

**“OUR LABOR IS OUR PRAYER,
OUR MOTHERING IS OUR OFFERING:”
A Chicana M(other)work Framework
for Collective Resistance**

Chicana M(other)work Collective:
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Abstract: In this article, we draw from Patricia Hill Collins' theorization on motherwork and Chicana feminism to propose Chicana M(other)work as a concept and project that amplifies the intersectionalities of our classed, racialized, and gendered lived experiences as working-class, first-generation, Chicana Mother-Scholars. We offer Chicana M(other)work as a framework for collective resistance by naming the feminized, invisible, undervalued, and exploited labor of Mothers of Color in academia. Through our testimonios we labor to transform academic institutions and culture by calling for the end of institutional violence against low-income and working-class Chicana and Women of Color mothers in academia and beyond.

Key Words: Chicana feminism, Chicana m(other)work, healing, intersectionality, Mothers of Color in academia, Motherwork, self-care, testimonios, Women of Color, Women of Color in academia

Chicana M(other)work Is Intergenerational: Michelle Téllez

I became a mother in 2006, an unexpected turn after a well-mapped out educational journey. I was alone in my new city, where I had just started my academic position, and I immediately had to start figuring out how to balance child-rearing and community work with the ever-present need to write. I think about my life in relation to my abuelita, who until the age of 87 woke up at dawn every morning to feed and care for the family and to make ends meet. Her tasks were immense, as well as the responsibility she shouldered with nine kids—many grandkids—and as a widow

after my grandfather had been murdered. My mom migrated to this side of the border to support her family of origin, and instead of returning to Mexico stayed because she met my father and had us. She cleaned other people's homes for a living until she learned English and then became an attendance clerk at a local junior high school until her retirement. The pace of work, family, and home was never-ending. This is my genealogy. This is where I come from. The intergenerational lessons are many. Of being always ready for the next task. Of not sitting still. Of watching women take the lead. Of being in control. Of never showing fear.

I think about my daughter's life and the kind of socialization she is getting. So utterly different from how I was raised. Single mother? Professor? She sees me as someone always connected to the laptop (grading, trying to write, reading, and the suck and drain of social media). Recently I had to explain to her my “work” day—why it was that I was able to pick her up from school, take her to dance in the middle of the day yet still be connected to “work” as I carry my laptop or other devices around. Since she seemed frustrated, the alternative, I suggested, was she stay in after-care until the evening so that I wouldn't be connected to work during our time together. She readily agreed that she wouldn't like it. So instead we work toward building a relationship that values the time I have to parent her, to support the things she wants to do while also trying to get my own work done. This is a valuable lesson I've learned during my time in academia; although I was denied tenure at my first institution and almost entirely left the academy, I refuse to compromise this commitment to my daughter. However, I realized my greater purpose was to remain dedicated to my own work. I am now on the tenure-track again at a Research I institution, working on balancing my commitments, and I draw on my abuelita and mother's leadership to keep me focused.

I remember when my abuelita had a series of strokes and was confined to a bed for the final two years of her life. As a twenty-five-year-old, I did not fully understand the immensity of the loss until I returned to our pueblo a year after her death. The sollozos

came quick as soon as I entered the home that my mother had been raised in, the home that I spent every single summer in. A year after my daughter's birth I became involved in a two-year bitter battle for her custody and the right to raise her. Six months after I won custody and full legal rights, my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. She had been battling dementia for five years previously but we never imagined the brutality of the disease, the pain of the fight to retain dignity to a woman who constantly modeled strength. It was a blessing that we were able to return to the pueblo one last time as a family right before my mom's health got worse: my mother, myself, my daughter. I hoped it wouldn't be the last time we were all together there, but deep down I knew it was.

*I pushed my daughter on the hammock that I too used to get rocked in, feeling firmly rooted in a home that has been in my family for four generations. While I see myself in my daughter, the people in the pueblo see my mother in me. I think about my abuelita, I think about my mother, *sin ellas pero conmigo*, and now my daughter and I are here. I stare at my laptop and I listen to her ten-year-old self make music videos on her iPad.*

Making Space—Whose Labor Matters?

In 2014, Michelle Téllez wrote,

Chicana motherwork . . . means maneuvering and mothering across cultural and political borders by creating contradictions that meet at the intersections of racialization, class, and patriarchy. It's been many, many moons since I fell to the floor sobbing when my neighbor told me that my mother sounded like a broken record when she spoke English. Yet, I can still feel the sting of a little girl made to feel ashamed for this difference. All of these years later, I never imagined that my own little girl would one day come home and tell me that she wished her eyes were blue and that her skin was lighter, that she wishes she could look more like her friends at school. It's a constant reminder of the work we have to continue to do to remind each other of our humanity. (par. 7)

Her words remind us of the conditions in which many Chicana mothers and their children must navigate their identities in the United States. Téllez also speaks to transgenerational traumas that Mexican immigrant mothers and their Chicana daughters experience while living within a white heteropatriarchal society. This article responds to this conversation by providing an alternative space to reconsider our lived experiences and break systemic cycles of classed, raced, and gendered oppression. As such, we offer a new framework for understanding the interconnections between Chicana mothering and academic labor. Rather than understanding Chicana identity as singular, we view it as ever-evolving. Here we use the term Chicana conceptually to integrate our varying identarian positionalities¹—we are daughters of working-class Mexican migrant parents, and we are Chicana Mother-Scholars to second-generation Children of Color in the United States. While we self-identify as Mother-Scholars, we do not view our work as restricted to academic spaces or the home; instead, the concept Mother-Scholar transgresses the domestic and academic. Our work exists in the community, with each other, and among our children. We view our care work and mothering, specifically “motherwork” (Collins 1994), as an interwoven political act that responds to multiple forms of oppression experienced by People of Color in the United States.

