center racialization<sup>2</sup> (Bonilla-Silva, 2006)

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as a process that structures graduate school experiences and exposes how students of color resist or reinscribe racialized institutional structures, expectations, and ideologies in order to succeed in doctoral programs. Second, a CRT framework calls attention to the intersectionality of identities, which we contend are *trenzas de identidades multiples* (Godínez, 2006) that help us analyze oppression and resistance, as well as positive transformation in educational contexts. These *trenzas* represent intersections of language, immigrant status, gender, accent, culture, phenotype, and surname, markers of identities that are used by the dominant culture to subjugate Latina/o communities. Finally, CRT centers experiential knowledge in the discourse, providing a space for us to present our personal stories as truth through *testimonio* (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valdés, 1996; Villalpando, 2004).

*Testimonio* is a dynamic, Chicana feminist space that relocates the lived experiences of the Other (Said, 1994) from the margins to the center of educational discourse (Pérez, 1999), becoming more powerful and transformative forms of narrative (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). As a “critical intervention in social, political, and cultural life,” *testimonio* exposes racial-, gender- and class-based encounters, as well as empowers and validates Latina lived experiences as truths (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 763). It is a tool for cultural survival, serving as a “crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2). When *testimonios* are gathered together, they can form a collective consciousness that uncovers systems of oppression and power structures, (re)constructs past events, (re)claims identities, exposes contradictions, and builds community (Beverley, 2005). *Testimonio* helps us to reflect on ourselves from a multifocal perspective, disentangling our identities and theorizing about our own oppressions and privileges in an effort to produce a heightened collective consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987; Godínez, 2006). Our goal, however, is not to essentialize the experiences of Latinas in all doctoral programs, especially as we enter “an era when the notion of an essentialized self is being challenged by an alternate view that suggests that each of us . . . consists of an array of fluid, multiple, hybrid, or fragmented selves” (Guerra, 1998, p. 120). We must be cognizant of the potential for essentializing our experiences, as well as the risks involved in sharing *testimonio*, especially because this process “is an endeavor always fraught with the potential promise of praise and the agonizing fear of failure” (Guerra, 1998, p. 126).

Our collective formulates sisterhood pedagogy that involves support, encouragement, and friendship as tools for resistance and agency in academia, which often relies on “notions of individualism and male supremacist ideas in spaces of learning” (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006, p. 140). The sisterhood that developed during graduate school not only helped to sustain us in our doctoral programs but also provided

us with a safe space to *echar plática* (dialogue; Guerra, 1998) about our knowledge of doctoral education, our work on Latina/o educational pathways, as well as our interactions, challenges, and aspirations as Latina PhD candidates. In presenting these *testimonios*, we balance our experiences of self within multiple contexts, to identify the various tensions within our experiences and to make sense of those experiences with the intent of creating change (Holman Jones, 2005).

Our process first involved writing separate *testimonios* based on an important event or series of events that occurred during our doctoral studies and remains salient in our current daily practice. The *testimonios* we crafted were intended to explore “our closely held values; the nature and intensity of emotions, the patterns of our thought processes . . . and the import of inherited cultural myths” (Senge, 2008, p. xv). We then shared the *testimonios* with each other and participated in several telephone calls to delve more deeply into our stories. Although our initial focus was on separate *testimonios*, we were challenged by the individualistic context in which *testimonios* are often presented. Rather than sharing stories from our individual perspectives, we chose to format the presentation of our multiple truths and identities through *pláticas* that we often have as a group.

*Plática* is a collaborative process comprised of sharing stories, building community, and acknowledging multiple realities and vulnerabilities in an effort to enforce strong bonds among the members of that social network (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008). *Echar plática* refers to Mexican forms of discourse in which the narrator’s “point of view shifts along a continuum between humor and seriousness . . . and narration and exposition . . .” (Guerra, 1998, p. 66). The storyteller, therefore, has a responsibility to share aspects of her lived experience that demonstrate “grace or wit, eloquence, flavor, emotion, and sincerity” (Guerra, 2008, p. 73). The *plática* we eventually developed was similar to our actual conversations and is illustrative of the collective support, guidance, and shared experiences that we encountered together in our sisterhood pedagogy.

## Weaving Together Our *Trenzas*

In the spirit of Burciaga and Tavares (2006), we first offer brief descriptions of ourselves, “unmasking our private faces” (p. 134). Our *testimonios* follow a scripted *plática*, which blends questions that surfaced during our conversations, research on Latinas in higher education, and our realities.

Michelle M. Espino, a middle-class Chicana, is an assistant professor at the University of Georgia. She claims her identity as a first-generation college student, although her father earned an associate’s degree as part of his training with the U.S. military. Her father is from Mexico and her mother, who earned a high school diploma, was born in Texas. Michelle claims Texas as her home, although she moved to several military bases throughout her childhood.

Susana M. Muñoz assumes a Chicana identity. She is currently a postdoctoral research associate at Iowa State University, where she also obtained her doctorate. She was born in Mexico but grew up in Fairbanks, Alaska, and is the daughter to a Mexican-born mother with a high school education and a Caucasian stepfather who is a college graduate. Her partner is an associate professor at the University of Wyoming, and they have two children (ages 2 and 7).

Judy Marquez Kiyama is an assistant professor at the University of Rochester in New York. She is a Mexican American, first-generation college student. Judy grew up in a rural, copper mining town in the Southwest. She is the daughter of a retired electrician and a secretary, both of whom began university educations but moved into full-time work before finishing their degrees. Her mother graduated from the local community college when Judy was in high school.

