VOICING FOR SPACE IN ACADEMIA: Testimonios of Chicana Communication Professors

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Abstract: *This essay centers the testimonios of three Chicana/Latinx scholars and contributes to the growing body of scholarship that demonstrates the value of this methodological approach. It highlights experiences and strategies of Latina scholars who struggle to make their voices heard in the ivory tower and against the bias in tenure and promotion in academia. This essay extends the use of testimonio within the field of communication as a viable method for engaging the personal and public lives, voices, discourses, stories and representations of Latina/os and Latinx communities. It is our objective that our shared stories filtered through a time-honored and respected Chicana feminist approach within a Latinx centric communication framework can become points of connection that encourage other emerging Chicana/Latinx scholars to consider communication as a serious and meaningful field in which decolonized knowledge production and activism is possible. Via their testimonios, the authors aim to contribute in shifting the vocal landscape of higher education and provide models for Latinx students who are considering Latinx critical communication as a dynamic area of study.*

Key Words: *Chicana, communication, decolonizing, knowledge production, LatCrit Comm, Latinx, testimonio*

The lack of Latina/os[1] in the professoriate is becoming increasingly well documented (Ponjuan 2011; Gonzales, Murukami, Núñez, 2013; Machado-Casas, Cantú Ruiz, Cantú, 2013), and the academic discipline of communication in the United States is no exception. Latina/os only make up 4 percent of tenured or tenure-track faculty members in the United States (Ponjuan 2011), and hold less than 3 percent of all communication faculty positions (Becker and Vlad 2009) despite demographic growth. In fact, over the past fifteen years, Latina/os have only made up 1.7 percent to 2.7 percent of all communication faculty, with most

recent figures sitting at 2.1 percent. Accordingly, many communication department chairs have noted that the racial and ethnic diversity of communication faculty and communication doctoral students still lag behind most academic disciplines (Interviews 2016). Although the field has grown in the past two decades and over five hundred communication doctorates are awarded annually, the percentage of people of color receiving PhDs in communication each year continues to be statistically small (Hickerson et al. 2008).

For instance, in 2011, 3 percent of all doctoral degrees conferred in communication went to US students identifying as Hispanic—a total of 22—while in 2014, 7 percent of communication doctoral recipients identified as Hispanic—a total of 39 (National Communication Society 2014). Current percentages for 2015 and 2016 have not yet been released by the National Science Foundation's *Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)* report, but an officer with the National Communication Association suspects the percentages have not changed much. With figures this dismal, Latina/os in particular, have been nearly nonexistent in the communication discipline in the United States. This small pool of Latinx scholars in communication is a likely consequence of multiple institutional barriers underrepresented racial minorities often faced when attempting to access higher education, especially graduate programs (Solórzano and Villalpando 1998; Castellanos, Gloria, and Kamimura 2006; Holling and Rodríguez 2006).

As a result, the discipline of communication continues to remain a space for predominantly white bodies, which affects the production of scholarship that claims to be politically committed to responding more broadly to the demographic, political, and cultural changes taking place across the country. Lastly, as Misra, Lundquist, Holmes, and Agiomavritis (2011) documented

in an *Academe* article on service work, women often face institutionalized sexism and are expected to take on additional professional responsibilities, such as uncompensated university service, that impede their ability to advance from the junior to the senior faculty ranks. Because of their dual status as women and as members of an underrepresented group, Latina/os are more likely to encounter racism, stereotyping, lack of mentoring, tokenism, uneven promotion, and inequitable salaries when entering the academy (Castañeda, Zambrana, Marsh, Vega, Becerra, and Perez 2015). Existing research documents the microaggressions Latinx faculty frequently endure: some are told by colleagues that they are particularly articulate, or that they speak English well, implying that unaccented English is atypical, while others have had to convince students, other faculty members, or staff members that they are professors, not service workers (Urrieta Jr., Méndez, and Rodríguez. 2015; Solórzano 1998).

These experiences send the message that Latinos do not belong in the academy. Moreover, although cross-gender and cross-race mentoring can be extremely beneficial, the dearth of senior Latinx faculty means that junior faculty are less likely than others to find role models who can provide guidance about how to navigate these specific challenges. Despite these overwhelming challenges and their minimal presence within the discipline, Latinx communication scholars have indeed made important scholarly contributions that bring together communication/media studies with Chicana/Latino studies (for instance, Alemán 2014; Anguiano and Castañeda 2014; Báez 2007; Casillas 2014; Chávez 2013; Martinez 2014; Molina-Guzmán, 2010; Pérez 2015; Valdivia 2008). Through these efforts, these scholars offer new forms of *conocimiento* in order to broaden the communication discipline to include, analyze, and craft the public and personal voices, discourses, stories, and images of Latinx individuals and communities.