Whereas Collins introduces the term “motherwork,” we modify it by embracing the term “other” through the use of parentheses in Chicana M(other)work as this calls attention to our layered care work from five words into one—Chicana, Mother, Other, Work, Motherwork. Chicana M(other)work is a collective of Mother-Scholars involved in collaborative projects that is inclusive of Women of Color (trans and cis), gender nonconforming people, other-mothers, and allies. We strive to build community within and outside the institution and one way we do this is by mothering others and ourselves (Gumbs 2010). Building upon Chicana feminists’ critiques of

institutional heteropatriarchal violence in the academy (Castañeda and Isgro 2014), Chicana M(other)work challenges increasingly corporatized neoliberal institutions by holding spaces accountable through activism when they are not supporting mothers and working-class families. Despite the possibility of individual upward mobility, we remain committed to our poor and working-class origins. Chicana M(other)work is not a project of assimilating or diversifying academia; rather, we aim to transform it, for instance, by choosing not to hide our children and instead including them within our work. As such, Chicana M(other)work is a call to action for transformative labor and justice within and outside academia. We acknowledge that other scholars focus on feminized labor in relation to topics such as citizenship and femicide; however, in this article we choose to focus on Chicana M(other)work to frame our feminized labor in the academy. In conversation with the work of other scholars in motherhood studies, we summarize existing literature on mothers in the academy; however through this article we are highlighting the particular conditions of Mothers of Color and capitalize this phrase to emphasize them as a distinct group. Chicana M(other)work offers a framework for collective resistance which makes feminized labor visible and prioritizes collective action and holistic healing to envision and enact socially just futures for Mother-Scholars, our children, and our communities.

This article is structured with the rebozo in mind, a multifunctional shawl that is woven and strengthened from strands of fabric. While we use the rebozo as a metaphor, our article similarly interweaves our five testimonios throughout that address themes such as intergenerational mothering, carving space, self-healing, creating imaginaries, and making labor visible. We have chosen to interweave our testimonios to contextualize our theory and create a foundation for what we are calling Chicana M(other)work. Our testimonios, like a thread of fabric, call attention to our fragmented experiences as

Chicana Mother-Scholars. We see our testimonios as an entryway for policy consideration and institutional transformation through collective resistance where Women of Color (Chicana and Mothers of Color alike) are collaborating to create, write, and push against our erasure. We focus on our academic mothering as an intervention within the literature on motherhood studies and academic mothering, which provide limited accounts of Chicana and Latina experiences.

While our work builds on Patricia Hill Collins' (1994) theory of “motherwork,” we use a Chicana feminist framework as our theoretical grounding to explore and challenge white heteropatriarchy as it continuously marginalizes Women of Color in the academic pipeline. Motherwork, for Collins, centers race, class, gender, and other intersectional identities to challenge Western ideologies of mothers' roles. As motherwork defies social structures and constructions of work and family as separate spheres for Black women and Women of Color, this framework disrupts gender roles. It also acknowledges women's reproductive labor as work on behalf of the family as a whole rather than benefiting men. Motherwork goes beyond the survival of the family; it recognizes the survival of one's own biological kin, but also recognizes the individual survival, empowerment, and identity of one's own racial and ethnic community, to protect the earth children who are yet to be born (Collins 1994). These concepts were instrumental for our own theorization of Chicana M(other)work.

As Chicana Mother-Scholars, our concept of Chicana M(other)work is informed by the labor we perform in the increasingly corporatized university model that exploits our labor as graduate students, faculty, and contingent workers. Although women who are adjunct professors comprise the new faculty majority in the United States, the difficulties of advancing in PhD programs and linear tenure-track careers are often framed as individual failings rather

than recognizing institutional barriers. In turn, the university is seldom held accountable for the exploitation faced by first-generation, low-income, and working-class Women of Color Mother-Scholars. We believe these institutional barriers include, but are not limited to, (1) poverty-level stipends for graduate students, (2) exploitative wages for adjunct faculty, (3) unstable contingent employment, (4) little to no financial resources for childcare, (5) numerous unpaid service obligations, (6) conference presentations in non-child friendly locations with expensive registration and travel fees, and (7) the expectation to attend professional networking events that often conflict with childcare and school hours. Moreover, a recent study shows that faculty family leave policies benefit fathers and disadvantage mothers (Wolfers 2016). These issues are compounded by the various degrees of microaggressions that Mothers of Color receive from administrators, staff, faculty, and peers, all of which can cause psychological harm (Bell 1992, 1995; Solórzano 1998; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano 2009). Taken together, these realities depict a dismal picture for Women of Color mothers in academia.

When we place these substantial institutional barriers within the context of data about Women of Color in academia, it is unsurprising that very few advance along the US pipeline of higher education and the professoriate. According to Ryu (2010), Women of Color in academia made up 7.5 percent of full-time faculty positions in the United States in 2010 (as cited in Harris and González 2013, 2). More specifically, Women of Color comprised 10.4 percent of instructors and lecturers, 9.9 percent of assistant professors, 6.6 percent of associate professors, and only 3.4 percent of full professors in US colleges and universities (Harris and Gonzalez 2013, 2). Women of Color are not only concentrated in the lower academic ranks, but are also overrepresented in what are perceived as “less prestigious” academic institutions, such as community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics 2010, 3). Among

women graduate students—who comprise 50 percent of PhD students—only 23 percent become tenure-track professors (National Center for Education Statistics 2009, 2). Men with young children are 35 percent more likely than women with young children to secure tenure-track positions after completing their PhDs (Wolfinger 2013). Moreover, academic fathers also secure tenure about 20 percent more frequently than academic mothers (Mason 2013). What these numbers show is that institutional issues directly affect the advancement of Women of Color Mother-Scholars.

