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Publisher: Routledge

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## Equity & Excellence in Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ueee20>

### The Process of Reflexión in Bridging Testimonios Across Lived Experience

Michelle M. Espino <sup>a</sup>, Irene I. Vega <sup>b</sup>, Laura I. Rendón <sup>c</sup>, Jessica J. Ranero <sup>d</sup> & Marcela M. Muñiz <sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Georgia

<sup>b</sup> University of California, Los Angeles

<sup>c</sup> University of Texas, San Antonio

<sup>d</sup> Del Mar College

<sup>e</sup> Stanford University

Version of record first published: 03 Aug 2012

To cite this article: Michelle M. Espino, Irene I. Vega, Laura I. Rendón, Jessica J. Ranero & Marcela M. Muñiz (2012): The Process of Reflexión in Bridging Testimonios Across Lived Experience, *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45:3, 444-459

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.698188>

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## The Process of *Reflexión* in Bridging *Testimonios* Across Lived Experience

Michelle M. Espino  
*University of Georgia*

Irene I. Vega  
*University of California, Los Angeles*

Laura I. Rendón  
*University of Texas, San Antonio*

Jessica J. Ranero  
*Del Mar College*

Marcela M. Muñiz  
*Stanford University*

From Latinas' locations in the margins of academe and society emerges a unique set of challenges complicated by racism, sexism, and classism. One form of resistance to these multiple marginalities involves drawing upon and (re)telling one's lived experience to expose oppression and systemic violence. *Testimonio* is a conceptual and methodological tool that transforms personal narrative into this type of resistance. In this article, the authors employ *testimonio* to document, from an intergenerational perspective, critical consequences and benefits of the academic socialization process for Latina academics. In examining the exchange between and among four established and four emerging Latina scholars, the authors uncovered an innovative methodological technique for bridging *testimonios* across lived experience; this technique is referred to as *reflexión* and enhances the level of knowledge construction that *testimonio* offers in formulating a collective consciousness across generations and social identities, crafting theories about Latina scholars in academe, and demonstrating that lived experience is integral to knowledge creation.

If we are to create a critical framework to analyze systemic inequity and injustice; if we are to actualize a form of authentic justice, we must act to (re)appropriate and exercise our right to be

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This manuscript is based on a symposium presented at the 2009 Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference. The authors thank Estela Mara Bensimon, Sylvia Hurtado, Anna Ortiz, and Laura I. Rendón for granting permission to use their transcribed remarks from the ASHE symposium and for providing helpful feedback during the preparation of this article.

Address correspondence to Michelle M. Espino, College Student Affairs Administration Program, 413D Aderhold Hall, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602. E-mail: mespino@uga.edu

subjects of knowledge and of theoretical construction (Aquino, Machado, & Rodriguez, 2002). We cannot afford to leave this task in the hands of those who oppress us with their excluding theories and ideologies. As such, the *testimonios* you witnessed today become conduits to decolonize ourselves with an oppositional feminist consciousness. I commend you for your courage, your wisdom, your inner strength, your resilience and your resolve. *Hermanitas*,<sup>1</sup> you are the ones we were waiting for. (L. I. Rendón, personal communication, November 7, 2008)

In November 2009, we presented an intergenerational dialogue among emerging and established Latina<sup>2</sup> scholars at the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) annual conference (Espino et al., 2009). The symposium emerged over several years from ongoing discussions among our collective of four emerging Latina scholars who were either completing our doctorates or beginning our academic careers. Our conversations focused on bridging cultural commitments to research and the challenges we faced as Latina scholars in racist, sexist, and classist environments. We often questioned whether our concerns were unique or common issues experienced by a more seasoned generation. Our intentions were to: (1) seek answers to assuage our apprehensions, (2) heal the fragmentations caused by oppressive environments, (3) critique oppressive educational structures, and (4) formulate strategies for social change within academe. As emerging Latina scholars, we centered our lived experiences during the symposium and then invited established Latina scholars as dialogue partners to reflect on our *testimonios* and share their truths in light of what we discussed.

Although grateful for the opportunity to share our experiences in a public forum, we had not anticipated the profound emotional, intellectual, and healing connections that emerged. We, together with the audience, enacted resistance by transforming silence into language (Anzaldúa, 1990) and transgressed the boundaries of an academic, “mainstream” space. By making public those private stories of pain, triumph, uncertainty, conviction, and growth, we wove the strands of lived experience along with *sitios* (spaces) of contention (Hurtado, 1998) to “translate ourselves for each other” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 3). As we interpreted how our established *colegas* made sense of these translations, affirming and challenging the ways in which we perceived ourselves in each other, we realized the power of intersectional dialogue. Through this exchange we uncovered a process within the method of *testimonio* that mirrors the (un)conscious, “the inner faces, *las caras por dentro*” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvii) among our collective. We refer to this process as *reflexión*, one that allows us to analyze and interpret our individual *testimonios* as part of a collective experience that reflects our past, present, and future, thus moving us toward a collective consciousness.