This essay is one such effort. Coauthored by three Chicana communication scholars, it centers the experiences of Chicana scholars through the use of testimonio, demonstrating the value of this methodological approach within a Latinx critical communication framework. Specifically, by providing testimonios of their experiences forging a career path in a predominantly white intellectual space, this essay extends the use of testimonio within the field of communication as a viable method for engaging the personal and public lives, voices, discourses, stories and representations of Latinx communities. It is our objective that our shared stories filtered through a time-honored and respected Chicana feminist approach within a Latinx-centric communication framework can become points of connection that encourage other emerging Chicana/Latinx scholars to consider communication as a serious and meaningful field in which decolonized knowledge production and activism is possible. Additionally, this collaborative essay exemplifies how we can collectively create healthier productive academic spaces and develop holistic research methods. This includes challenging notions of sole-authorship as the only mode for knowledge production, privileging autoethnographic research practices as legitimate forms of information gathering, and dependably engaging with each other as we write, publish and present our scholarly work within and outside the academy.

Five sections guide this work. The first section introduces us, the three testimoniadoras. The second section grounds the value of testimonio for the communication discipline by reviewing its utility in Chicana feminist scholarship and Latino studies. The third section outlines the tenets of a Latinx critical communication framework and links them to a method of testimonio which is explored in the fourth section. The final section concludes the essay and elucidates lessons learned from bearing witness as Latinx profesoras.

Brief Biographical Sketches of Las Profesoras

As the three co-authors, we represent a variety of the facets of the communication discipline, as well as a range of experiences as Chicanas. We connected with each other over the course of several academic conferences, including *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS)* and the *National Association for Chicana and Chicano Scholars (NACCS)*, where we presented on topics such as the development of a Latinx critical communication framework, pedagogy, and our roles as scholar activists. In these spaces, we learned about each other's educational trajectories, challenges, and successes as we each sought to forge or sustain teaching and scholarship that aligned our investment in our respective communities, our identities as Chicanas within the communication discipline. The following offers a brief biographic sketch of each of us:

Claudia A. Anguiano: I migrated from Mexico at the age of six, but once in the United States, my father's labor certification was denied, resulting in an all-consuming experience that influenced my trajectory for a PhD to further understand the anti-immigrant sentiment I grew up in. I started as an assistant professor in the Human Communication Studies Department at California State University, Fullerton, a diverse institution, following a position held in the Institute for Writing and Rhetoric at Dartmouth College. For me, a first-generation college graduate, the decision to leave an affluent private university with a light teaching load and ample research support involved internal conflict, in part because, I was keenly aware that Latinos are further underrepresented in more selective institutions than in public Hispanic Serving Institutions. My scholarship and teaching most generally focus on the communicative intersections of culture, identity labels, and race, particularly within the context of social justice activism.

Sonya M. Alemán: A fourth-generation Tejana, I was raised by a single mom and my grandparents. I attended my first college class alongside my mother, who went to night school as a teacher's aide working on her teaching degree. When I was a preteen, I set my sights on earning a PhD, motivated by the fact that there were very few Chicanas who had PhDs. My research focuses on analyzing issues of race, racism, and whiteness in the media, journalism pedagogy, and media produced by racialized communities. I held a tenure-track appointment for five years at a predominately white research university, but recently relocated to a new tenure-track position at a Hispanic-Serving Institution, the University of Texas, San Antonio.

Mari Castañeda: I am now entering my sixteenth year at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, a historically liberal, predominantly white research university in New England. I began as an assistant professor at my university and am now a full professor, and recently became the new department chair. I selected the field of communication because I grew up attending TV tapings in Hollywood because my K-12 schools utilized these "fieldtrips" as opportunities to fundraise. Our schools received $2,000 for a Friday afternoon worth of live audience tapings. As young as eleven years, I came to recognize the power of media and the ways in which the images we viewed on television were intentionally and strategically constructed. My mom loves to tell how as a kid, I questioned the absence of Latinos on television, and how she planted seeds of inquiry by encouraging me to find out why.

Now, that we have anchored our voices in telling aspects of our respective positionalities, we will turn our attention to the use of testimonio in Chicana feminist scholarship, and explore its potentiality for the communication discipline.

Testimonio in Academia

The rich tradition of testimonio in Chicana/Latina studies makes it an important theoretical and empirical framework for examining how professoras make sense of their place in academia and the broader social world that ranges across the education, social science, and humanities fields. Since the publications of Moraga and Anzaldúa's seminal book *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* as well as *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* by The Latina Feminist Group, Chicana feminist scholars have utilized *testimonio* as a method to reflect on their experiences as well as the experiences of other marginalized communities. The importance of situating such experiences with testimonios is well documented as a method that allow authors:

> . . . to reflect on their personal narratives and arrive at certain conclusions, but it also strengthens and validates their experiences as Chicana/Latina scholars, authors, and activists in academia as they both provide a repertoire of meaning, context, voz auténtica (authentic voice), personal experience, negation, and most importantly, validation within and about spaces of contestation, resistance, and marginality. (Machado-Casas et al. 2013, 8)