These data also show that motherhood goes hand-in-hand with second-tier positions. Mothers are an astounding 132 percent more likely than fathers to end up in low-paid contingent positions (Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden 2013). The likelihood for a Mother of Color to receive a tenure-track position, let alone obtain tenure, is minimal (Castañeda and Isgro 2013). Combined with the invisible labor of mentoring Students of Color, providing undervalued service work for diversity initiatives, as well as maintaining family and community responsibilities, Mothers of Color are often institutionally pushed out because they do not receive credit for their feminized labor nor do they receive resources to adequately accommodate their motherwork.

Furthermore, the data provided above do not reflect the substantial gaps in the Chicana/o² and Latina/o educational pipeline. In support of Solórzano and Yosso’s work, a more recent Chicana/o Latina/o educational pipeline research study continues to show that for every 100 Chicana/os and Latina/os in kindergarten, 60 will receive a high school diploma, 11 will receive a bachelor’s degree, 3 will receive a graduate degree, and 0.2 will receive a PhD (Pérez-Huber et al. 2015; Solórzano and Yosso 2006). The numbers are sobering, especially when we apply an intersectional lens and consider that Chicana and Latina mothers constitute an even smaller percentage in the

educational pipeline. Therefore, we offer Chicana M(other)work as a call to end this cycle of institutional violence against Chicanas, Latinas, and Mothers of Color in academia.³ Chicana M(other)work challenges these institutional barriers faced by Women of Color Mothers in academia to show why and how they are pushed out from academia, exploited into contingent positions, and expected to meet and exceed professional standards as graduate students and faculty with little to no support. We claim that by taking agency, making our labor visible, building community, and prioritizing self-care, we can begin the revolutionary process of institutional transformation and collective resistance in these spaces and beyond. We believe:

Chicana M(other)work is intergenerational

Chicana M(other)work means carving space

Chicana M(other)work means healing ourselves

Chicana M(other)work is an imaginary

Chicana M(other)work makes our labor visible

Our labor is our prayer, our mothering is our offering.

Chicana M(other)work Means Carving Space: Christine Vega

My very existence as resistance shows what it takes to be a first-generation Chicana Mother-Scholar activist at a university. I see my presence, on- and off-campus, as a continuous effort to carve space mainly by building a pathway for children and parenting students. Most mornings, I wake before the rest of the house does, while baby and daddy sleep. I try to get a head start: make coffee, check social media, I whisper a prayer and burn medicine. My dreams often remind me of my tasks for

the next day, outlining my to-do list. On some introspective days, I'll find myself reflecting. May 4, 2016, my early morning social media entry is the equivalent of a journal reflection as motivation from my then two-year-old son:

Janitzio motivates my grind. I'm tired, all the time. Sometimes I don't eat or eat too fast to move onto the next thing, the next assignment, the next meeting. I go. I work. I do. My son reminds me to sloooooow it down. Tells me 'carry me like a baby mami' so I can remember how important it is to love tenderly with a soft heart in a not so soft world. My son is my heartbeat. My breath. My fire. My passion that drives my body to go. To work. To do. I have no choice than to move forward. To pray. To change. To fight. For him. For her. For all of the children. So that we can believe in love . . . So that we can believe in happiness . . . So that we can become those two things for them.

I give thanks to the many privileges I have as the “first” of many things in my family. Witnessing my son's restful slumber is a privilege with an ability to physically hold a baby in my womb, but to also have birthed him. I get to parent, hug, kiss, and cuddle him. All of which has come with a cost and labor of my family, ancestors, and community so we can exist. Despite not having all of the tools to trek this academic-motherhood journey (like many of us), I continuously pull from all directions and build a path functional enough for others to move through. The late Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), reminds us about the process of becoming and building in spaces where we “don't” fit. She urges our freedom to carve and chisel our own presence in spaces where we shouldn't belong: “I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space . . . with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture” (44). Because I don't belong, I organize and fight for

systemic and academic changes for all parenting students on my campus lado a lado with my fellow PhD mommas and allies. After I birthed my son, I birthed a coraje and frustration with a deeply felt isolation. My adviser, supporting my every move as a pregnant Chicana in education and a mother, granted me the opportunity to teach and lead work as it was related to my experiences as a mother. I led two quarters of Research Apprenticeship Courses (RAC) analyzing discrimination and microaggressions experienced by pregnant and mother-scholars at the university. Because my fellow pregnant presenting friends and I face discrimination on campus, we push back with our panzas, fighting for the right to own and do with our reproductive health what we see fit all the while three other mothers and I birthed a campus collective, Mothers of Color in Academia de UCLA. Because my fellow parents and I understand marginalization first-hand, we step into the front line of activism to create a more accepting campus culture as a means to care for the seven generations before us and the seven generations after us. I am what my ancestors prayed for; I am here to stay and carve space, build bridges, burn medicine, and pray for the seeds of the future.

Literature Review on Academic Mothers: ¿Pero Dónde Estamos Nosotras?