### La Plática

The chimes on Michelle's clock indicate that it is three o'clock in the afternoon. She dials the teleconference number and waits for her friends to "arrive" into the conference call. A tone on the phone signals that Judy has entered the call, and Michelle excitedly greets her old friend who attended the same graduate program. "Hey, Juuudy!" she exclaims in her newly acquired Southern drawl. Moments later, Susana, who has known Michelle through their involvement with Latina sororities and met Judy at one of the conferences the sister scholars attended several years ago, joins the conversation. Michelle says, "Hey, Susana! I was just telling Judy how happy I was to finally chat with you both. I can't believe we are celebrating our first year out of graduate school!" "I know! It's so crazy!" Susana laughs, "We sure have had to deal with so many challenges this year: moving to different geographic locations, resolving family concerns, starting new positions as well as adjusting to being called 'Dr'." "Oh, don't even get me started with that, Susana! I forget that people are talking to me when they address me as Dr. Marquez Kiyama!" Judy says. The sister scholars laugh together, and the laughter turns to a collective sigh as if the burden of the challenges the three *mujeres* (women) are facing has begun to finally unravel on their shoulders. A heavy pause leaves the women silent, reflecting on whether they are feeling exuberance or exhaustion. Reflections of the past year begin to drift through their minds like the snow flakes that Judy can see from her office window. These reflections contrast with memories of graduate school, especially the challenges the sister scholars experienced based on the multiple strands of their identities. In graduate school, they were not afraid to challenge the dominant discourse in higher education, to name their fears and celebrate their small victories, and most importantly, to express their sincere emotions when the doctoral process seemed to weigh down their spirits. The conversation

today is already feeling like one of those days when turning off all of the lights and huddling under the covers is the best option. Michelle clears her throat, and the sister scholars are jolted back to the present moment, "So, Susana, what have you decided to do about your job offer?"

(*Re*)braiding trenzas: *La mama in academia*. I knew this question was coming, yet no matter how prepared I was to answer Michelle, I continue to fight for control of my vulnerable emotions. I rub my hands back and forth on the crimson microfiber sofa in the hope that the softness of the material will relax my spirit. With a raspy and trembling voice, I say "Well . . ." before the flood of tears uncontrollably streams down my face. Michelle softly states, "Take your time, Susana." I take a long drink from my green tea Snapple and use both hands to brush away the tears as I begin to recount and organize all the events surrounding the unexpected job offer. "It's crazy!" I proclaim,

I know people fantasize about receiving a phone call out of the blue to be hand picked for a position yet no one expects it to happen; except in our dreams. So, when I received the phone call about a job offer to work with one of the top scholars in our field, I was in complete awe and wondered if this was indeed something I fabricated in my head.

"Oh, but this is not dream, Susana," Michelle says,

Girl, you've been handed a golden ticket on a silver platter. I heard about the position from other folks, and I think it's a wonderful opportunity to hone your theoretical understanding of social justice while perfecting your teaching skills.

Michelle is right. I respond,

This is exactly what I need to revive my professional spirit. However, this position will come with some concessions, namely, that I will move away from Ed and Julisa, separating my baby girl, Mirely, from her sister and father.

I hear Judy sigh deeply, "Wow, that's not an easy decision. How does Ed feel about the job offer?" "Actually," I say, "he has been extremely supportive." My mind quickly rewinds to that late summer evening,

We were sitting in our parked mini van outside a closed restaurant contemplating the offer. I had just finished a day of air travel and hadn't eaten all day. It was late at night and I was completely wiped. I could feel my stomach churning as I nervously listed the job perks.

I pause for a moment,

You know, I couldn't even look at Ed when I was explaining the job offer. I knew I would be an uncontrollable sobbing mess if our eyes met. It's the way he looks into my eyes that reminds me of our compassionate love, our friendship, and our giggly babies who always provide us comic relief. Even though he wanted me to accept this position, I was constantly thinking about our marriage and family unit. Could our marriage withstand the 10-hour travel distance and could our hearts bear not having one of our kids in our daily lives? What kind of a mama would consider this decision?

I am overwhelmed with emotion because I know my final decision not only affects my immediate family; I also worry about my extended family and tell the *mujeres*,

You know, the timing of this job opportunity coincided with our yearly summer visit with Ed's family. I don't know if I told you that Ed is the first and only child of six siblings to attend college. You can imagine that when we inform my strong tight-knit Mexican family of our decision; not all family members were supportive of separating the family. The job offer soon became the *chisme* (gossip) of our entire vacation.

My thoughts are transported to the concrete front stairs of my in-law's small white house and the poignant smell of lilac bushes filling the hot steady breeze,

I was watching my children joyfully chase their cousins, disguising my tear-strained face with large framed sun-glasses. Then I overheard my sisters-in-law whispering, "Do you think it's a good idea?" Then another sister responded, "I don't think so but I hope he gets the kids; the kids should be able to stay together."

Again, my voice trembles. Judy quickly comes to my defense, "You are a wonderful mom who is striving to teach her girls that independence does not mean loving your family less." Michelle agrees, "Absolutely, Susana. You are trying to be a good role model for other Chicanas as well." I think about Judy's and Michelle's comments. They are right, but for my family, separating half of my family for a job opportunity eerily resembles notions of divorce or separation. I say,

I just don't think they understand that accepting this job is an act of care and a means of economic stability for our family. Why I would consider leaving my spouse and child for economic or professional purposes is incomprehensible to our families.

Michelle states, "If you think about it, Susana, you've also had to make these contestations during your graduate school process." "You're right," Judy comments, "Susana had to juggle motherhood, graduate school, and her culture. A pretty well-orchestrated juggling performance I might add." I respond,

I know people think I am able to juggle my identities without much effort, but the truth is I often feel like a ship in the open sea, sailing without its navigation equipment trying to find its destination. I don't want anyone to know I was lost or that my juggling act often becomes too difficult. I am always afraid people will second-guess my academic abilities because I am a mom.

Michelle chimes in, "Yes, girl, this reminds of the time Judy and I strategized with you on how to inform your dissertation committee about your second pregnancy." "That's right!" Judy recalls,

I remember thinking it was silly to hide your pregnancy, but after you explained the issues in the literature, it was evident to me that Chicanas/Latinas before us endured harsh scrutiny for attempting to intertwine their mother identities with academia (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

"That was a tough time," I say, "My committee positively welcomed the news of my pregnancy but I still remained hyperconscious of their perceptions. After my dissertation proposal defense, one committee member said, 'I just don't know if what you planned to do will get done.'" "Wow, I can't believe that. What did you say?" Judy asks. "I didn't know what to say," I answer.