*Reflexión* entails an examination of the inner self and sharing that inner self with a trusted dialogue partner. Through *reflexión* we move beyond self-reflection and self-inquiry toward a shared experience where our dialogue partners reflect our truths back to us as they share their own life journeys. This process accounts for the distortions and (mis)perceptions of ourselves based on the vestiges of oppression that continue to manifest within academe, tethering us to one another in the midst of racist, sexist, and classist environments. *Reflexión* helps us situate and explain how our lived experiences exist within a broader set of social and institutional structures. Through this process we analyze data at multiple moments in time. First, through the documentation and interpretation of the emerging scholars’ *testimonios*, then through the feedback offered among our smaller collective of emerging scholars as we prepared for the established scholars’ analyses and responses to the finalized *testimonios*. The final step involved analyzing the *testimonios* and responses as a larger collective. *Reflexión* created opportunities

to move beyond traditional notions of goodness and trustworthiness in qualitative research and focus more on catalytic validity (Lather, 1993). The construct of catalytic validity was evident, not only in displaying “the reality-altering impact of the inquiry process; [but directing] this impact so that [we would] gain self-understanding and self-direction” and thus transform our world (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 324). A point and counterpoint dialogue uniquely enables those participating in *reflexión* to engage in meaning making, identify the shared and differing themes found in Latina experiences, and lay the groundwork for theory building. We enacted *reflexión* to craft a collective consciousness from individual sufferings and triumphs that would lead to change within ourselves and within our environments.

For this article, we present *reflexión* as a complement to *testimonio* that focuses not only on the telling of lived experience but the (re)telling of those experiences to a trusted dialogue partner. This partner may or may not bear witness to the same forms of oppression but is still able to weave her story into a shared understanding of what it means to be a Latina in academe in the U.S. We first explain how *testimonio* bridges the perceived divide between personal experience and knowledge construction in academe. We then present excerpts from the *testimonios* shared at the symposium and demonstrate how the process of *reflexión* can be practiced to affirm and encourage healing pathways for our fractured minds, bodies, and spirits (Delgado Bernal, 2006, 2008). Finally, we offer suggestions for implementing the process of *reflexión* and assert that by analyzing the collective consciousness that emerged from this process, we can conceptualize the extent to which Latina scholars can create spaces for wholeness.

### SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS OF *TESTIMONIO*

Our use of *testimonio* follows a tradition established by the Latina Feminist Group (2001), a collective of 18 women who documented their private stories to expose the diversity of *Latinidades* in the U.S. and “decenter what counts as theory and who can engage in theorizing” (p. x). The collective sought to answer Moraga’s call for “theory in the flesh . . . where the physical realities of our lives . . . all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity . . . by naming our selves [*sic*] and by telling our stories in our own words” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 21). The Latina Feminist Group created a social and intellectual space where personal experience, situated within historical and sociopolitical contexts, is the foundation for knowledge creation. By engaging in *testimonio*, scholars avoid essentializing a Latina experience and instead, honor the various subjectivities that correspond with sexual identities, immigration status, language, and phenotype, to name a few.

*Testimonio* offers a venue to expose the complexities within Latina lived experience and engages individual stories to facilitate an understanding of the larger collective (Henze, 2000), while constructing knowledge that accounts for our connections and tensions. More Latinas are successfully transitioning into higher education and becoming socially and politically empowered, theorizing differently from “the Western form of abstract logic” by sharing “the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language” (Christian, 1990, p. 336). For example, Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, and Villenas (2006) rejected deficit interpretations of Chicana/Latina lives as “having problems or issues requiring intervention” (p. 4) and instead uncovered Chicana/Latina resilience by identifying the cultural resources they employ to navigate various social institutions. Similarly, Burciaga and Tavares (2006) used *testimonio* to establish sisterhood pedagogy within the academy in defiance of hostile, competitive environments in which

limited resources and support breed distance and contempt among graduate students. Espino, Muñoz, and Marquez Kiyama (2010) also employed *testimonio* to expose the challenges they faced in negotiating their evolving identities (motherhood, social class, and public intellectual) as they transitioned to faculty life.

We believe that *testimonio* is the most appropriate framework for our work because it is a tool that functions beyond the recording of personal stories. *Testimonio* moves us into the realm of knowledge creation that is grounded in lived experience, bearing witness to issues of oppression, confronting “traditional notions of ethnicity and nationalism, [and] questioning Eurocentric feminist frameworks” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2). Like others before us, we argue that the goal of personal narratives should be expanded from the collection of historical events to an academic venue that privileges Latinas’ ways of knowing and meaning making. Through *testimonio* we formulate our collective consciousness as a space of empowerment and resilience, while recognizing the intellectual aspects of this effort. By privileging the knowledge of those in the margins, we achieve a critical raced-gendered epistemology, a way of knowing that “speak[s] to culturally specific ways of positioning” and examines “how oppression is caught up in multiply [*sic*] raced, gendered, classed, and sexed relations” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 107). We cannot separate the mind from other elements of ourselves. Every element of our “bodymindspirit” (Lara, 2002, p. 435) is indivisible and influences the knowledge and theory constructed from lived experience, despite institutionalized oppression that fragments us. In this way, we are one with knowledge, affirming our lived experiences as truths.