Literature and research that centers the experiences of low-income and working-class women faculty and/or data on Mothers of Color in academia is scant. Indeed, a survey of the literature published by and about academic mothers reveals that this field remains largely focused on academic mothers who are white, straight, married/partnered, middle- and upper-class, hold faculty positions, and who focus on the narrative of a right to mother (Peskowitz 2008; Evans & Grant 2008; Kuperberg 2009; Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden 2013; Springer, Parker, and Leviten-Reid 2009; Wolfinger 2013; McGranahan 2015; Wolfers 2016). For example, McGranahan (2015) states, “The question is not whether or not we can be mothers in academia, but rather understand that indeed it is possible, only it involves making sacrifices that

stand beyond those expected for men” (3). Peskowitz (2008) adds that the work on academic mothering is concerned with “documenting what happens when smart women consider motherhood in the context of institutions that have barely gotten used to the presence of women, let alone mothers” (pxiii). Similarly, Evans and Grant (2008) highlight the stress that comes with the combined demands of family and the academy in their edited volume, *Mama, PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life*. As pregnant, childbearing, or nursing mothers, the contributors recount their experiences struggling in a workplace that does not provide on-site childcare, flexible sick or family leave policies, and spaces to pump or breastfeed. They discuss how academic institutions are not family-friendly and how such institutions of higher education are not intended to accommodate mothers. They provide specific suggestions for improving academic settings so that they are more supportive of academic mothers. They also acknowledge the limited number of academic mothers who secure tenure positions.

However, this literature does not reflect the range of experiences that Mothers of Color navigate. While it is important to blaze trails “to normalize parenting in academia without apology” and make “our presence visible for the next generation, which includes taking our children to conferences and to talk about life outside of the academy as part the work we do as mothers” (Pine 2012, as cited in McGranahan 2015, 5), the experiences of academic Mothers of Color who face microaggressions and provide differentiated care to their families, communities, and students, are neglected.

Instead our work more closely aligns with the emerging scholarship about Mothers of Color in the academy. This growing body of literature challenges other work about academic mothers that largely reproduces white feminist neoliberalism and erases or minimizes the theories and lived experiences by and about Women

of Color academic mothering. These newer anthologies, including *Mothers in Academia* (Castañeda and Isgro 2013), *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women of Color in Academia* (Harris, Niemann, Gonzalez and Gutierrez y Muhs 2013), *Chicana/Latina Mothering* (Smith Silva 2011), and *Laboring Positions* (Nzinga-Johnson and Sekile 2013) reveal the various ways academic Mothers of Color combat institutional violence and microaggressions stemming from the intersections of racism, sexism, and mothering in the academy. Our work also closely aligns with *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* (Gumbs, Martens and Williams 2016) as the editors contextualize Women of Color mothering into a multi-generational and historical framework rooted in the legacies of colonization, such as state-sanctioned violence, genocide, and incarceration, but also spirituality, community-building, and liberation. Taken together, this small but growing body of literature demonstrates that academic Mothers of Color are taking agency by centering their lived experiences through narrative and interconnected histories of resistance.

Graduate Students of Color navigating the academy have necessarily added to the literature with their counternarratives detailing their experiences of institutional isolation as they contend with their communities and families while also trying to make the decision of if/when to have children or how to thrive in the academy with children (Duran 2008; Torrez 2013; Anaya 2011). However, Casanova and Brown (2013) and Anaya's (2011) work both make an important theoretical intervention for our own framework. Casanova and Brown (2013), while not specifically focusing on race, argue that care work and mothering is a practice versus a role that is solely performed by the mother or women. Our concept of "otherwork" accentuates the idea of mothering as practice, via care work, that can be performed by all—in the home, classroom, and community. In other words, one can mother a child or children and not be biologically related. Anaya (2011) uses intersectionality

as a tool to understand the multiple and complex experiences of mothers, who are of color and who are graduate students and the relationship between the personal and the social in constructions of power. Anaya’s contribution to our literature is critical as she has applied intersectionality in a way many mothers—and parenting students—can self-identify as a location of visibility in the academy, where being a parent as an identity is often hidden. In acknowledging that our experiences are intersectional, Anaya challenges ongoing marginalization in institutions of higher learning.

Furthermore, articles and books that amplify the lived experiences of queer Chicana, Latina, and Mothers of Color in academia are a critical contribution to the literature, because such writers disrupt compulsory heteronormativity and are more vulnerable to oppression due to their sexuality. For example, Gabriela Sandoval shares her experiences of what she calls “choice mothering” as an academic and a queer single Chicana mother in a largely white discipline and institution. In her testimonio, Sandoval shares how queer Chicana choice mothering informed her decision to ultimately leave the academy shortly after the birth of her child (2011). Likewise, Ana Castillo’s recent memoir showcases how she navigates queer Chicana mothering in academic spaces as faculty (2016).⁴ In Castillo’s memoir, she shares her journey as a queer Chicana mother, particularly in her early career when she struggled financially due to temporary visiting positions at colleges and universities and the lack of child support throughout her son’s childhood.

Finally, our project was initially inspired by Téllez’s (2013) article, “Lectures, Evaluations, and Diapers: Navigating the Terrains of Chicana Single Motherhood in the Academy,” where she uses her testimonio as a Chicana single mother to argue that diversity in academic institutions should grant voices to underrepresented experiences instead of simply focusing on

increasing representation. By providing statistical and testimonial accounts of the silencing of female junior Faculty of Color as well as single mothers, Téllez proves that the academy is not the liberal and diverse space it claims to be. Instead, the institution continues to reify “neutral” policies that privilege the experiences of straight, white, middle- and upper-class men, which further oppresses Women of Color faculty, but particularly Mothers of Color in academia. As a response to the publication of this article, the Chicana M(other)Work framework and project emerged, which we will discuss below.