I felt paralyzed by this statement and was left wondering whether my pregnancy was perceived as a barrier to finishing my dissertation. Regardless of the intent behind this statement, it lit a fire inside my heart that fueled my determination to finish the dissertation and prove to myself, to academia, and to my culture that Chicana mothers can earn their doctorates and become scholars.

"Amen, sister!" Michelle exclaims, "I really do see the complexities associated with your motherhood, cultural, and woman identities." I am grateful for the validation and state,

I know my story may not be unique and I recognize that I am privileged in having Ed, who understands the nuances of academia, but the struggles of learning how to make sense of my motherhood identity as a young

Chicana scholar are salient for me. For me, the complexities of my motherhood identity attempts to disrupt traditional gender paradigms that are perpetuated by the dominant culture yet are reinscribed by my own culture.

Judy probes, "What do you mean when you say your culture reinscribes dominant paradigms?" I think about my mother for a moment. I see a traditional Mexican-born woman who divorced, despite her Catholic upbringing, to avoid a violent and abusive life for her children. I see a courageous woman who ventured into a new country without family so her children could "do better." "Children are central," I say aloud.

My mom put me and my siblings' needs before her own. So, I am challenged by how to weave my academic and cultural worlds together yet I am growing tired of reconfiguring myself to appease social and cultural traditions and expectations.

"Ay, it is tiring," Michelle comments. "When does the defense process end?" Judy ponders this question, "You're right, even though you defended your dissertation, you continue to defend your career choices because they don't fit within traditional gender structures." I feel myself tense by the magnitude and complexity of my multiple identities. I imagine what my *trenzas* of identities would look like in actual hair. While I generally present polished, finished, sleek straight hair, my *trenzas* are imperfect and so tangled not even a wide tooth comb can brush out the thick complexities. Perhaps, I need to see the beauty in my own messy braids and acknowledge that my motherhood identity will encourage other mothers to have a stronger voice in academia.

"You know what?" I conclude, "I need to stop trying to find my answers from others and find truth in my own notion of motherhood, even when my notion is incongruent with my mother's definition of motherhood." Then I return to the question that prompted this entire reflection. My voice quivers, communicating that my decision is still raw, unstable, and frightening,

I've decided to accept the job. Am I crazy for doing this? I will be in a commuting marriage, and I will be a single mom (sort to speak) with a two-year-old, while Ed stays with our seven-year-old. Do . . .

There is silence on the phone as the *mujeres* wait for me to finish all of the thoughts that are struggling to come out. I think about missing my daughter's school activities, dance recitals, and soccer games and wonder aloud, "Do you think she will resent me later for making this choice? Will Ed and I grow apart as a result of our distance?" "Oh no!" Michelle and Judy exclaim together, "You can't think that, Susana."

I excuse myself to grab a tissue and take a deep breath, "Well, talking about this decision does give me some courage. I know I have so many people supporting me through this. It has to work." But even the words fail to ring true. I begin to cry anew. My dear sister scholars try to comfort me. "This is a great opportunity," Judy says. "This is a short-term challenge for a long-term gain," Michelle adds. They both pause, wondering why family and academe are placed in such juxtaposition, a theme that we have often discussed. Michelle continues,

When you talk about challenging traditional gender roles while in graduate school, I think about the complexity associated with gender and culture. We always talk about straddling the dominant culture and our own culture (Anzaldúa, 1987), but we never consider our resistance of traditional gender roles within our culture (Gándara, 1982).

"It's exhausting isn't it?" I respond.

It's not like I had many faculty who truly understood my plight. Where are the faculty who are Chicana mothers? I can only think of one at the moment. Don't you find it odd that I can only name one person?

"Honestly, that doesn't surprise me," Michelle says. "Inevitably, academe and family will continue to clash. I doubt there is anything in the literature that addresses it differently." As Judy listens, she seems to become tense.

I don't agree. Hearing you say this makes me angry. I feel that it means I can never have both, that I will always have to choose between family and the academy, placing value on certain identities over others. We aren't addressing the feelings that Susana alludes to in making these decisions. I sense her feelings of guilt and resentment are also connected with being part of a relationship where both partners are in positions that could separate or disrupt the family structure. If Ed were to move away for professional reasons, would your family respond differently to his decision?

"Wow!" I think to myself. Judy is saying exactly what I have been feeling. "Oh, definitely," I respond.

I think it's more acceptable if men choose to disrupt the family structure than women. Either way, commuter marriages are challenging. I wonder if my professional gains are worth the time I will lose with my daughter and husband (Carrillo, 2007).

Although I am the only one with children, I know that Michelle and Judy experienced similar tensions between family and academe. Michelle left for college 500 miles away from home, despite her mother's concerns that there was no one in the area to help her in case of an emergency. In an effort to help each other grow professionally, Judy accepted a faculty position in the Northeast while her husband obtained a prestigious doctoral internship in the South. They were separated for a year, which gave me hope that the separation I would experience would not be too overwhelming. I say, "Okay, Judy. I know you and Arturo have been maintaining your marriage apart for the last year so I am going to lean on you for advice." Judy responds,

Of course, whatever you need. I am here to support you! And I need your advice now too. I feel like I am still struggling with making sense of who I am and who I am becoming. I look at where Arturo and I are professionally and what it means to be in the positions we are in and it's just so far removed from anything either of us experienced growing up.

*Intertwining my trenza: My working-class upbringing meets academia.* Michelle reassures me, "Your parents worked hard while you were growing up so that you would have the opportunity to make these choices. You're a tough woman. Undoubtedly your parents are proud you." "But that's just it," I reply, "What are they proud of? I know our parents are bursting with pride because of our 'academic success,' but I just can't help but hear the voice in my head repeat, 'At what cost?'"

I did not anticipate having this conversation today, but I know that I need to explain what I am feeling. Revisiting this topic is going to be tough, and I hate showing my emotions. Trying to remain composed, I pause to take a deep breath, thinking about how I will explain this to my sister scholars. I close my eyes for some clarity, and the familiar surroundings of the ranch begin tiptoeing into my head. I can clearly see the tired windmill that stands watch over my grandmother's old ranch house, the same house where my mom grew up. I can see the rock wall that surrounds my parents' house and the vibrantly painted merry-go-round that my mom rescued from the elementary school playground. "Okay," I begin, "You know how I jokingly say that I grew up in the dirt?" Susana responds, "Yeah," prompting me. Michelle chuckles, "Yes, I've been to your house!" I continue,

Well, now growing in the academy feels so surreal.