### CREATING THREADS OF CONNECTION

In 2006, Espino and Muñoz met at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual conference. Vega met Ranero and Muñoz when she was applying to doctoral programs. A year later, all of us met at the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE) annual conference. From conversations about our doctoral journeys, we found similar challenges in negotiating between the pressures of family and academe, developing personal relationships external to our studies, and uncovering our ethnic identities that were often subsumed under the larger Latina umbrella. Energized by our connections, we decided to share our lived experiences in a more public forum and presented our first set of narratives during the 2008 AAHHE conference. Our stories focused on negotiating academic responsibilities as a new spouse, attending to traditional values as well as emerging feminist ones, shifting identities as a married academic, and contending with (hetero)sexist interpretations of women’s positions within Mexican American families.

At that point, we were not completely aware that we were engaging in an act of resistance by exposing our lived experiences in an academic space. In fact, we were privileging our ways of knowing and asserting our expertise as both the objects and subjects of knowledge creation (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Laura Rendón, who was in the audience, recognized that we were at the early stages of understanding *testimonio* and shared that many of the tensions we documented were also of concern to her generation of Latina academics. With her encouragement, we developed the idea of engaging in an intergenerational exchange to explore the possibility that our stories were reflected in those of a more seasoned generation. As a result, in Spring 2009, the second iteration of the *testimonios* shifted to include responses from established scholars. By

then, the most salient aspects of our experiences also were shifting because the intersections of our identities are fluid and place us in different positions within different moments in time (Bloom, 1998). Acknowledging the fluidity of identity further establishes the function of *testimonio* as a tool to document systemic violence over time and to demonstrate how lived experiences reflect broader structural realities (Henze, 2000).

With an understanding that our “honorable sisterhood” would enable us to “critique our experiences as . . . women with different cultural, class, and immigrant backgrounds without turning our differences into sites of adversity or hostility” (Cutri, Delgado Bernal, Powell, & Ramirez Wiederman, 1998, p. 101), we developed a question to guide the crafting of our revised *testimonios* and allow the malleability of our identities to shape our writing: To what extent have our intersecting identities informed our positions as Latina scholars? We individually crafted *testimonios* that drew upon our cultural intuition<sup>3</sup> (Delgado Bernal, 1998) to highlight the most salient parts of our experiences as *mujeres* and sister-scholars in academe. Our stories were deeply personal, reflected aspects of the literature on Latinas in higher education, and included knowledge acquired through our professional experiences.

We then began reviewing each other’s drafts and hosting teleconferences where we revealed ourselves to one another, honoring “what we [could] learn from our own and each other’s mistakes . . . [to be] unashamed and unapologetic about our joint collaboration” (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006, p. 138). We affirmed each other and expanded our awareness about how the multiple strands of our identities (re)shape our experiences, while recognizing our privileged and marginalized selves (Delgado Bernal, 2008). Through multiple iterations, we exposed four connecting themes in our *testimonios*: embracing the borderlands between home culture and academic culture, serving our communities, facing the challenges of being “educated out” of one’s community, and the transition from doctoral study to faculty life.

Laura Rendón served as our counsel, offering suggestions and helping us secure our dialogue partners. After confirming our partners, we distributed an e-mail message that included goals for the symposium, a timeline in the event that the proposal was accepted, and questions to consider such as:

1. How have the experiences shared in the *testimonio* resonated with or differed from your own experiences?
2. What one point really stood out for you in the *testimonio*?
3. What advice would you give to emerging Latina scholars as we navigate our academic careers?
4. What are some implications for the academy’s ability to attract and retain Latina scholars?

When the proposal was approved in Summer 2009, we revisited our *testimonios* and made changes that reflected a more current set of circumstances. For example, as a newly diagnosed breast cancer survivor, Michelle wanted to include the pain and struggle of dealing with cancer during her first year as a faculty member. Irene decided to focus specifically on the fragmentation and reparation of her identity during her undergraduate years. As we talked with one another, we felt encouraged to expose our *papelitos guardados*, the hidden secrets that we kept close (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

The resulting *testimonios* are heartbreaking and honest portrayals of our interactions within systems of oppression and the resulting impact on our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. When we presented the final versions at the symposium, our colleague, José Cabrales, videotaped our exchange, which we then transcribed verbatim. By situating *Latinidades* in the

center of scholarly discourse, we were “breaking boundaries, crossing borders, claiming fragmentation and hybridity” (Hurtado, 2003, p. 216) that would lead to theories of liberation and healing. By sharing stories about our often-fractured minds, bodies, and souls, we formulated a collective consciousness that fosters resistance and builds interdependence among Latinas in the academy, making explicit, in our case, oppression and systemic violence within higher education. Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 highlight the most evocative sections of the *testimonios* and responses from our dialogue partners. Similar to the work of Burciaga and Tavares (2006) and Espino et al. (2010), we will first introduce the emerging Latina scholars.

Michelle M. Espino identifies as a first-generation college student and a Chicana. Her father is from Mexico and her mother was born in Texas. Michelle claims Texas as her home, although she moved to several military bases throughout her childhood. She is in her fourth year as an assistant professor at the University of Georgia. Her dialogue partner was Sylvia Hurtado, Professor in the Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences and Director of the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Irene I. Vega is the daughter of a Mexican immigrant mother and a Mexican American father. Her childhood is both migratory and transnational since her family followed the agricultural crop between the Arizona-Mexico border and northern California for the first 15 years of her life. She is a doctoral student at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her dialogue partner was Laura Rendón, Professor of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at the University of Texas, San Antonio.