Chicana M(other)work Means Healing Ourselves: Yvette Martínez-Vu

Other than my father suddenly passing away when I was twelve, birthing my son was the most transformative and empowering event of my life thus far, which taught me about the power of individual and collective healing. Birthing was an emotionally and physically grueling process that has liberated me despite leaving me with chronic pain. At nine months pregnant, I distinctly remember sitting inside the midwives’ office for a routine checkup only to find out my baby was breeched. There I was, meeting with chiropractors, acupuncturists, and midwives only to have that dreaded ultrasound machine show an image of my baby’s head under my ribs, only to have multiple doctors fail at moving him, resulting in a c-section. What I did not know back then was that I would have pregnancy complications. I did not know that I would hemorrhage, lose three liters of blood and almost lose my uterus, delaying my recovery from a few weeks to two full months. I did not know I would face a near-death experience, which would scar me for life but also teach me about the power of healing.

Physically recovering from pregnancy and birthing complications marked the beginning of my focus on healing as a form of survival. Returning to the disembodied culture of the academy after experiencing a highly embodied traumatic experience reminded me that the work of healing myself physically,

emotionally, and spiritually was not over. As someone with irritable bowel syndrome and undiagnosed post-surgical endometriosis, I live with daily abdominal and pelvic pain. I have also suffered from and learned to manage anxiety, phobic, and depressive disorders. Shortly after completing the PhD I started the radical process of listening to my gut. It has meant modifying my diet and lifestyle. It has meant learning to advocate for my special needs autistic son. It has meant parting ways from the tenure-track academic job market. It has meant acknowledging that I may not be equipped to carry another child, even though I yearn for another human being in my life. Listening to my gut has meant facing my fears every single day despite the pain. I am now transitioning into an academic administrator job helping underrepresented first-generation students pursue higher education. I have moved to a new city and maintained my involvement in community projects that feed my spirit. I am also forming a feminist and critically conscious biracial family. But my healing work is not over.

I view healing as a lifelong process where I am constantly confronting pain to find my joy. I am still working to heal myself and help other mothers through their healing process. Chicana M(other)work incorporates a similar kind of healing because it helps to provide mothers with a model for collective healing. This healing occurs when we mother each other and ourselves. Healing can occur in a number of ways, whether that's cooking each other organic healthy meals, taking walks in between our writing sessions, burning sage while engaging in pláticas, referring health practitioners to one another, or giving each other micro-affirmations that validate our experiences. For example, in December 2016, the same week I found out I was offered an ideal administrative position in a beautiful location, my son was diagnosed with autism in addition to his apraxia speech disorder. Just as I did in that week, I continue to experience mixed emotions, wondering what it will mean to raise a biracial special needs child in a new city where he will probably attend a school as one of a few nonwhite and neurodivergent children. But the members of Chicana M(other)work

have provided me with much needed micro-affirmations by learning about special needs and providing me with emotional support. I know that my son will be okay, I will be okay, and my family will be okay because I'm not alone. We are in this together. By working alongside other Chicana mothers, we provide each other with medicine that counters the institutional violence we experience. I firmly believe that without individual and collective healing, there is no change.

Chicana Feminist Framework and Testimonio as Method

Our work is deeply informed by Chicana feminist discourse, which is influenced by the tradition of advocacy scholarship that challenges the claims of objectivity and links research to community accountability and social change (Anzaldúa 1987; Téllez 2005; Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal and Elenes 2006).

Moreover, our work is driven by a passion to place the Chicana, as a speaking subject, at the center of intellectual discourse (García 1997). This framework advances notions of hybridity, which challenge the distinction between self and community, between Mexican and American; a Chicana feminist perspective disrupts dualisms by identifying the coexistence of seemingly contradictory ideas (Sandoval 1998; Téllez 2005). Furthermore, Chicana and Women of Color feminist discourse speaks to other intersectional issues, such as race, which have historically been ignored by white feminist scholars and activists, as demonstrated by first- and second-wave white feminists in the United States (Anzaldúa 1987). While white feminists did value personal experience, they often limited their analysis to the category of gender, thereby ignoring the intersectional elements of race, ethnicity, and class (Martínez 1996). Thus, Chicana feminism offers a framework for understanding the intersectional identities of Chicana Mother-Scholars and Women of Color scholars.

It is from the tradition of Chicana feminism that we write and offer our testimonios as a method that informs our concept of Chicana M(other)work.

Testimonio is a story that is told from a place of intent and understanding of social, political, and historical contexts (Latina Feminist Group 2001; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona 2012). Participants, who often create the testimonio, should be conscious of their positionality through their political consciousness. There is a larger purpose in telling a testimonio, where the private becomes profoundly political with the intent to raise social consciousness for people reading the text (Latina Feminist Group 2001). By centering the power of storytelling, our personal histories can become sites from which to theorize and understand how change can be used as a methodological tool (McClaurin 1999). Coupling Chicana and Black feminist theories with the method of testimonio, our methodology offers our experiences from locations of the brown body (Cruz, 2006) as a “bodymindspirit”⁵ (Lara, 2003) memory. Our testimonios challenge the silence we hold, within ourselves, out of fear of not being “academic or motherly enough” and instead allows us to reclaim space and discourse that would otherwise be silenced or marginalized by dominant discourse (Flores Carmona and Luciano 2014).

Chicana M(other)work Is an Imaginary: Cecilia Caballero

It wasn't supposed to be like this. That's what I remember the most. Not like this. Not with me showing him the dollar-store pregnancy test in his almost-falling-apart car whose fumes always burned into my nostrils because it smelled like gasoline all the time and I couldn't even open the windows for fresh air because they wouldn't roll down anymore. Not when he didn't have a high school diploma and he was just laid off from his construction job and was living with his parents and his sister and her three kids in a two-bedroom apartment. Not with me about to start an undergraduate summer research program filled with research deadlines and too heavy GRE prep books and all my favorite novels by Chicana writers. Not at twenty-three years old, before I moved out of my parents' house, before I even graduated from college, before I held that degree in my hand. My parents, who crossed the border

sin papeles from Michoacán, who have sixth-grade educations, who labored for this strange new land with their backs hunched over strawberry fields and fast-food deep fryers. My parents, with their tired eyes, their aching bones, and their big American dreams, wanted more for me, their baby. And I wanted more for mine.