Many Chicana scholars have taken up testimonio to recount their own stories (Acevedo 2001; Burciaga and Tavares 2006; Espino et al. 2010; Flores and García 2009; Latina Feminist Group 2001; Pérez Huber 2009b; Yosso 2006). In particular, the engagement with testimonio by Chicana/Latinx professors over the years has produced a body of knowledge about the experiences of brown women's bodies in higher education, which is the focus of this essay (Huber 2010; Flores and Garcia 2009; Villenas 2006; Escobar 2014; Cueva 2014; Fernandez 2002). The value of women of color using testimonio to engage the

complexities of their experiences as women of color scholars is clear. Special volumes about testimonio reveal the labyrinth of environmental challenges and educational policies in the US for aspiring and emerging Latinx students—the range of articles highlights the need for spaces of resistance, inclusion, and critical transformation in our practice as scholars (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga , and Flores Carmona, 2012; Saldaña, Castro-Villarreal, and Sosa, 2013; Vásquez, Flores, and Clark, 2013). Most recently, Chang et al (2016) further uncovered the meta-stressors familiar to Chicana/Latinx scholars given the hostile environment of academia. Their work features the resulting struggles of being both activists and scholars, and how often such scholarship is marginalized if it is rooted in race/gendered contexts. Moreover, they advocate for more institutionally sanctioned writing groups, writing retreats, writing spaces for Chicana/Latinx faculty, as ways to succeed since they serve to ameliorate the struggles, isolation, and tensions faced by Latinx scholars doing social justice work and scholarship (Gonzalez, Lara, and Prado, 2015; Torrez 2015).

When Chicana feminist scholars employ testimonio to document, reframe, transmit, or illuminate their own multiple subjectivities and the oppressive burdens they entail, it often functions to soothe abrasions caused by marginalization, a balm that heals both seen and unseen wounds (Pérez Huber 2009b). The ability to author one's own tale serves as a source of empowerment and healing. This approach promotes a sense of agency because the testimoniante is simultaneously the subject and object of inquiry, fostering a self-reflexivity of identity formation and an acknowledgement of the capacity to thrive despite unjust social and institutional barriers (Delgado Bernal et al. 2006).

Moreover, testimonio-based research challenges the Eurocentric timbre of research and invigorates race and gender scholarship with its insight into the material and discursive reality of multiply-layered oppression (Pérez Huber

2009b). The work validates the experiential knowledge of those who live with the discursive and material residue of racism, racialization, race, sexism, patriarchy, and/or genderization. As incarnate manifestations of these various oppressions, Chicana scholars often develop an insight into the phenomenon of disenfranchisement by drawing on their cultural intuition (Burciaga and Tavares 2006; Delgado Bernal 1998; Latina Feminist Group 2001). As such, testimonios are perceived as not merely documenting lived experiences, but also "acting upon the world" and having the potential to shift theory and praxis across multiple contexts, especially educational settings (DeNicolo and Gónzalez 2015; Figueroa 2013; Prieto 2012; Blackmer and Rodríguez, 2012). This essay contributes to the effort, because it is necessary to examine such experiences across a range of scholarly disciplines and educational contexts, and we hope to extend this methodology into the field of communication.

Within the communication discipline, testimonio has been underutilized. Most of this scholarship analyzes the rhetorical function of testimonio; for example, the ability to transform listeners of the testimonio to witnesses of the trauma they describe (Holling 2014); testimonios' ability to allow undocumented mothers to build solidarity with each other that helps to counter "criminalizing and dehumanizing discourses" about immigrants (Figueroa 2013); the ways they cultivate counterhegemonic discourse and agency among transnational women (Scholz 2015); their value even when their veracity is questioned (Avant-Mier and Hasian, Jr. 2002); and their ability to reimagine a journalistic practice that resonates with the racialized experience of communities of color (Alemán 2012). In this essay, we hope to broaden its application within our discipline, employing testimonio as a method that corresponds with a Latina/o critical communication framework. The next section outlines the tenets of this approach.

Latinx Critical Communication Framework

Conceptualized by Anguiano and Castañeda, Latinx critical communication framework emphasizes five tenets in its approach: centralize the Chicana/Latinx experience; deploy decolonizing methodological approaches; acknowledge and address the racism faced by Latinx communities; resist literacy-colorblind language and rhetoric toward Latina/os; and promote a social justice dimension (Anguiano and Castañeda 2014). It is important to note that Latinx critical communication theory builds on the important work produced through critical race, decolonial, and Latina/o critical theorists as well as on the accomplishments of scholars in Latina/o performance and media studies. The contribution of the framework is its attempt to bring together seemingly disparate theoretical orientations in order to uncover patterns of Chicana/Latinx experiences across communication landscapes, ranging from interpersonal, rhetorical, performative, and mass media.