Jessica J. Ranero is a student affairs administrator at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. She is a first-generation college student and was born in Arlington, Virginia. Her parents are from Guatemala and Honduras. Her dialogue partner was Anna Ortiz, Professor of Educational Leadership and Student Development in Higher Education at California State University, Long Beach.

Marcela M. Muñoz is a newly minted Ph.D. from Stanford University. A first-generation college student, she was born in Pittsburg, California to a Mexican American mother and a Mexican father, the owners of a Mexican restaurant. She is a lifelong resident of the San Francisco Bay area and is married to a native Texan. Her dialogue partner was Estela Bensimon, Professor in Educational Policy and Administration and Director of the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California.

## HEALING FRACTURED MINDS, BODIES, AND SPIRITS

As evidenced in the excerpts, deeply emotional, intellectual, and healing connections were fostered through the exchanges among the emerging scholars and between the emerging and established scholars, as well as the consciousness-raising that occurred between presenters and the audience. By first demonstrating “individual agency—a person’s socially acknowledged right to interpret and speak for herself” through the emerging scholar’s *testimonio*—and then inviting “theoretically mediated interpretations” (Henze, 2000, p. 238) of lived experience through dialogue partners, we uncovered the process of *reflexión* and formulated our collective consciousness. While bounded within the space we carved at a particular moment, our exchange illustrates the core values we share that are rooted in our *Latinidad*, as well as the complexities of our multiple identities. In the following section we offer theorizations that emerged from our exchange.

In 2003, I graduated from Arizona State University with dual degrees in Political Science and Chicana/o Studies. I had come to Tempe four years prior without a plan and graduated with a political consciousness and newfound confidence in my academic and leadership potential. But this “success” did not come without its costs.

Like a ceramic bowl that breaks and is glued back together, my wholeness was restored, but the fragmentation that I experienced left its mark.

Some would say that framing this process as deficit does not recognize all that I, my family, and community have gained through education. I realize that what I call costs can also be considered assets and that what I call fragmentation can also be understood as growth. I am conscious that my “successful” socialization into the academy has facilitated important opportunities. Instead of subtractive, this process can also be understood as additive—I gained a new dimension of self. However, being optimistic about it requires hard work—it just doesn’t feel natural. The truth is that most days I feel like I’ve lost more than I’ve gained.

I feel that I had to suppress the migrant farm working border girl to allow the scholar to emerge. In restraining the border girl, I also held back from my family, my culture, my community, and my roots, and I constantly wonder if it’s worth it. I wonder if the social and emotional cost that I have paid for academic success is too high.

I know that the person who left San Luis, Arizona in 1999 is within me. She and her experiences are reflected in the work that I do and in the passion that fuels me. I know she’s there, but sometimes I wonder if others, especially my childhood friends and family know she’s actually me.

Our lives have forked so sharply and while I know that my friends and family are proud of me, I also know they suspect me of not understanding them anymore. I fear that perhaps I’ve veered so much from who I was that they no longer recognize me.

What is happening here is an act of courage; it’s an act of resistance; it’s an act of truth-telling in a very different way but still extremely valid. Those of us who are senior on this panel—20 years ago when we were your age, this session would not have been accepted at ASHE; there would not have been an audience. We would have been told we were crazy. And so this is a very significant event in the history of ASHE and I wanted to take a moment to recognize that.

Irene, *querida hermanita*, my little sister. I cried when I read your *testimonio*. I cried because your story connected me to my story. I too am a border woman. I was born in Laredo, Texas, which literally and figuratively makes me a border woman. But, I’m also a border woman in the academy. You know, I’m neither here nor there. I’m sometimes accepted; sometimes I’m not, even at my senior status.

Irene, you talk about certain dualities, cost/assets, strengths/deficits, gains/losses, comfort/discomfort, the familiar/the unfamiliar. And the academy also deals with dualities. You have research/practice, theory/practice. But these dualities exist for a reason. To know night, we have to know day. To know man, we have to know woman. So, to know our assets, we have to have some costs; otherwise, we wouldn’t recognize that these are assets. And so, what I say to you is that I think that you are moving forward because you mention how you are now viewing these things in a different way.

And in actuality, those dualities exist, the Mayans and the Aztecs told us, so that we would play in those dynamics; see how things are similar and dissimilar. We are right in this middle where there is the resolution of the duality. At some point you will grow to recognize how all of these costs and all of these things that you view as very painful, and they are painful, but how those now can be assets to give you the wholeness and the identity that you seek.

So, I thank you, Irene, and know that I am walking the path with you. *Muchas gracias*.

FIGURE 1 Fragmentation by Irene Vega; Dialogue Partner: Laura Rendón.

I carry in my heart the lessons my parents taught me along with the memories of the moments that shaped my educational aspirations. These memories and lessons sustain me during the difficult times and help me feel like I am back in the safety net of home even when I am thousands of miles away.

Despite dreams for a better life for all of us, I don't think any of us understood what types of sacrifices we would all have to make in order to get *una mejor vida*. I do not think that my parents envisioned that pursuing my education would mean having to leave home and breaking away from the *familia*. They also didn't expect that an unspoken barrier would build up between us. Furthermore, they did not anticipate that education would mean that their only daughter would not marry young and give them *nietos* to spoil.