I wanted everything for my baby. Everything. I wanted to reach far beyond my body and embrace all of las estrellas and galaxies together into the palms of my hands, gathering stardust that is alive with the vibrations of memory and resistance. I wanted us to reach deeply into the neverending umbilical cord of the universe and invite our antepasados, known and unknown, to this earthly dimension and walk with them in dignity, always. I wanted us to ride the endless rolling waves of yemaya together in the turquoise oceans of our shared dreams, hopes, and visions. I wanted to give my baby a life healed from inherited trauma and unspoken violence imprinted in the double helix of our genetics, evidenced in the rebelliousness of my curly hair, revealed in the darkness of our caramelo skin, manifested in the despair of my family's poverty and our soul sicknesses—diagnosed in clinical English words with exact scientific definitions printed in peer-reviewed books—cold, precise words like depression, schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, alcoholism, addiction, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

As a pregnant Chicana and first-generation undergraduate from a household where intergenerational trauma and poverty ran too deeply in our veins, I feared that I wouldn't survive, much less provide for my baby. I internalized the belief that I didn't belong at this institution, that I wouldn't finish my degree, that I would fulfill the stereotype as a young unmarried Chicana mother dropout. During my pregnancy and the following fall semester, I dreamed an imaginary: I wanted a world healed by love, by our ancestors, by the wisdom of plants, flowers, and herbs, by our animal friends, by our ceremonies, by the burning of sage and copal and incense. My imaginary means resistance: when I disclosed my pregnancy

*to an administrator who told me she “didn’t want this for me,” my family’s belief that I would drop out of my PhD because I started the program a newly single mother in a new city far from my hometown and any family or community support, professors who shamed me for lacking the financial resources for childcare. Now, as a PhD candidate and mother of a seven year old boy, my Chicana M(other)work imaginary is expansive. It is collective, it is vibrant, it is ancestral, it is fluid, it is shape-shifting, it crosses space and time. Although the radical labor of low-income and working-class Chicana and Women of Color mothers remains largely invisible and undervalued among school, work, and family, we know that *sin madres no hay revolución*. And we will win.*

Our Offering: Chicana M(other)work

Our review of literature on academic mothering in relation to our Chicana feminist framework and testimonio methodology accentuates the need for our *ofrenda*, our contributions on theoretical, epistemological, and scholarly understanding of motherwork through Chicana experiences. Therefore, we offer our working definition of Chicana M(other)work as we attempt to witness, understand, and complicate each other’s testimonio as Chicanas in our struggle for change. Through everyday acts or tactics⁶ of collective resistance against institutional violence, we are establishing an ethos of collective resistance. These acts over time can help produce change that supplements the policy changes for which institutions should be held accountable. By highlighting Chicana M(other)work as one example of collective resistance, we expect there will be an institutional response that recognizes the multiple identities we negotiate that will manifest in policy changes as well as a changes in the atmosphere towards academic scholars both at the departmental and university level. However, we also believe that a Chicana M(other)work framework grants agency to the individual, not just the institution. We recognize that policy change will fall short unless there is collective work.

Chicana M(other)work helps us thread together our intersectional and often fragmented identities. To weave, or to tejer, calls attention to the fragmentation of the words Chicana, mother, other, work and motherwork, into one where all pieces are not fragmented, instead, they are part of each fabric. Chicana M(other)work as a concept is like a rebozo, which is made of very simple material that comes from the earth, the cotton. Before the weaving of a rebozo, the cotton is thin and fragile. When all the strands come together, the rebozo begins to take shape. A rebozo serves to hold our babies, our children, and pull our hips together after giving birth. A rebozo can be used to cover, protect, and shield.

Building on the work of Margaret Montoya's (1994), concepts of "mascaras, trenzas y greñas," we conceptualize the rebozo similarly as the trenza (a braid), weaving our identities as Chicanas and Latinas aesthetically challenging the academic space with our presence as Mothers of Color. We view our journeys as Chicana Mother-Scholars as interwoven like a braid; in that process of weaving, an understanding of our collective experience emerges. We see our work as a political and feminist project that transforms the narrative for Chicana, Latina, and Women of Color mothers.

Chicana M(other)work also incorporates the rebozo metaphor to call attention to how our identities are not only intersectional but also interwoven because we cannot easily compartmentalize the work that we do within our communities, families, and academic spaces. Rather than compartmentalizing, which involves isolating one form of labor, we accept that we provide care work in all spaces. Chicana M(other)work allows us to view our labor as whole rather than fragmented. We ground Chicana M(other)work in Chicana feminist epistemologies because as first-generation college students and Women of Color, the institution does not account for the many ways our identities are split.⁷ Chicana M(other)work is about healing ourselves and attempting to heal these fragments. This is why we use the metaphor of the rebozo to pull

ourselves together within and beyond these institutional spaces, by calling into our healing the old abuelas, who taught us about mothering and resistance.