In the case of this essay, the framework reinforces the need for more engagement with Chicana/Latino studies within in the field of communication and vice versa. Certainly, communication research on "Hispanics" exists, but those lacking an intersection with Chicana/Latino studies do not center social justice or the need to counter color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006). On the other hand, the LatCrit Comm approach is activist in its orientation as it aims to address "the epistemological gap of research about communities who lack institutional privilege in the society and in [the communication] discipline" (Anguiano and Castañeda 2014, 117). As the previous section noted, the powerful potential of testimonio in excavating counterhegemonic lived experiences is one critical method in LatCrit Comm for centralizing the Chicana/Latinx experience and promoting social justice strategies. Ultimately, one of our goals is the decolonization of knowledge production and certainly acknowledging methodological self-reflexivity is key for successfully unpacking

the complexity of intersectional material and symbolic realities. Jacqueline Martinez (2000) reminds us, "We need to know history of many people and their struggles, and they need to know ours. Make a commitment to persons, their lived bodies, and their many histories. Let us take inventory and be true to our face . . . documenting, exposing, and demanding recognition of the damages done by virtue of racist cultural perceptions carried across generations is an essential part of la mestiza's taking inventory" (87). Thus, it is necessary to lay bare the ongoing colonial context, challenges and opportunities Chicana/Latinx scholars have faced in order to continue our work toward disruptive disciplinary inclusion as well as generating scholarly communities that engage in counter-narratives as attempts to challenge the normative conjectures of the mainstream. We also recognize the communication discipline is vast and fragmented, but with this essay we aim to engage other scholars in a dialogue about how the discipline, departments, and universities practice the exclusion/inclusion of Latinx scholars and scholars of color more generally in the broader communication discipline. We have witnessed that our bodily presence in our departments is already challenging the disciplinary rigidity of the communication field because of our backgrounds, research foci, and teaching engagement is rooted in difference. Despite the limitations of producing intellectual work in predominantly white institutions and fields, the efforts to complicate disciplinary inclusion and challenge conventional presumptions about Chicana/Latinx scholars are still important because as long as institutions utilize normative practices of review, such as those for tenure and promotion, we need to voice for space in academia and in our discipline. In doing so, the "discipline suspends its own centering because [our voices brings] a commitment to questions greater than the discipline itself"(Gordon 2006, 34). Demonstrating the communicative power of testimonio is one such step towards disruptive inclusion, as illustrated in the next section.

Testimonios de Las Profas en Comunicación

The following section is divided into three parts in an effort to demonstrate the communicative power of testimonio through our lived experiences as Latinx critical communication scholars. The three themes are: 1) impetus for becoming a Chicana communication scholar; 2) forging an identity as a Chicana scholar; and 3) doing the work as Chicana communication scholars. These themes were developed collectively through a methodological process in which we wrote longer testimonios, shared them with each other, noted thematic similarities/differences, highlighted the sections that pertained to the eventual themes, and lastly, discussed how our situated knowledges regarding impetus, identity and work mapped onto the three themes, which emerged as intersecting dynamic processes. Through this process we got a little closer to what Sarah Amira de la Garza (2004) states is "an embodied, subjective methodology that would unearth, or *interrogate*, these cultural patterns [of religion, power, race, and social status] through performative [autoethnographic] text, whose analysis is between the lines, becoming louder and louder with repetition, like culture. The more you say it, the more it begins to speak to you" (xv). In essence, it revealed the commonalities and relevance of our experiences.

Impetus for Becoming a Chicana Communication Scholar

Claudia A. Anguiano: For me, a central feature of my perspective comes from the feeling of being at the margins—politically, economically, ideologically, and within the totality of my environment. The intersecting institutional barriers I have experienced are the driving force for the work that I do that (like many other Chicanas before me) are guided by Gloria Anzaldúa's words to do work, que valga la pena. My commitment to the ongoing effort to increase student persistence and communication skills that equip students for success—while bringing a holistic approach to decreasing

Latinx educational inequality—comes from my own sense of inadequacy during my long bout as a "DREAMer." That is, my interest in writing my dissertation about undocumented youth organizing did not emerge strictly from a theoretical curiosity bearing the stigma of unauthorized immigration status a so-called "alien" identity that indexes and guides my scholarship on immigration. Cervantes and his colleagues (2015) refer to tendencies toward academic overachievement, which is true of many in the undocumented student population who are able to successfully navigate their university studies as a defense mechanism to counteract the abjection resulting from cumulative messages and environmental cues of being unwelcomed. The product of working-class parents, I had to navigate and negotiate many episodes of microaggressions as part of my personal struggles in mainstream/discipline-specific academic spaces. While I was fortunate to have migrated from central Mexico to Los Angeles, the diversity of Southern California did not shield me from dismissive high school advisors who expressed the pointlessness of any expectations of my ever attending college. So, when pursuing a PhD in the Southwest, as opposed to going to law school, it was in large part because I felt that theorizing about intercultural communication centralized my subjectivity as a Latina, and just as important, allowed me to speak truth to power.