I too did not understand that my education would place me in this strange space where I am in constant conflict between old and new; home and unknown places; tradition and innovation. I naively thought that education would give me a never-ending freedom. Although in many ways my education has given me freedoms that my parents never had the privilege of experiencing, such as economic freedom and a freedom from physical labor, it has also bound me to new and unfamiliar restrictions. These restrictions come in the form of academic standards that I blindly trip over every day in my doctoral program as I am socialized into the academy. Standards such as objectivity and the ability to work autonomously are unfamiliar because they are not based on *mis tradiciones, ni mis valores*.

Even as I struggle to hold on to the lessons and values given to me by my parents, the academy is covertly pushing me into solitude and confinement. I am left wondering if solitude was the *buena vida* my parents had envisioned for me. Somehow, I don't think so because I do not think the *buena vida* means feeling lonely and confused more often than affirmed and enlightened.

You talked about several polarities in your *testimonio*. I think the polarity between tradition and innovation is really key because we are constantly creating; we're creating research, we're writing, we're creating courses. Sometimes that is in contrast to tradition where we do what's expected, but remember there's autonomy in creation too. You have a disposition for collaboration and that's another tension—I think we work at the intersection of autonomy and collaboration.

I was also struck by the way you contrast economic freedom and freedom from physical labor to the restriction that academe offers us, requires of us. Sometimes we think that we have to buy into that restriction because we have chosen this career, this life. But know that you can reconstruct that reality just as you are reconstructing what it means to be a Latina in your family.

In fact, that's one of our greatest opportunities—we are reconstructing what it means to be Latina. This is part of that innovation that you spoke of in your *testimonio*. We are creating a new existence and new gender role patterns for ourselves in relation to our traditions.

I, too, have experienced the unspoken barriers that emerge as we educate ourselves, move up in the academy, and acquire a new language. This makes us more conscious of how we interact with the people who are so important to us and adds to our responsibilities as Latina academics. For me, it means that I have to be more intentional about connecting with my external family so that they don't think that I think I'm better than them. Because that is one of the things I really fear.

Overall, I loved reading your story, Jessica, because it made me think so much of my own. The advice I'll offer is to combat that loneliness and isolation no matter where you go. Lastly, because we come from an ethic of hard work, we often think we can take on a lot in the academy, but we must remember to balance our health. Reach out to those around you; please reach out to me in whatever way that I can help you.

FIGURE 2 *Haber Mi Gorda* by Jessica Ranero; Dialogue Partner: Anna Ortiz.

As the child of a tortilla maker and Bracero Program laborer turned entrepreneurs, I learned the value of hard work not simply by hitting the books, but by cleaning and waiting on tables in support of the family business. In my world, the term *service* has a few connotations. My culture and upbringing in a community service-oriented family have taught me that giving back in a heartfelt way is absolutely essential. However, service in academe seems less essential for tenure, often taking a backseat to research and teaching. It pains me that I would question any decision to engage in service, particularly the activities from which I draw great personal gratification, yet the pressures within the academy that will judge my success impact my decision-making process.

Throughout graduate school, I've found myself limiting my service involvement and now make decisions against a backdrop of other demands, such as my need to make academic progress, develop other aspects of my vita, and aim for greater balance between my work and family life. There is no question that I am influenced by the cues from my academic socialization, and this is something I have struggled with. As I see others passionately engaging in diversity advocacy, I sometimes wish that I could be fully in the trenches and question whether my decision to play a more limited role has been the right decision. Am I succumbing to a socialization process that limits or even denies culture and community? I'm not so naïve that I believe such a change in how we value service in tenure – a revolution, really – could easily take place at research universities, but I hope that, with supportive allies, change can indeed occur.

Until that time, I ground myself in the reality that this is not the world that I live in at my research university. Despite the tradeoffs, it is highly likely that I will continue to take those calls from the Upward Bound counselor who wants me to meet her high school students, the summer research program that needs mentors for under graduates of color, and the students who need academic help. It may not contribute to my tenure case, but it might encourage or better equip a few more students to consider and complete a stage of higher education that they might not have considered or thought possible otherwise. It's difficult to have any regrets about that.

I suppose that my story is very different, and I probably should have titled this, if I would have written it, "How I became a Latina." I come from an Argentinian family where we were voluntary immigrants, and I'm not a first-generation college student. My story of immigration is not a story of struggle at all; it was a planned immigration. The biggest struggle was, and it's kind of ironic now when I hear some of the [other] stories, is that my father was a surgeon in Argentina and, at the age of 40, when we decided to come to the U.S., he had to start his medical profession all over again.

I think that one of the things that really surprised me was how self-directed you are and how you're thinking about things I never thought of when I was a doctoral student. When I read your *testimonio* about service I thought, "This is not about service. This is about activism." In the academy, we define service as unpaid administrative work for the university. What you're talking about is a kind of activism that enables people who are in positions of power, as tenured professors, to use the resources to enable the success of others. In order for you to be the activist that you want to be, it is very important that you not do service. Because, the way in which you will be able to do what you want to do for others, what has been done for you, you will need to reach that position that gives you the power to help others. We often think that service and teaching and research are separate. Research to me is to, as in Freire's words, to act in the world to change it. And that's the kind of research that I was able to start doing after tenure, but drawing much on the experience of being in community organizing. I encourage you to think about becoming as Ricardo Stanton-Salazar would say, "an institutional agent" that has the social network to help others become like you.