I say this because quite literally, I grew up on a ranch that threw dirt on your car and feet as you drove or walked through it. I am now learning to navigate a new space where dirt roads have been traded in for prestigious academic halls.

I picture the different contexts of the ranch and the academy as I clearly recall the day of my dissertation defense, a significant day because it represented an emerging identity that weaves together my home identity as a working-class, rural, Mexican American with my academic identity. I stood at the side of the table, and to my left was my family (my husband, mother-in-law, and parents). To my right was my dissertation committee with the exception of one who sat between me and my family. His accepting and warm demeanor helped to bridge the two groups together. I remember the exact moment looking at the groups and becoming overwhelmed with emotion. I was excited, I was scared, my legs were shaking uncontrollably, and I did not know who I was with these two groups together.

Weeks before, I was reluctant to invite anyone to my dissertation defense, an open defense per university policy. My advisor convinced me that I needed to have my parents there and in the end I was glad that he did. It was only the night before my defense that I recognized the significance of these identities coming together. I was coteaching a course in which a good friend was enrolled. After class, she offered encouraging words for the next day. I explained my hesitation with having my family there. She grabbed me by the shoulders and carefully said, "These two groups have to come together if you are to move forward; you need to have them both present in order to understand your identity." The intensity in her eyes could have knocked me over. I finally understood. I am forever grateful to my friend because she helped me to see something that I had been fighting.

My reluctance stemmed not from a lack of pride in my accomplishment or in my family. Rather, I felt compelled to protect my family. I did not want them to feel out of place or intimidated. I was nervous about having everyone in the same room during my defense. I wondered what everyone would talk about. My worries seemed silly as my committee began to arrive, and my mom casually asked one of the members about what he was working on during his sabbatical. I thought to myself, "How does she even know what a sabbatical is? How does she know he's been on sabbatical?" After reflecting on this experience, I realized that I wanted to protect myself. I was so scared to become something that was foreign to everything I had known. I had not yet come to terms with my new identity—a PhD, an academic, an expert. What does this mean when you come from a working-class background or when you are the first in your family to go to college?

Michelle brings me back to the present, "What you're describing sounds a lot like what Delgado Bernal reassures us about our *trenzas* and how they weave 'our personal, professional, and communal identities' and by doing so we become 'stronger and more complete' (p. 135)." "Yes, you're right," I say, "I just didn't anticipate the 'complexity, tensions, and obstacles' that would come with weaving together my identities" (Delgado Bernal, 2008, p. 135). I further explain,

“When I think about my dissertation defense last year, I was overwhelmed to the extent that I almost did not invite my parents to one of my most important life events.”

Susana poses a brief question that captures what I have been thinking. She says, “I suppose what you’re asking is—What does earning the doctorate mean when the new life that it offers is drastically different from the home community in which you grew up?” I reply, “Yes, that’s exactly what I’m asking myself. I grew up in a humble mining town. Most people worked for the local mines. In fact, I can describe to you what work smells like.” I continue,

I distinctly remember the way my dad smelled when he came home from working as an electrician in the copper mines—a mix of dirt, grease, and sweat, made all the more pungent by the dry desert heat. I know what work is supposed to look like and how one performs that type of work; it looks like callused hands, an old, tin lunch box filled each day with a ham and cheese sandwich, and dark, tanned neck and arms. I still am trying to make sense of the kind of work that I am expected to do in this role as an academic and how that contributes to the everyday lives of the communities to which I belong. I identify with people in these communities who come home looking and smelling like work, but I am also experiencing distance from these communities because my new role privileges my coming home from work looking and smelling instead like I am headed out to dinner.

I continue, “Ladies, I see now that I fear I’ll need to sacrifice the comfort of my home identity in order to pursue my academic identity. But what I am learning is that I can intertwine both.” Susana challenges me, “How will you able to do that?” I respond.

Well, I can share an example from my defense where I think I managed to weave the two. As I began my defense presentation I proceeded to tell everyone about my conversation with my friend the night before. In the spirit of merging my two identities, I told my committee that I would introduce them using the stories I had told my family over the last few years. I chose not to introduce my committee to my family using their titles or academic research. Instead, I shared how each committee member had become part of who I was, had shaped me, had guided both my husband and me, and had made a significant impact on my emerging identity. The introductions represented the ways in which knowledge is shared in my home and the ways in which I approach my own research. I suppose it was my way of welcoming my academic identity into

my working-class, home identity rather than pulling my working-class identity out and into the academy.

I breathe a sign of relief; it feels good to process through all of this. Michelle responds,

I was struck with the idea of defining work, especially based on one’s class background. Often, families use education as a gateway for opportunity. Ideally, it becomes a form of liberation education, providing new opportunities not just in socioeconomic classes but also in social classes (i.e., knowledge and networks; Anyon, 1980). However, it seems to separate us from our own communities. What we believe is intended to be a decolonizing pathway, an “awakening of critical consciousness,” (Freire, 2007, p. 36) inevitably leaves us with a feeling of separation (Villenas, 1996).

Michelle always helped me connect the research we read to our lived experiences and today she is offering a lot to consider. Susana adds,

Listening to your challenges really made me sad. I feel like we have to choose parts of ourselves to fit in the hegemonic structures of academia. How happy can we really be if we have to hide or silence parts of ourselves? Perhaps this contributes to the feeling of being an imposter we have previously discussed. Why can’t family be prevalent in our academic spaces?