First-hand familiarity in the contested identity as an undocumented student is an embodied part of my personal, emotional, identity work, and my research process. The activist methodology is characterized by loyalties to an organized group engaged in political struggle— in this case by integrating aims of the DREAMer undocumented immigrant youth who agitate for a more inclusive and fair migration system. This means revealing my driving orientation as someone immersed in the goals of the Latinx undocumented youth movement and honoring the desire for dismantling racist nativism are central to my role

in academia. In doing so, I have struggled with painting an accurate picture of the moving sights of undocumented youth defying oppression, many accounts which never make it to publication. Actually, I frequently struggled to capture the complexity of the national events I was witnessing. Still, there were also days of coming back to write and cathartically process incidents that would otherwise not be exposed, that got me through the heartbreak of failed DREAM Act votes. Moments of exclusion continued to occur at different periods of my developing career, including the implicit and explicit messages that my professional productivity did not really matter—after all, faculty of color simply don't get tenure. To be sure, moments like that are not unlike going through that college application process and feeling instantaneously discounted. However, those are the very moments that drive me to continue inserting my voice as a former undocumented student.

Sonya M. Alemán: One of the earliest lessons of my doctoral program in communication was the need to define myself as a scholar. My professors indicated that I needed to frame my research, chart my trajectory, and demarcate my contributions in order to stake a claim in the communication field, as well as to prevent others from categorizing my work. My lived experiences as a working-class Mexican American from South Texas dissatisfied with media imagery and discourses about Latinas/os fueled my research agenda, leading me to distinguish myself as Chicana communication scholar. Defining myself as such allowed me to fuse my personal and emerging professional identities rhetorically, mirroring my embodiment of them. While much of academia advocates bifurcating research from racial, ethnic, class, sexual, and gendered identities (Villalpando and Delgado Bernal, 2002), this perspective negates my reality as a racialized individual living in a racially stratified society (Omi and Winant 2014; Bonilla-Silva 2006). Institutions of higher education do not exist outside racial formations

fueled by a white supremacist hierarchy. In fact, my experiences as a Chicana communication scholar reveal how these sites continually reinscribe those systems and accentuate those identities.

Mari Castañeda: As the daughter of working-class Mexican immigrants living in a diverse barrio in the San Gabriel Valley of Los Angeles, I never recognized my otherness until I began attending the Hollywood live TV-tapings my elementary schools used as fundraisers. In those studio lots, it became clear whose bodies were privileged and valued enough to be screened on the media landscape. As a communication undergraduate at UCLA and then a doctoral student in communication at the University of California, San Diego, I wanted to produce visual and written texts that challenged the racist orientations of mass media as well as expose its capitalist underpinnings, which fuel the negative stereotypes about Latina/os. My professors' understanding that media is a powerful social force inspired in me a desire to investigate the transcultural political economy and racialized and gendered contours of English-language and Spanish-language cultural production in the US as well as the social impact that these media have in how we see ourselves and the broader world. Yet the presence of few people of color in my communication doctoral program, and in graduate school at my university overall, made me doubt my potential impact in the scholarly conversations about what has occurred and is occurring in global media landscape. Additionally, a white faculty member in my doctoral program (who later failed to receive tenure) told me that my interest in Latina/o communication studies was boring and uninteresting. Therefore, it became clear early in graduate school that taking a Latinx orientation toward communication and media studies would be a struggle. Yet my participation in MALCS, NACCS, and the Raza Caucus of the National Communication Association as well as multiple viewings of the PBS documentary *Shattering the Silences: The Case*

for Minority Faculty made all of the difference in my ability to find spaces where the research I was attempting to conduct was accepted, encouraged, and discussed. My emphasis on the political economy of communication and its intersections with Chicana/Latinx studies placed me at the margins of both fields, but I believed questions and stories about Latina/o labor in the US communication industry needed much more exploration, and it still does.

Forging an Identity as a Chicana Scholar

Claudia A. Anguiano: The relationship between my identity and critical Latina/o communication scholarship is inextricably tied, and it informs my teaching and research. While experiential differences have been noted based on institutional type, Latinas are commonly still the "first" or "only" ones within their departmental or colleges, a norm not surprising given the number of Latinas in communication studies. While the resources aimed at assisting pretenure faculty vary, and while I have certainly received support from colleagues and administrators, such was the case for me working at both a PWI in the East Coast and HSI in Southwest. That lesson tells me we must defy gendered and racist biases and stereotypes at each campus, even if each has shown to have different sets of challenging legacies of institutional inequality.

In testimonio, the product and process are inseparable; but often, the emphasis of higher education is on product-driven classes. Granted, the time at my previous institution in the Northeast was one during particularly heightened issues of campus racial tensions, not toward me as a professor, but rather as exemplary of a larger campus culture of intolerance toward people of color. My second year included an unprecedented day when all undergraduate and graduate classes were canceled for a teach-in, following the death threats sent to students of color involved in a protest prompted by ongoing incidents of homophobia, sexual assault, and racism. Perhaps not surprising, since

the campus had lowest minority faculty representation in the Ivy League at 14.7 percent. That number raises other crucial questions— in my case, how educational exclusion contributes to "the imposter phenomenon." This, many Chicana feminist know all too well, includes the tremendous energy we expel to keep functioning in our institutions while carrying the weight of our ever self-evaluations/ever-calculations. Perhaps one of the most pernicious effects of impostor syndrome is the inner tension and conflict it creates even in our own expertise-based areas. Despite unwavering support of my chair, questions about the value of minority faculty members made me feel like the "all-things-diversity" resident, which also meant being tasked with multifold more service requests than my white, male colleague.