When I read your *testimonio*, the first thing I thought about was my first student at USC, Marta Soto, who died of cancer two years ago. Her parents also had a restaurant, and I thought of Marta and how much she would have enjoyed to have been here with us, so I thank you for inviting me and for helping me keep Marta's energy and sensibilities alive with me.

FIGURE 3 Heeding the Call to Service by Marcela Muñoz; Dialogue Partner: Estela Bensimon.

On February 20, 2009, during my first year as a faculty member, I was supposed to attend admissions interviews. Instead, I was in the doctor's office hearing the words, "You have cancer." Too many questions entered my mind: How would I handle the pressures and stresses of academia while dealing with cancer? How would my vulnerability affect my relationships with colleagues and students? As I began to lose my hair and my level of energy decreased, I incorporated the consequences of the chemotherapy into my schedule. I had chemo on Thursdays, knowing that I could recuperate during the weekend and then resume teaching on Tuesdays. I updated students, faculty, family, and friends through a blog. Students sent care packages and cards and raised money for breast cancer research. When others said I should not focus on my research, I argued that my work was what I should think about. I wanted to believe that there was life for me after this battle was a distant memory. While engaging in scholarly activities, I could take a break from facing the horrors of cancer and the difficult surgical decisions that would later occur. On the days I lost hope, I prayed for just one more day so that I could be remembered for doing something of value, one more day to make a difference in the lives of those around me, one more day to write about and advocate for the communities I loved. Perhaps this was a bit unorthodox, but keeping that routine and those ambitions uplifted my spirits.

What it meant to be a faculty member changed on the day of my diagnosis. Cancer reminded me that I should not fear my journey to tenure; that I am strong enough to endure the challenges with grace and gratitude. Cancer granted me an opportunity to have faith in others, to have patience in myself. Now, my scholarship has greater meaning for me. I believe in waging some battles, but only if they lead to enhancing the work that we do as faculty, the work we do in developing practitioners and policymakers, and most especially, the work we do to advocate for students and their families. As I continue to face the consequences of my diagnosis, I am confident that having and defeating cancer will make me a better researcher, colleague, and friend. I am *La Sobreviviente*.

When I read your *testimonio*, I was surprised how relevant it was to aspects of my life. The one thing that comes through is the amazing strength we have within us. We are full of insecurities, and we never realize how strong we are until it comes to a test. Yours is an amazing story of hope; enabling us to understand that we can get beyond the challenge. What I hear in your story is your strength in accepting who you are; you have a wisdom that many of us still are acquiring. To understand where we get our strength will only make us more useful to a variety of communities. As an assistant professor, you're going to doubt yourself every day. But, academia is a trapeze act, and the next bar you're going to catch, you've done it before, so you can catch it again. I never really thought about this before but, if you don't catch that bar, you have a net. It's okay to fall. You have to ask: what am I to learn from this experience? I think that is key.

During a serious illness, the first thing you have to do is plan the rest of your life, which is difficult to do because you're not gonna care about that syllabus, you're not gonna care if you deliver the perfect lecture. When I was diagnosed with a tumor on my spine, I knew I had to make a will and contact my brothers and sisters to let them know. These are the things that when you're young, you don't want to think about, but they really put things in perspective. During my illness, I started doing a lot of reading about the body and healing. Now I believe that everything happens for a reason.

So, what's the advice? Do what you love to do. You love the questions, ask the questions. You love finding the answers, go find the answers. Do what you love to do whether it means taking some time out or exploring other pieces of yourself. Thank you for your strength and for sharing what you learned because it's a valuable lesson. One of the things we learn is that the body is an amazing creation. Our bodies want to naturally heal and get back to equilibrium. The only reason the body cannot get back to equilibrium is because something is preventing it, and that could be our own thought processes; it could be a health issue. That's the one thing that I learned that was most amazing, the healing power of ourselves. Thank you for your *testimonio*.

FIGURE 4 The First Year of Survival by Michelle Espino; Dialogue Partner: Sylvia Hurtado.

## Enduring the Emotional and Social Costs of Socialization to Higher Education

Our successful socialization into the academy has required the segmentation and compartmentalization of our identities. Like so many Latinas in higher education, we are positioned in the liminal spaces between multiple worlds of womanhood, family, community, and profession, striving to bridge our cultural and scholarly commitments. We fear that we are no longer recognizable to our childhood friends and families; that we have acquired a language that prevents us from communicating with the people we love; that we cannot reciprocate the opportunities that others provided us. We acknowledge that the process of socialization can be isolating for all academics; however, we assert that multiple marginalities based on Latinas' various subordinated identities compound the expected challenges. (See Delgado Bernal, 2008; Godínez, 2006; and Trueba, 2002 for discussions about intersecting identities and complexities of lived experience.)

## Resisting Racialized, Gendered, and Heteronormative Expectations among Work, Family, and Community

As heterosexual women within patriarchal and homophobic environments, some of us face the pressure of managing and resisting heteronormative, gendered expectations within our families and communities. Specifically, we contend with imposed expectations about romantic partnerships and child-bearing and piece together (temporary or final) resolutions that satisfy our personal desires and work priorities. For those who identify as such, we acknowledge that our heterosexual privilege in sharing our lived experiences may not reflect salient aspects of experience for our LBTQ sisters. A recommendation for future work is to bring women with marginalized sexual identities into the process of *reflexión* and disrupt traditional academic spaces that would otherwise ignore their lived experiences.