Part of the work involved in threading together our fragmented identities involves having to speak up and speak back to those institutions of power that silence us. Often in doing academic work we are taught to silence ourselves. We have been told “you’re better off doing it by yourself” if you want to succeed. Chicana M(other)work rejects this notion and highlights our agency and collective power to dismantle patriarchy and resist colonialism. Chicana M(other)work calls attention to the part of each one of us that was told not to get pregnant. Choosing to take control of our bodies and raise a family is healing and radical. To acknowledge someone as an academic mother, we validate their existence and the work they are doing through micro-affirmations⁸ even by saying hello, offering a seat on the bus, or complimenting them. By bearing witness to another academic mother, such as saying “I see you and the work that you’re doing is critical,” you can acknowledge each other’s existence. All of our labor is work that matters, similar to the consejos of Gloria Anzaldúa and our own mothers.

Ultimately, Chicana M(other)work is care work which includes the care we do in our home, classroom, communities, and with ourselves. Chicana M(other)work is also decolonizing, because when we reflect about all the ways that we’ve been erased and taught that our experiences weren’t important and yet we still try to raise our children in ways that value where they come from. Moreover, Chicana M(other)work is expansive and intergenerational. It is expansive because we do not mother alone when we have help from partners, relatives, or friends. It is intergenerational because it includes the histories of our Chicana and Mexicana abuelas, mothers, tías, and sisters. Chicana M(other)work is relational where often we also recognize our children for understanding that, “Mamá is studying.” Chicana M(other)work is an

imaginary because we envision what it means to mother for liberation among interlocking systems of oppression. We refuse to continue living fragmented and silenced lives, and as we navigate these institutions that have not been intended for us, we will tell our stories and build alternative spaces for ourselves within and outside the academy.

Chicana M(other)work Makes Our Labor Visible: Judith C. Pérez-Torres

In reflecting back on my first two pregnancies, for my academic colleagues, I had become that graduate student they warned us about. All they knew was that I had moved out of family housing. I was three months pregnant with my second baby when I left from Utah to California for financial support and to be closer to my family. My partner and I had made the decision to move back as it was the only way to alleviate childcare expenses on one household income. It was a difficult decision to leave the academic environment. My professors were right about “out of sight, out of mind,” since moving back home I took on different priorities, making it difficult to focus solely on school. This led professors and classmates to assume I had dropped the ball on my schoolwork and career for choosing to put my family first during their child-rearing years. Even more difficult to understand were the stares I received at the few conferences I managed to attend on K–12 education. Being asked to step out from an awards ceremony because my baby was making fussy noises was enough to make me feel out of place. Feeling burned-out from the assumptions placed by academia to now questioning my presence in conferences took a toll on me. First I was shamed for leaving school for my children and now I was being shamed for bringing my children to conferences.

Now, three babies later, I speak back to those feelings of shame I endured for stepping away from school to focus on familia and instead speak of the work we do as Mothers of Color from the home. Indirectly labeling me as a stay-at-home mom, it was assumed that I was losing my academic self, which failed to recognize the labor I

had to do at home. The “other” work as a Chicana mother often fails to include the labor done at home. Teaching my children to embrace their language and culture. Researching different books, videos, TV shows and songs that embrace and teach them to love their brown skin. Finding ways to break away from societal gender roles by pulling out the stool for my little boy as he loves to help me cook while my older daughter is playing outside. Figuring out ways to teach my brown-skinned children to survive and thrive within the hostile environment outside our home. This labor is in addition to the financial burdens, affordable healthy cooking, cleaning, helping with homework, scheduling, and planning for after school sports and activities and the labor I do for my siblings in making sure they are prepared for college, my parents bills accountant and translator, and my community involvement are all unrecognized labor. All of these are additional labors of love seldom considered as part of the work I do when I tell others I work from home. Instead they are seen as distractions preventing me from working toward the ideal academic position. I have learned that there is no ideal professional position—they all come with a price.

I have learned to love all that I do. Whether it is at home, in the classroom, in my community, with family, or in writing. While I have created a schedule to help me balance my life, I have learned to close my laptop when my children want to have a movie night—even though I have writing time on my schedule—and be okay with that. That’s what balance looks like in my life. Being flexible without feeling guilty. As Téllez shares, my children’s well-being will always be my first priority, and I will not apologize for their presence. Instead, let me remind you, “I was meant to be a mother, just as much as I was meant to be in the academy” (2013, 90).

Now while it might have taken me longer to graduate as a result of having my dissertation babies during grad school, what I experienced last May 2016 made me feel it was all worth it. I had the privilege of walking on stage with my four-year-old daughter walking next to me, my two-year-old son holding my right

hand, while carrying my seven-month baby with my left arm. It was bittersweet to walk with my three babies on stage. I had prepared them for that day, as our family accomplishment. "We did it mommy, we graduated!" Those were the words of excitement from my daughter as she walked proudly. I only hope my walk on the stage with my busy hands further encouraged other Mothers of Color to do the same and know you do not have to choose between your family and education.

Conclusion

This article draws on Black feminist scholarship to discuss how Chicana M(other)work performs multiple kinds of radical labor that cannot be compartmentalized; instead, our identities are woven into all that we do, just as a rebozo is woven together from individual strands. Specifically, we described how Chicana M(other)work includes the care work we do in our home, classrooms, and communities through our activism, self-care, community care, healing spaces, communal survival, and accountability. Applying Chicana M(other)work to our lived experiences in academia provides a framework for institutional transformation through collective resistance and makes our feminized labor visible by resisting institutional violence, challenging assimilation, and advocating for social justice. Chicana M(other)work can lead to institutional change, allied work within communities, and can reshape ideals about mothering as activist labor.