Relatedly, the goals of an activist epistemology and of academic spaces often feel at odds with each other. While I cannot say that I always balanced the efforts seamlessly, nevertheless it is always felt worthwhile to wrestle with these tensions of reconciling the dual roles of activist and scholar. As tenure-track faculty in communication studies, taking on that label sometimes means not all parts of my work are seen as valid or valuable, and feeling like the role of "scholar" must take precedence over role of on-the-ground "activist." In those moments where it seems progressive politics are not valued, I reimagine the field of communication as one that welcomes activist methodology, features Critical Latinx communication studies, and embraces all the aspects of ways we serve our communities.

Sonya M. Alemán: Before beginning my doctoral program, I visited the university and department I hoped to attend, seeking out the only Chicana scholar in the department, a rhetorician studying Chicanas/os, race, race relations, and social justice. She was on leave at the time, so we did not connect until a year later. I expressed my interest in working with her. She

said she avoids working with Chicana/o students in order to circumvent being pigeonholed as a "Chicana scholar." While she did not reject mentoring me, I felt rebuffed and disheartened. The department had not matched us up because of our surnames—I sought her out because I was interested in her research, which seemed rooted in her Chicana identity. However, the identity politics she played as an associate professor at a predominately white institution meant that while she successfully published research filtered through her experience as a Chicana, she detached that identity from her role as mentor and educator. Being denied mentoring because of my Chicana identity by a Chicana scholar illustrated my value and viability a scholar in the academy. I now challenge this attitude as a Chicana communication scholar, aware that out of the five hundred Communication PhDs awarded annually, less than one percent are to Latinas.

Mari Castañeda: As a first-generation college activist student entering graduate school straight from undergrad, I was a twenty-two-year-old Chicana who often felt completely out of place in the classroom and on campus. Additionally, as the oldest of five children with a single mom, I struggled to make sense of my deep desire for an academic career and the entrenched responsibility I felt for my family in Los Angeles. Needless to say, my doctoral program at UCSD was productive yet difficult. And yet, I had the opportunity to construct a dissertation committee that respected and acknowledged the research path I was attempting to develop for myself. They also were compassionate and supportive of my responsibilities towards my family, especially when I became pregnant during my second year of my doctoral program and began juggling motherhood with graduate school. Although my graduate mentors were nonjudgmental toward my efforts at scholarly production while parenting, other faculty members from within and outside my home department were not as understanding. Once such professor

from across campus was visibly annoyed when I excitedly told her I was pregnant and wished to get her advice as a fellow mom-scholar. She flat out told me, "Why do Latinas always have to get pregnant and ruin their chances of having a great career. My advice? Don't have this baby"; and she walked away. I was deflated and brokenhearted. But my advisor at the time, a white male McArthur winner, told me that many people won't be supportive of my life choices, but at the end of the day, no one was going to live this life except me. He asked, "So how do you want to live it?"

With my partner at the time, we chose to have this beautiful baby, and to continue with our academic pursuits (my son's father was completing his undergraduate degree at California State University, San Marcos). Yet none of my professors really knew what we had experienced to reach our place in higher education; and nothing, not even the belief that it was impossible to be a scholar of color with a child, was going to stop us from moving forward with our educational paths. Certainly, the journey was very difficult and deep sacrifices were made along the way, but our commitment to higher education as a form of liberation for us, and our families, was more intense than the intensity of the struggle. At the age of twenty-nine years, I defended my dissertation and embarked on a position as a tenure-track assistant professor at a research-one university on the East Coast. My son had just turned five years old when we drove across the country to our new life.

Leaving Southern California and our extended network of family and friends was very painful, but over time we developed a bicoastal life in which winter and summer breaks were spent in Los Angeles, which became ever more important after I divorced and then remarried. My extended family, especially my mom, visit often, which transforms our experience of "Amherst"—our family's presence helps us claim the environment as our own. It's important

to note that our New England college town experience is not perfect (for instance, it's not racially/ethnically diverse) and carving out a space in academia as a Chicana has not been easy, but our bicoastal existence keeps us tethered to the West Coast, and that makes all the difference.

Doing the Work as Chicana Communication Scholars

Claudia A. Anguiano: I have come to know some of the implications of engaged research by drawing on my experience that certain challenges seem to exist regardless of being at small predominantly white, elite university, or at a large, Hispanic Serving Institution. This is likely because power is predominant and "space" in the academy is limited. Thus, I have found the best way to expanding a conservative discipline like communication studies, is to continue to value and privilege the collaborative aspect of research and teaching. The partnering opportunities I have had with other Latinx communication studies mujeres, like my critical communication studies comadres and coauthors create a spirit of solidarity that lightens the load and transforms an otherwise isolating/alienating experience into an interconnected, reciprocal, and worthy effort.