Susana is referring to literature that addresses the struggles Mexican American doctoral students experience due to a lack of family understanding, exacerbated by the physical and psychological distances from the institution to home, a lack of an adequate Mexican American and Latina/o presence in graduate programs, and self-doubt or “imposter syndrome,” which is characterized as the feeling that someone made a mistake in admitting her into a graduate program (Figueroa et al., 2001; Herrera, 2003). Susana continues,

I think we choose not to divulge some of our experiences to our families because education (and specifically doctoral education) is considered a privilege. To our families, our doctoral degrees signify the ultimate example of the “American Dream,” yet we never reveal the many contestations we’ve had to make along the way. We should feel privileged to be part of academia, right, Judy?

“Yes, but I feel like I’m still awaiting full membership into this exclusive club,” I reply. My sister scholars are helping me



make sense of a variety of feelings I continue to experience as I shift in both socioeconomic status and social class while acknowledging the responsibilities, expectations, and privileges that accompany those shifts (for further discussion of the differences between social class and socioeconomic status, see Anyon, 1980). Additionally, as both Susana and Michelle explain, I am making sacrifices along the way through forms of separation and negotiation. We return to Delgado Bernal's (2008) reassurance that in bringing together our identities we will experience complexity and tension. "You know, I think part of my negotiation process involves creating my *trenza* or, perhaps, rebraiding my *trenza* to make room for a new strand." "What do you mean by that, Judy?" Michelle asks.

Well, I'm concerned with how this new strand may affect the original strands that defined who I was. I don't know which parts of my *trenza* I should present to different groups. For example, how much of my academic identity should I share with my family? How much of my home identity should I share with the academy? Is it enough to weave in a new strand?

These questions are intensified by the fact that I am no longer geographically near my home and the sites of my most salient identities. Again, there is silence over the phone, and the air is thick with concern and doubt. Susana clears her throat,

I don't know if this helps, but I can understand how you feel. I mean, you're negotiating your *trenza* through elements of place, space, and separation. That has to be challenging for anyone going through this, much less without Arturo by your side.

I remain silent because I know I will start to cry if I think any more about it. Susana picks up my hint and turns the attention to Michelle.

"What about you, Michelle? You've been kind of quiet today," Susana asks. "Well," Michelle says, "I'm parceling out articles from my dissertation and I wish I had a group of individuals who could help me process through some of my ideas. I really miss having a support group with me." "And what are we, *mujer*?" Susana asks, laughing. "Oh, you know what I mean!" Michelle answers.

*Asking others to braid my trenza: Becoming a public intellectual.* "I always had a group I could count on for academic support and now I am starting all over again as a faculty member," I tell my sister scholars, but it is only a half-truth. It is more than simply finding support for my research. I am homesick and perhaps a bit lonely. I gaze at my favorite pair of Rainbow flip-flops and recall my days in the Southwest, my home. It has been cloudy here for weeks, and not seeing the sun is definitely having an effect on me. I can still remember the smell of orange blossoms and lemon trees around campus that always greeted me on my walk from the parking

garage to the College of Education. Usually in a t-shirt and jeans, I could already feel the sun burning the distinct tan line on my Rainbows, even at 9 o'clock in the morning. I would cross the library and the faceless sculpture that caused Judy's dog to growl and then walk through the grass and dirt to arrive on the third floor. In my cubicle, under florescent lights and the noise from friends typing at their computers, I worked on my dissertation, chatted about nothing in particular, and calculated the time when I would see one of my faculty members walk along the hallway, listening to NPR podcasts on his break from writing. I was grateful to be in this space, to walk past offices and visit people who empowered me as a scholar and as a Chicana, identities that would ordinarily lead to struggle and subordination. I would miss them and panic occasionally rippled from my toes to the end of my long ponytail. During those moments, I would sigh, with eyes searching the tiled floor for answers. What would I do without them? How could I leave my home? In those moments, I had to remember to breathe, and even when I took a breath, my eyes would mist. "You can't cry. Not here. Not now. There is work to do and you have to finish this dissertation," I would say to myself to the point that it had become a mantra. I knew the end of this journey would be over soon, and I was clinging to what was left so tightly that my palms had multiple crescent-shaped marks.

"What's really going on?" Judy asks, forcing me to leave my memories. There were many instances when Judy seemed to know when I was denying my own truth. It is not until that moment that I realize I have been holding my breath, a bad habit indeed. I have often mentioned to the sister scholars that the walk to my new office in the sports complex involves the scent of chlorine and exercise equipment. Flip-flops have given way to sling-back heels, t-shirts to ruffled blouses, jeans to skirts that fall below the knee. "Um, just another typical day, walking past offices filled with people I do not know," I chuckle. This morning, no one is on my side of the hall. As I open the door, my office greets me with images of the desert. Deep red and gold cover my walls, and the pictures of friends and family smile back at me. A faint chatter can be heard outside the window of my office that overlooks the indoor running track. There is no noise other than the sound of my own typing. I say,

I miss the people who helped me cultivate my Chicana feminist strands. They did not necessarily look like me, were not always part of my department, and were not always faculty. I don't know why I am having trouble fostering social networks similar to the ones that contributed to my success as a doctoral student and reinforced my identity as a scholar.

"Don't think you're the only one, *hermana* (sister)," Susana tells me, "That's the reason I like going to our professional conferences. It's invigorating to connect with our

Latina/o colleagues.” As I hear her words, I glance at the conference badges I have collected since my college orientation. Many of these badges bring memories of visits to Boston, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Most of the Latina/o professionals I met at these conferences seemed to gravitate to each other as a way to (re)connect with other Latinas/os in similar positions, discuss issues relevant to Latina/o communities, vent about challenges faced, celebrate successes with one another, and feel encouraged to persevere until the next year we would meet. Within a span of ten years, seven of my colleagues decided to pursue doctorates in higher education, which led to the development of a core group of Latina/o PhDs who are now viewed as leaders within the Latina/o higher education community. These are the people I now turn to for advice and support, the ones who hold me accountable for conducting research that challenges the dominant discourse and helps inform practice. Our interactions with one another help us feel connected, even if we are hundreds of miles apart. Because my fellow sister scholars attend the same conferences, they understand my need for community and how that need is expressed through my social networks. “I think that for you, Michelle, building solidarity is vital to your experience; therefore, your social networks do not have to be local, but can be enacted regardless of distance,” Judy remarks. I draw my attention back to our conversation,

You’re both right. In the midst of struggle in my doctoral program, the annual meeting with this group was always nourishing. Now it’s my turn to serve as an example for others within our community that the PhD is possible. In this way, community aspirations became as important as familial aspirations during my doctoral experience and now as an academic.