Much of our success is attributed to members of our families and communities who invested their time and scarce resources so that we could fulfill our potential. As a result, we feel a social responsibility to contribute to the efforts of which we were once beneficiaries. Unfortunately, our commitments toward family and community are often at odds with the expectations of the academy, which refuses to acknowledge that scholars are committed to more than just their work. The fact that we are so passionate about our academic work further complicates the career-life balance. Our resistance is illustrated in the bridging of our research, teaching, and activism (Ayala, 2008).

## Honoring Experiences of Pain and Healing

As members of multiple marginalized groups, we have experienced a sense of isolation and doubt stemming from our racialized, classed, and gendered experiences in academe. These socioemotional experiences and their physical consequences require that we take a more holistic perspective on our journeys—prioritizing bodymindspirit while drawing from our cultural resources to ensure our well-being (Lara, 2002). Seeking a healthy balance proves difficult as we face various academic commitments, deadlines, and the constant pressure to prove ourselves as scholars. We challenge ourselves to reflect on the nexus between our physical and mental conditions and our

profession. When we are tested, we need to reframe our professional community, our friendships with one another, aspects of our own vulnerabilities, and even our work. The strength within us may not be recognized until there is a moment of difficulty, but when that strength is harnessed, we can resist against structures of oppression within higher education and the greater society.

### REPLICATING THE PROCESS OF REFLEXIÓN

The exchange with dialogue partners who, in our case, were established scholars, deepened our understanding of the process through which a collective consciousness is formed; the process we have named *reflexión*. Through the process of *reflexión*, we moved from *testimonios*—sharing our truths—to engaging in a deeper examination of our truths and how they intersect and represent a sense of wholeness. The wisdom expressed first among our group of four emerging scholars and then among our group of eight scholars provided a sense of wholeness as we affirmed that we were not alone in our journeys and that just as our dialogue partners continued to navigate their own paths, we too would create new paths toward wholeness. The middle place where *testimonio* and *reflexión* meet is the spiritual place of identity; it is the place where two consciousnesses meet to create a collective consciousness. By sharing our personal struggles and exposing our vulnerabilities, we opened pathways between two generations of scholars who could share wisdom with one another, validate lived experiences, and (re)frame these lived experiences as legitimate, academically rigorous, and emancipatory projects.

By examining our inner selves and sharing those inner selves with trusted dialogue partners, we documented how our individual experiences diverged and converged with one another. The result was a collective consciousness through which we resist oppression in its various forms and empower ourselves and other scholars to continue doing so throughout the academic journey. Similar to the ways that Delgado Bernal's (1998) reflections after her study on Chicana school resistance and the 1968 Blowouts in Los Angeles led to uncovering the value of cultural intuition, we realized only after the symposium that the process of *reflexión* offered methodological clarity in formulating collective consciousness. Based on our experiences, we offer how the process of *reflexión* unfolded.

First, one should identify aspects or moments of her life that have been critical to the development of her intersecting identities. For us, the process started with our experiences as Latina scholars but evolved into aspects of our lives that were much more personal as we gained a greater sense of community with one another and were more willing to delve into the essence of who we each were at that given time. Second, one crafts a *testimonio* as an individual, either using a guiding question agreed upon with a dialogue partner or without such a question. A dialogue partner is identified as one who has wisdom (regardless of age or circumstance) and ways of knowing that parallels or differs from one's life experiences. In our case, we chose established Latina scholars because our intentions were to understand ourselves within the context of academe but soon realized that we, too, had wisdom to share with our established *colegas*. When the *testimonios* are exchanged through the written word, through discussion in person, or via teleconference/videoconference, guiding questions are formulated so that the dialogue partners are able to respond to similar prompts. In the responses we showcased in this article, the questions we formulated gave our dialogue partners opportunities to read our *testimonios* with particular questions in mind, but the reading of the *testimonios* in a public space also encouraged

more organic reactions based on that public interchange. The process of *reflexión* is made evident when the partners engage in a dialogue. Given geographical constraints, our dialogue prior to the symposium was done in writing, but without the limitation of distance, we would have done so in person. *Reflexión* is the dialectical process that we followed in formulating a collective consciousness among ourselves and with the established scholars.

Based on our experiences, we believe that *reflexión* enables participants to engage in meaning making, to identify the shared and differing themes of their experiences, and to lay the groundwork for theory building. *Reflexión* allowed us to situate our lived experience within a broader set of social and institutional structures. By engaging in this dialectical process, we simultaneously honored the “multiplicity of positions and border-crossing identities” (Diaz Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villarreal, & Campos, 2009, p. 771) we inhabit, while formulating theories about our experiences in academe.