The struggle to centralize the Latinx experience, in a field that continues to treat such scholarship as existing in the periphery, continues to be more of a matter of importance to our survival than of tenure. Again, I am reminded by Anzaldúa's (1987) affirmation that "the possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react." It is in working side-by-side with Latinx students (whether few at PWI's or more at HSI's)—I am reminded of the indomitable spirit and resourcefulness of our students. A former Chicana student shared with me a sense of disappointment she felt at her incompetence, not able to recognize the amazing academic feats she was accomplishing. And as I have advised my students, being part of the higher education institutions

that were never created for faculty of color, is its own act of resistance, a contribution to the goal of social justice. One of the ways inequality functions is through putative refutations of structural challenges. Moments when I felt that I had to say that all was well when it wasn't; or that I felt welcomed when I felt isolated; or that I was fine when the issues of racism made me feel sick—well, to state the obvious, meant constantly feeling like I was lying to myself. To embrace the testimonio of my race-based experiences is held steady when speaking out about historical or current systems of oppression and marginalization in context. These moments imbued me with passion for mentoring Latinx students in and out of the classroom, hopeful that my role as a professor might help them walk through the similar paths I'd once traversed myself.

Sonya M. Alemán: My identities as a Chicana, an educator and a scholar are interlaced and inextricable, impelling and transforming every aspect of my work. They also compound to make me an outlier in my chosen discipline. Several anecdotes illustrate this. The first happened only a few weeks after beginning my first tenure-track faculty position, when a white male instructor asked if I realized that a single vote decided my fate as the new "diversity hire." Noting that half of my new colleagues voted against me, and that any support was based solely on my racial and ethnic identity, he stated, "Welcome to second-class citizenship." Cognizant that his calculated barb deliberately divulged confidential information in order to undermine my confidence rendered me mute. But it revealed to me that I narrowly entered a disciplinary community that espouses an understanding of the social construction of race, racial categories, and racial hierarchies, yet seems unreflective of the way it polices those boundaries.

Another example stems from a tenure-track joint appointment I held

early in my career. My teaching course load was evenly divided between a communication department and an ethnic studies program, yet my research productivity was evaluated solely by my communication colleagues. Because all my academic training is rooted in communication—BA in English and communication, a MA in journalism and a PhD in communication—my research emphasis remains in communication. However, because I engage race-based frameworks to analyze race, racism, and whiteness in news and entertainment mass media content as well as in media pedagogies, this focus, combined with my racialized identity, meant that the communication faculty saw me as Chicana, rather than as a communication scholar. For instance, during an annual review, a white male senior colleague revealed that my reviewers suggested I target more top-tier communication journals, but then dismissed this recommendation as irrelevant since my scholarship was primarily grounded in ethnic studies. I was flummoxed because my publication record did not include a single ethnic studies-based journal. His comment revealed that foregrounding race in my research and my identity eclipsed the "communication" aspect of my scholarship, which for my former colleagues, remains anchored in the seeming racelessness of whiteness.

A last example occurred when a white female undergraduate student accused me of racial discrimination. The class was a specialized communication course that provided academic support to activist students who published a bilingual Chicana/o student newspaper. Primarily, Chicana and Latinx students enrolled in this course, producing and theorizing their unorthodox journalism practice (Alemán 2011). A senior requested special permission to enroll as it both fulfilled a final credit she needed to graduate and "fit" her schedule. In negotiating access to the class, she committed to learning about the need for a newspaper serving the Chicana/o student population on campus and the larger community. However, she attended only four class meetings. Since she

failed to fulfill her assignments, I assumed she dropped the course. The last week of the semester, the director of Undergraduate Studies called to initiate a meeting to discuss a grievance filed against me. Clarification arrived the next morning when I received an email from this student's mother, threatening to sue me, accusing me of being a racist for not accepting her daughter's work, for teaching my students to hate white people, and for speaking ill of her daughter in Spanish during class. When I asked department administrators what evidence was presented for these claims, I was told that because the student cried uncontrollably in their respective offices, that justified her allegation and their investigation of me. I was outraged that the department legitimized unfounded accusations rooted in my racial identity as a result of a young white woman's tears (Accapadi 2007). Even after I presented documentation proving her absences and failure to complete coursework, her tearful narrative spurred my department to request that I permit the student to complete alternate assignments so she could pass my class and graduate on time. I refused, as I was under no obligation to alter my syllabus, nor did I want to kowtow to white fragility. Resistance proved futile as this incident only revealed how vulnerable it is to be a Chicana communication scholar at a predominantly white institution, as institutional power overruled and pressured me to oblige.

Articulating my scholarly and racial identity functions as a political strategy intended to disrupt a rigid disciplinary terrain designed to perpetuate a racial social system that denies its very existence is fraught with peril. Regardless of the array of scholarship produced in the field engaging issues of race, racism, racialization as structures of oppression and marginalization, many daily operations within departments such as mine fail to interrogate these very systems, reminding scholars such as myself of how unorthodox—yet necessary—their presence truly is.