My vision begins to blur as tears well in my eyes,

Maybe it’s just that today is cloudy and it’s affecting my mood, but sometimes I just want to give the responsibility to someone else. Why can’t other folks carry the burden of serving as the example? I mean, I was so focused on trying to finish this PhD and helping my community. Now that I have welcomed the responsibility of doing that for others, is there anyone who is going to take care of me? Who is going to help one of a handful of Latina/o faculty members on this campus? Why is finding that type of support harder to do here than finding *La Llorona*?

Judy and Susana laugh. Judy responds,

Hold on a second, Michelle. You can’t expect to have a built-in support network immediately. It took five

years for you to cultivate those connections. Don’t you think it will take you some time to build those back up again? Let’s face it, as someone who now cultivates doctoral students, there are remnants of old traditions in your research philosophy and pedagogies that we both learned in our program, but were not formulated through a traditional model of teacher/apprentice or mentor/mentee. So how can we expect traditional notions of what a support network should be guide our pathways to tenure?

“Yes, that’s true, Judy,” I say,

I was viewed by my faculty as a colleague and allocated space in which to share my perspective. That took time. Their investment in me was evidenced in their willingness to coconduct research and coauthor articles for publication. I learned the process of writing for publication by serving as first author and heeding the advice of my faculty member, a White male. I learned a different approach to writing through my advisor, who is a woman of color. My work on the lived experiences of Mexican American PhDs is illustrative of the support I received from faculty to ask challenging questions that critiqued not only the mechanisms that prevent Latinas/os from succeeding in higher education but also the ways in which our own communities may serve as obstacles to achieving the doctorate.

“But not everyone had that same experience in our graduate program,” Judy recalls. Susana asks, “How was it different?” My chair creaks as I uncross my legs and attempt to stall this conversation. My face begins to burn as I sense my discomfort with Judy’s memory, “Whoa, are we really going to go down this road?” “Yes,” Judy asserts, “It’s the only way to deal with what is going on with you right now.” Memories of doubt blur my vision. Why was I chosen over others? What did it mean for me to be perceived as having more privilege, especially by my White counterparts? I had greater access to faculty, who were willing to write letters of recommendation, review my work at various points along my dissertation process, coauthor papers and subsequent publications, and extend friendship after graduate school. Susana sounds impatient, “Okay, tell us, Michelle.” I say to my sister scholars,

There are several instances that I recall cringing when talking about my access to our faculty with my White colleagues, especially during the dissertation process and job search. In fact, I tried to downplay my relationships with faculty during those conversations, but I still read their faces: “You are getting access because you are a person of color.” Now that I’m here at UGA, I fear that others are looking at me in the same way.

“Mm hm,” Susana says, “I can see how that could affect you. And now, well, we know that the road to tenure is not easy for faculty of color. Maybe the lessons gained from your experience in grad school can help you now.” I shake my head and speak in a rushed tone,

Well, in an effort to justify my opportunities, I took a surprising stance. Although I am a researcher who works to dismantle the master narrative of merit, I argued that my connection to faculty and the attention I received was based on the fact that my work was worthy of drawing attention and that I *earned* the opportunity to gain access to faculty in ways that my White colleagues had not.

Judy wonders aloud, “All of us have some guilt about our access and the opportunities we were afforded as a result of that access. Why are we feeling guilty? Why does Michelle have to downplay her relationships with faculty?” She seems to be uncovering a difficult issue during our conversation. Susana states,

Perhaps a better question should be, “Why not you?” Why do we, as Latinas, question our capabilities and the ways our efforts engender privilege and opportunity? It seems that we spend a substantial amount of time rationalizing, minimizing, and even negating our scholarly contributions and our places within the academy.

Judy responds,

I have asked myself similar questions, and I think part of our self-doubt stems from questioning others’ intentions for giving us opportunities, especially when we are confronted by those who do not benefit in the same way. Michelle, do you think it is possible that the level of investment you received from your faculty was a form of benevolent racism? (Miller, 2008)

I mutter to myself that I hope this is not the case and then address Judy’s question.

Many hands labored to pull my *trenza* together. Disentangling a *trenza* that was coconstructed with others is problematic. If I pull one part of the strand in order to more fully understand the reasons the faculty invested in me, I may not be able to put it back together in the same way. In addition, although I have trouble explaining my reasons for minimizing my relationships with faculty, if I delve too deeply into my behavior I may uncover the truth: I am “justifying [my] presence among Whites” (Miller, 2008, p. 353). In fact, by

minimizing those relationships I am participating in the same positioning that my colleagues’ racist viewpoints asserted: There is no room for a legitimate Chicana scholar in higher education. Regardless of why the *trenza* was braided in a fashion that helped me understand my role as a scholar or who is involved in braiding my *trenza*, I will strive to never justify my presence in the academy.

We talk for a few more minutes, our minds racing with new ideas, old struggles, and an indistinct vision of what the future will hold for us as *mujeres* and scholars. Our *plática* ends with little resolution, but we promise one another to return to what we have shared when we meet at the next conference.

### Creating Spaces of Solidarity

Through *plática* and *testimonio*, we attempt to unpack our individual multiple identities by contesting, redefining, and forming our strands of identity in different locations and spaces. As Latina sister scholars, we are often faced with questions of legitimacy. For Susana, her motherhood identity is complicated by her Chicana identity. While she tries to uphold the standards and expectations of motherhood from family members, Susana needs to believe that her decision to accept the job offer validates her as a mother. For Judy, finding spaces to incorporate her working-class, home identity into research and practice allows her to counter the cultural norms of the profession. For Michelle, fostering support networks across the country allows for a sense of community external to her institution as well as an opportunity to utilize the power of non-Latinas/os in order to claim her identity as a scholar. In our sisterhood space, we affirm and validate our experiences. Our *testimonios* both support and extend existing research, suggesting that Latina doctoral students struggle with a combination of individual, familial, and institutional factors that can affect success (Gándara, 1982; González, 2006).