We were inspired to include our testimonios, as it was through our testimonios that we became a collective. Our individual testimonios, although experienced during different phases of our academic life, speak to the everyday acts of resistance to institutional violence. The support we gained collectively allowed us to thrive in this hostile environment. Had it not been for this collective, we all agree that we would not be where we are today. In our ofrenda we offered a definition of Chicana M(other)work and a tejiendo

(weaving) theory that informs our praxis. Just as our testimonios were threaded into our article as part of our methodology, so too our identities are constantly shifting depending on our motherwork labor. We also discussed relevant research on motherhood studies and highlighted their gaps by acknowledging their lack of attention toward intersectionalities of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Our goal in this work was to pose questions, asking what kind of institutional transformation we want to see and want others to imagine. For instance, we imagine and demand institutional change for all working-class and poor parenting Scholars of Color inside and outside the academy. We wish to see undergraduate and graduate programs that welcome children and families, academic conferences that include childcare, and funding that accounts for parenting costs.⁹

Since our first academic conference presentation together in 2014, we have received an array of support from Mothers of Color at different levels in academia (and in the non-academic community as well) that has inspired us to keep building. As a result, we have started our own podcast, website, social media networks and most recently, submitted a call for papers for an anthology where we encouraged submissions that amplified the lived experiences of Chicana Mothers and Mothers of Color in academia. We hope to extend that collective resistance to other Mothers of Color in academia through Chicana M(other)work.

Just as Black feminist scholarship inspired us to develop a Chicana M(other) work collective and theory, we wish to inspire others to create their own Mothers of Color collectives for faculty, students, and staff in their campus. Historically, Student of Color activism has led to much institutional change but not as much for parenting students. We believe that parenting concerns should be part of all Student of Color social movements, and institutions should be held accountable to

supporting these populations. We acknowledge that mothering and child-raising labor in Communities of Color are frontline activist labor and a powerful form of community building that has historically been invisible or undervalued (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016; Law and Martens 2012).

We identify the following areas for future research and we hope that our work can inspire multiple forms of collaborative knowledge production to address these areas. Specifically, more scholarship needs to be done by and about academic Mothers of Color and parents of color, including but not limited to adoptive Mothers, Undocumented Mothers and Parents of Color, Queer Mothers of Color, and Gender Nonconforming Parents of Color. In addition, other-mothers and allies who perform caretaking labor among their family and chosen kin model an undervalued form of community building. Also, future research on Mothers of Color in academia should center reproductive justice, including the right to parent Children of Color without fear of racialized and gendered state violence, including police violence, mass incarceration, state surveillance, or the detention of Black and Brown families. Furthermore, we acknowledge our limitations in this article and our varying degrees of privileges—including our Chicana and cisgender identities and our reproductive capacity to be biological mothers, among others—do not speak to everyone, we hope other Mother-Scholars of Color in academia will also share and be inspired to write their stories for collective resistance.

Notes

¹ We are a group of five cisgender Mother-Scholars who identify as Chicana, Chicana-Indigena, Chicana/Xicana/Latina, and Afro-Xicana. Therefore, we use the identifier “Chicana” although we also affirm the use of the identifier “Chicanx” in order to recognize varying gender identities, including Transgender and Gender Nonconforming people.

² Here we want to clarify that we use the terms “Chicana/o” and “Latina/o” to mirror the language used in Solórzano and Yosso’s research on the Chicana and Chicano educational pipeline (2006).

³ To clarify, we do not use Chicana and Latina interchangeably. We use them as separate entities to

honor and respect the different experiences of folks of color who have chosen to identify as Latinas and or as Chicanas.

⁴ For more on queer Chicana pregnancy and mothering, see Cherrie Moraga’s *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood* (1997) and Karleen Pendleton Jiménez’s *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* (2011). Although their work does not focus exclusively on Chicana academic mothering, they are foundational texts about queer Chicana mothering.

⁵ Irene Lara first introduced the concept of *bodymindspirit* in her dissertation, *Decolonizing Latina Spiritualities and Sexualities: Healing Practices in the Americas* (2003). She asserts and reminds us that all women are producers of knowledge and we carry generational information in our genetic makeup, which informs our everyday lives.

⁶ In *A Practice of Everyday*, Michel De Certeau developed his theory of everyday practices he called tactics, which involved consumers manipulating spaces imposed by strategic producers, which then created a secondary form of production. Likewise, we view our work as a secondary form of production through daily acts of resistance against institutional violence that affects mothers of color in the academy and these acts produce an atmosphere of collective resistance, which can lead to change.

⁷ When thinking about our split or fragmented identities, we also draw from the story of Coyolxauhqui, whose fragmented image serves as our logo for the Chicana M(other)work collective.

⁸ Rowe (2008) defines micro-affirmations as “apparently small acts, which are often ephemeral and hard-to-see, events that are public and private, often unconscious but very effective, which occur wherever people wish to help others to succeed. Micro-affirmations are tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening. Micro-affirmations lie in the practice of generosity, in consistently giving credit to others—in providing comfort and support when others are in distress, when there has been a failure at the bench, or an idea that did not work out, or a public attack. Micro-affirmations include the myriad details of fair, specific, timely, consistent and clear feedback that help a person build on strength and correct weakness.”

⁹ Please see Mason et. al. (2007), Isgro and Castaneda (2015), Torrez (2013), Springer, et. al. (2009), McGranahan (2015), and the “The Pregnant Scholar” project for important policy recommendations. In addition, Brown University’s memo for family-friendly academic scheduling and Wilson College’s Single Parent Scholar Program are excellent examples of policy implementation for faculty and student parents, however even these programs lack an intersectional lens: <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/11/18/502003007/when-the-students-on-campus-have-kids-of-their-own> and <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/provost/policies-and-procedures/family-friendly-scheduling>

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