Mari Castañeda: My department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the campus as a whole have been very supportive of my research contributions and the Latinx critical communication perspective I bring to my courses and scholarship. A large component of my approach that has been especially appreciated is my investment in community and civic engagement. This is an area of strength particularly within the Communication Department, and my social justice engagement with Latinx/Puerto Rican communities is viewed as a positive asset, especially at this moment of anti-Latino political discourse and the progressive Black Lives Matter social movement. Such support from my research university has been critical especially during moments when the predominantly white undergraduate students have responded negatively to my presence and scholarly orientation in the classroom. For many students, I disrupt stereotypical notions of Latinx people and the idealized "professor." Additionally, my scholar-activism in the traditionally normative spaces of higher education shifts the conversation of what academia can do to engender social justice, social change, and the decolonization of knowledge production, particularly as it relates to my area of expertise in communication and media studies. My advancement in academia is centered in an ability to translate for my students and colleagues why my expertise matters; but it is also because I work in an academic environment that appreciates my skill-set and intellectual work as well as the collaborative components of my research. The road has certainly not been easy, but my research, teaching and outreach challenge mainstream notions of the professoriate and engaged scholarship, which is made all the more possible through the supportive networks of scholars of colors that many of us are part of. Ultimately, this is the revelation that has emerged for me: it is possible for this type of work to occur in the academy, but it is possible because it's done in community and not alone.

Lessons Learned

There is always risk when scholars of color make visible the challenges, pain, revelations and joy that we experience in academia. Historical notions of what constitutes a "professor" often do not include Latinx scholars or voicing personal experiences of academic trauma and success. Yet documenting and sharing our testimonios as Chicana communication professors is important for recognizing the continued underrepresentation of minority bodies and their intellectual work in predominantly white academic fields. By highlighting these kinds of testimonios, we create the potential to shift the vocal/material landscape of higher education and provide models for Chicana/Latinx students who are considering Latinx critical communication as a dynamic area of study. The testimonios in this essay highlight the heterogeneity of regional, class and educational differences even as we position ourselves similarly as Chicana scholars and demonstrate how academic institutions treat us equally as gendered, racialized, dubious professors of color. As Martinez (2003) notes, ". . . who we are as people, and what we come to say, think, believe and do are always, inescapably connected to the fact that we are located in history, culture, time and place" (120), and thus, as the testimonios above attest, challenges continue to exist for Chicana/Latinx professors trying to make their voices heard in the ivory tower. For instance, there are still challenges in how college administrators understand the unconscious bias in tenure and promotion, the differences in how professors of color experience the family/work juggle, and the relevance of community-oriented engaged scholarship. Yet, as this essay contends, there is strength in intellectual communion, communication and collaboration.

For Chicana/Latinx professors employed in traditional disciplines but also intersecting with Chicana/Latina studies, it is important to develop strategies for how to make interventions within those traditional fields. As

other MALCS mujeres have shown, scholarly collaboration, as promoted by generations of Chicana/Latinx scholars is one crucial way of resisting the lone researcher model that is often revered in the academy (Rojas Durazo, Silvester and Zepeda 2014). We have found collaboration, for instance, to be incredibly generative for our own intellectual and teaching development as well as deeply gratifying as we navigate at our institutions and careers. When we gather at conferences, our homes, online and via phone to work on collaborative efforts, we engage in "academic tamaleando" because as we discuss, debate, write, and edit our scholarly production, we're kneading the intellectual masa in the hopes we can collectively generate some knowledge-based sustenance for us and others. This is the crux of the methodological and theoretical work emerging from Chicana testimoniantes that builds on feminist scholarship as well as cultural praxis. Additionally, sharing our Latinx civic engagement projects with each other is another intervention that helps us stay connected to each other and our communities. In discussing the successes and challenges of community-based research, we hold each other accountable in our reciprocity and social justice work, which gives meaning to the research, teaching, and outreach that we conduct on a daily basis, particularly when so many Chicana/Latinx people experience barriers to higher education and we continue to experience inclusion/exclusion as professors of color.

Nevertheless, Latinx communication scholars are making headway in changing the type of scholarship that is produced along with the ways in which such production takes place. They are also challenging normative spaces of higher education through social justice-oriented teaching that places the long-ignored Chicana voices at the center as important knowledge producers. The testimonios above connect to the broader issues Latinx professors are facing, but which in the communication discipline have been silent and invisible. They are ultimately an attempt to make visible the

experiences of Latinx communication professors and give voice to strategies that can expand communication and other mainstream disciplines as well as the academy as a whole.

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Notes

[1] The term "Chicana" primarily refers to female persons of Mexican origin living in the US and signifies ideologies of self-determination, anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-assimilation that emerged during the 1960s. The "a/o" configuration counters the patriarchy embedded in the Spanish language that privileges the male identity in mixed-gender plural constructions. "Mexican American" was primarily used to identify this ethnic community. Chicana, Chicanx, Latinx, Xicana have since evolved to include any woman of Latino origin who share similar anti-oppressive political philosophies and, when composed with an "x" to deconstruct patriarchy and gender binaries. It is used in this essay similarly.

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