Based on our *testimonios*, we wish to critique key assumptions regarding research on doctoral students; in doing so, we also discuss important implications for institutional agents. First, we believe that there are mechanisms within each discipline that prevent certain students (i.e., students of color) from matriculating into programs. However, once students enroll, they find ways to survive, including the development of social networks that extend outside of their programs. This challenges the notion that students remain isolated and segregated within their fields. Although they may not find support within their department, Latina doctoral students are finding support through other faculty around campus and through support networks cultivated at academic conferences, fellowship programs, and student organizations.

Second, although socialization processes can hinder Latina/o student success, we argue that there is an aspect of the socialization process that is actually empowering for students of color. The goal is to utilize one's advantage but not reproduce similar negative socialization processes for future generations. By obtaining scholarly language and research skills, Latina/o students can address issues pertaining to Latina/o communities and articulate the needs of Latina/o communities while dismantling systems of oppression. There is strength in weaving together home identities and academic identities. This is a delicate balance because our goal is to empower and advance our communities through our scholarship and praxis, but we also must critique the privilege and oppression exerted within our communities. We are challenged to determine the extent to which this balance is realized when informing policy and curricular changes that directly affect our communities.

Finally, our critiques have implications for institutional agents who are rarely targeted or held accountable for (re) conceptualizing persistence for Latina/o doctoral students. As more Latinas/os enter higher education, institutions and departments should assess pathways to the PhD and analyze cultures and structures barring doctoral completion, such as overt and covert racism, sexism, and classism inherent in the design and implementation of graduate programs and curricula (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; González, 2006; Solórzano, 1993). Although institutional agents should be held accountable for the limited rates of Latina/o doctoral production, we can also empower doctoral students to utilize their agency and advocate for themselves through social networks.

As we have illustrated, one cannot minimize the role of support networks external to students' academic departments. However, in confining affirmation and validation to external spaces, are academic departments being excused from working towards creating more inclusive and welcoming environments? Students should be encouraged to explore their personal, professional, and communal identities (Delgado Bernal, 2008) as they begin to develop their research agendas, navigate the profession, and seek job opportunities. Just as we have done here, students should be encouraged to explore these identities together, so that identities are validated and acknowledged rather than pushed aside or silenced. In closing, we return to the concept of *trenzas* and remind institutional agents that the process of (re)braiding one's *trenza* is always unique and seldom orderly. We challenge institutional agents to be active and supportive participants in the (re)braiding process and to explore the complexities that come with nurturing a new strand. "Many hands labor[ed]" to create our *trenzas*, and we cannot place the responsibility of doing so solely on the student.

## Epilogue

"Ugh, just my luck," Judy quietly whispers as she fidgets with the hotel key card hoping the green light appears in order to avoid the lengthy walk back to the hotel reservations desk to request another key. Just as she is about to give up, the door swings open and Michelle and Susana are standing inside a small and dimly lit hallway. "Hi, *mujer!*" they both exclaim. As they exchange friendly embraces, Judy notices that her fellow sister scholars are wearing flannel pajamas and slippers. "Did I wake you guys up?" Judy asks apologetically. Susana and Michelle look at each other with smiles as Michelle responds, "Are you kidding, Judy? It's only 11 o'clock my time." "Yeah, we're not *that* old you know," Susana jokes. "Point taken," Judy says, "Now give me 10 minutes to get settled, and I'll join the pajama party. And, um, by the way, I never got the memo about wearing flannel pajamas."

Once everyone is comfortably settled and sitting on the white duvet covers, Susana probes, "So, let's get to it, how is the second year in academia coming along for everyone?" Michelle begins, "Well, I am not as homesick as I was last year and feel more firmly situated in my identity as a scholar. I have accepted that I can't go back to graduate school. I mean, who would want to?" The *mujeres* laugh together. Michelle returns to her story,

The social networks I established as a doctoral student were put to good use during an isolating first year as a faculty member. (Re)connecting with friends and colleagues was vital to my well-being and intellectual development. As one of few Latina/o faculty members at the university, I continue to struggle with establishing support networks in my area that innately understand my experiences as a woman of color and as a scholar deeply invested in Latina/o educational pathways. Although there are moments when I feel that I need to defend my place within the academy, the moment is fleeting. I am empowered to extend my concerns to others across the country, ask for help, and seek collegial relationships with more seasoned faculty. I have also developed connections with several White faculty and non-Latinas/os on campus who offer feedback on my experiences as a junior faculty member and challenge me to produce research that serves my community. I will make no apologies for helping other faculty and students of color situate themselves in as scholars and as practitioners.

Judy responds to Michelle and asks, "How did you find these new networks and colleagues on campus? I'm still having a hard time doing so." Michelle grabs her water bottle and takes a sip. She turns to Judy and says,

It certainly hasn't been easy because of all the issues I've already talked about, but something that I have realized is how defensive I can sometimes be with my colleagues. Establishing trust is very difficult when you're constantly worrying that others may think you don't deserve to be there. But I have asked my colleagues to review articles before I submit them, I sit next to a different person at our department meetings, and I try to participate in as many departmental and program events that I can.

Michelle gives a mischievous grin to her sister scholars and says,

You know how stubborn we *mujeres* can be. Sometimes asking for help can go a long way. And sometimes we need to realize that not everyone is going to love us like they did in grad school. Spend time with those who can be allies. Don't worry about the rest—just don't make enemies.

Michelle moves over to the chair to give Susana more room. Michelle senses that Susana is struggling, despite her various attempts to make Susana laugh that evening. She asks, "How has the position been going?" Susana hugs the small square pillow while contemplating Michelle's question and the sister scholars watch as tears glisten in her eyes. She quietly responds, "It's been tough." Susana pictures the times she has laid awake at night staring at her baby girl, peacefully sleeping underneath her "Dora the Explorer" fleece blanket. "I cry a lot," Susana begins as she tries not to worry her sister scholars,

I know I'm not depressed but there are times when crying is a good release for me. I live my days not thinking about the implications of my separated family. I don't think about how my heart yearns for the warm embrace of Ed's arms. I don't think about the girls' laughter as they play hide and go seek and later argue with one another about who playfully tagged who first. I don't think about whether my career choice is worth the strain on my family. But, when I am alone with my thoughts, I do cry and it pushes off all the weight I carry on my shoulders.