Underlying both the creation of *testimonios* and the process of *reflexión* is the practice of reflexivity. Reflexivity is “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the ‘human as instrument’” (Merriam, 2002, p. 26). As Latina scholars, we all reflected critically on ourselves as individuals, but we also employed reflexive practices as we engaged in *reflexión* and developed our collective consciousness. Just as the teachers in Ladson-Billings’ (1995) study of culturally relevant teaching pedagogies used dialectical relationships to make meaning of their experiences, we emerging and established Latina scholars made meaning of our experiences through reflexive dialogues with one another. As Latina scholars committed to creating transformative change in the academy, we were further motivated to engage in the practice of reflexivity because it enabled us to challenge the status quo and examine our own privileges. As stated by Herising (2005), we engaged in reflexivity because we knew that as Latina scholars we needed to

consider politics of location as a serious form of enquiry, to map the ways in which we are socially and historically constituted, intertwined, and intersect with(in) the world and in relationship to the subjects of our research, reflexivity requires a resistance to theoretical generalizations and monolithic truth claims. (p. 136)

## CONCLUSION

As Latina academics, we claim Chicana feminist discourse to expose the cultural and social costs that we pay for success in academe. These costs are evidenced in the ways that our minds, bodies, and spirits are fractured. Through the process of *reflexión*, we combat the “alchemy of erasure” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2); this is our effort to transcend the effect of time and the insidious effects of academic socialization. *Reflexión* is an exceptionally productive technique for doing this because of the learning and collective consciousness that can emerge from the process. In our particular experience, it allowed us to engage with colleagues in not only intergenerational exchanges that exposed how little the culture of academe has changed across generations but how we are, in some ways, more prepared to think about and expose oppression. As we encounter similar obstacles of a more seasoned generation, they simultaneously relieve their pain through ours.

By using dialogue partners to share our *testimonios*, we are also better able to identify the structural and systemic roots of our individual and collective struggles through higher education.

This affirms our belief that what the academy frames as “individual subjectivity” is more collectivist in nature. “By virtue of [our individual] process of understanding [our] relationships to [our] social milieus, the groups [we] identify with become better able to represent [our] members in political struggles against oppression” (Henze, 2000, p. 230). Our personal experiences are tied to a larger community memory and a collective history that includes those who share several characteristics to include our sociocultural and sociohistorical backgrounds. As a collective of women that represents both emerging and established scholars, we created our own space of healing and empowerment in a hostile academic environment where we could begin to heal the fractures of our minds, bodies, and spirits.

As a result of theorizing the status of Latinas in the academy through the eyes of two different generations, we are both disheartened by the ongoing struggles and encouraged by the empowerment achieved through the process of *reflexión*. Feelings of isolation, confusion, physical pain, and spiritual yearning were evident across all of our lived experiences. We recognize that the fracturing experienced in the academy is a result of how higher education is structured to promote the success of those in the dominant culture. We are encouraged because despite the barriers, we Latinas have created our own spaces as we move from the margins to the center of the discourse.

We encourage other scholars to build upon the process of *reflexión* for larger empirical studies of Latinas in academe that focus on crafting lived experience as an aspect of knowledge creation. The process we highlighted in this article represents the first steps we took in our process of *reflexión*. We recognize that *reflexión* is an ongoing process; where it will lead us in the future remains to be seen, but we eagerly continue to come together in community as we forge ahead to create spaces for Latina scholars in the academy and beyond. We hope that others will move our work forward by continuing to theorize about *testimonios* and *reflexión* as mechanisms of transformative change. We end with an excerpt of Rendón’s concluding remarks from the ASHE symposium (L. I. Rendón, personal communication, November 7, 2008). Her words reiterate the profound personal meaning of our exchange, while calling attention to its scholarly significance:

[I]f research is, at its core, the simple yet complex act of uncovering truth, then *testimonios* become confessional narratives, which portray one’s own truth. *Testimoniando* . . . is an act of liberatory courage. What you’re saying to the academy . . . is that to be a good scholar, you must first confront your past, your pain, and your sorrow, and your evolving identity because all of this is deeply and profoundly related to your philosophical grounding and the way that you view the world. You simply cannot operate in the academy without this clarity; without pausing and taking in the enormous challenge of seeking to uncover truth, because you are a part of that truth. However, the academy has not created a space for us to engage in this profound self-reflexivity, and therefore, as Latinas, we are called to create it.

## NOTES

1. Throughout the article, there are particular Spanish words and phrases that were not translated to English for the purpose of signaling to readers that we respectfully wish to convey meaning that cannot be directly translated; a collective consciousness that incorporates linguistic differences; and a connectedness to our ancestors. Those words and phrases are important references to our culture and our experiences as Latina scholars who straddle multiple worlds and languages.

2. We use the term Latina to encompass multiple ethnic identities within Latina/o populations, especially accounting for the ethnic identities of the authors. We use specific racial/ethnic identifiers when citing from the literature.
3. Cultural intuition is a complex analytical process that extends beyond theoretical sensitivity, which is “the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33). Cultural intuition is based on four sources: personal experiences, existing literature, professional experience, and analytical processes (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

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**Michelle M. Espino** is an assistant professor in College Student Affairs Administration at the University of Georgia. Her research interests center on Latina/o educational pathways, particularly graduate education, as well as on employing critical methodologies in higher education research.

**Irene I. Vega** is a doctoral student in Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests are in international migration, ethnic boundary formation, and race in the United States and South Africa.

**Laura I. Rendón** is a professor of Higher Education and Co-Director of the Center for Research and Policy in Education in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Texas-San Antonio.

**Jessica J. Ranero** is the Coordinator for the Transition Center at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas.

**Marcela M. Muñiz** is a scholar-practitioner who has devoted her career to the field of higher education.