Judy squeezes her hand and says, "I know it's difficult. How is the job going and how are you coping?" "Well," Susana answers,

In all honesty, I love my new position. I've turned a new leaf! Instead of questioning whether I belong in academia, I feel my voice and my *trenzas* are needed in the academy. My validation stems from the relationships

I have cultivated with my graduate students in the classroom. Since many are aware of my family situation, my female students often ask for my advice about navigating children and work. Now, I don't claim to have the secret recipe for success, but I do like sharing the knowledge that I have gained during this process. I hope that I am able to give other women courage to follow their own paths.

"You are such a strong example of funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), Susana," Judy continues. "It makes me happy to hear that others are learning through your actions." "Gracias, Judy," Susana says as she closes her eyes and thinks about her dilemma between professional fulfillment and family separation. "I still can't help worrying about my relationship with my oldest daughter. Our conversations are becoming awkwardly distant, like two strangers conversing on an airplane." Michelle responds,

You are not strangers, Susana. Maybe your oldest daughter misses you more when she hears your voice. Not to equate my situation with yours, but talking with my old friends and faculty members is a constant reminder of the love and support I had with me. It can be lonely, but this will not be forever.

Susana reveals, "Even though it is hard, I do have supportive colleagues. Ed is really encouraging me to get a social life." The sister scholars smile as Susana continues, "It's hard to believe, but me, the extroverted, social butterfly who floats to limitless social events at professional conferences isn't quite the social butterfly at home." Judy questions, "So, it's easier to have a social life at conferences but not at home?" Susana shrugs her shoulders, "Sometimes I feel guilty about getting a babysitter to have dinner and drinks with colleagues or friends." Judy and Michelle both reassure her, "No, you can't think about it that way." "Finding your own support network is an aspect of good mental health," Michelle says. Susana nods in agreement. "I know," Susana sighs, "I do worry about my health in general, and I really need to take better care of myself." Susana goes to the bathroom to gather more tissues. She will share more as the days at the conference unfold. For now, she wipes her eyes and glances over at Judy. In turn, Judy looks at her sister scholars and fidgets uncomfortably, "Wow, is it my turn already?" She begins,

I admit that it has been almost two years into this position, and I am still not always comfortable with PhD title and the role that comes with it. I am still making sense of my identities as they weave in and out of one another. However, I recognize that I am accumulating tools that are used in my process of survival. In understanding my strength and power, I am consciously

making the decision to assert my capacity to create change in ways both big and small because, more than anything else, I believe that is the privilege and responsibility that comes with this new identity.

Judy begins to dig through her bright green laptop bag. She says, "I want to read something to you that I wrote last year during my first semester." Susana and Michelle watch as she pulls out a worn journal, with pages paper clipped and tagged. Judy turns to a page closer to the front of the journal and reads,

I began and my voice shook. As I tried to gain control of my voice, calm my nerves, and pray for confidence in my words, I made myself vulnerable. I am exposed. On purpose. I shared who I am, where I'm from, and why I do what I do. I shared why this is never just about me, that the letters that come after my name mean nothing if they are not constantly reflective of my family and community. I share that my success is my family's success. My success is my community's success. Even in doing so I am thinking about the literature<sup>3</sup> that talks about the challenges of faculty of color, particularly when they study their own communities and strongly identify as an advocate for a community. Yet I can't move forward here without telling them who I am.

Susana, who is sitting closest to Judy looks at her and says, "I didn't realize you were journaling about all of this. What was this from?" Judy responds,

I wrote this journal entry after a particularly difficult week during my first couple of months as a new assistant professor. This entry was written after the annual school of education faculty colloquium designed to introduce new faculty. I knew that these presentations traditionally included a few slides about one's research agenda, articles currently in progress, essentially—proof of one's academic worth. I instead opted to present who I was and what my work represented within the context of my communities and various identities. I've come to understand the significance of this event and why it took the emotional toll on me that it had. I was not just choosing to introduce myself in an unconventional way, counter to the cultural norms of our department and profession; I was also resisting those norms at the same time and hopefully opening the door for other scholars and/or graduate students to do the same. Although I was unaware at the time, I realize now that advocacy and agency does not have to be confined to teaching or publications; I was able to assert my agency by simply choosing to present in a different

way. I am trying every day to find ways to assert my agency. But quite honestly, it's very tiring.

Michelle is quiet for a moment and responds,

You know, in the midst of negotiating and (re)braiding our own *trenzas* this last year, we have also reaffirmed our commitment to advancing our communities. And you're right, it is not just tiring, it is exhausting. But there is strength in our *trenzas*. We can't forget that.

Susana picks up Michelle's thoughts,

This is our commitment. It is in the research that we conduct, the community outreach that we engage in, the articles that we assign, and in the conversations we have with our students. We must assert our identities and find ways to not only survive but also thrive within the academy.

Susana glances at the clock on the nightstand. Their conversation has pushed them past midnight. She says, "For now, let's get some rest. Our CRT roundtable is at 7 am tomorrow." The sister scholars close their eyes and reflect on their intertwining *trenzas*, sisterhood pedagogy, and the long road that they are happy to journey together.

### Acknowledgment

Special thanks to Dr. Stephanie Waterman for her helpful comments.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

### Notes

1. We refer to our collective as *Latina* because the term is more inclusive of our differing political perspectives and subsequent personal labels. We use the identifiers *Mexican American* and *Chicana* when discussing our personal identities and as a means of demonstrating how we value one another and our multiple identities. Finally, we utilize the terminology employed by the authors we cite.
2. Racialization is an ideological process in which individuals make meaning of their racial identities according to preconceived notions. For example, within the labor market, Mexican immigrants are intentionally recruited into low-paying jobs for reasons external to their abilities or skills.
3. See Baez (2000) and Reyes and Rios (2005) for examples.

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