Leading in the Borderlands: Negotiating Ethnic Patriarchy for the Benefit of Students

Alicia Fedelina Chávez
Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Leadership and Organizational Learning
University of New Mexico

This article draws from a 7-year autoethnographic study of a Mestiza (female Spanish/Native American) leader negotiating ethnic patriarchies while serving as dean of students at a large Midwestern university and then as senior executive officer for a small southwestern campus. Professional teaching stories derived from study findings illuminate leadership dilemmas in navigating situations across gender and culture in higher education. Values, norms, beliefs, priorities, and behaviors of various ethnic patriarchal leadership environs are explored using anthropological techniques to understand how one female leader of color moves effectively, though not without challenge, to negotiate for the benefit of students. Recommendations are provided for leaders, allies, and those working to develop beyond gender-cultured boundaries in higher education.

Because I, a mestiza, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time . . . alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro, me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio . . . a soul between two worlds, three, four. My head buzzes with the contradictory; I am disoriented by all the voices that talk to me simultaneously.
—Gloria Anzaldúa

My first reaction is intense anger, rage . . . and I am usually so very slow to anger. This response is prompted by headlines announcing the first female president of Harvard; an article on first female Native, Asian,
and Hispanic American presidents of 4-year colleges (Turner, 2007); and my own return to faculty after 4 productive yet physically and psychically exhausting years as a woman of color leading a college campus. I am shocked at my visceral reaction yet perhaps my response is intense because even after 25 years in various collegiate leadership and faculty roles, I am still painfully negotiating the gender-cultured borderlands of higher education almost as deeply as when I started as a college freshman. As a former dean of students of a Midwestern big ten university and former executive campus director for a small rural southwestern campus, I felt compelled to turn this anger into something positive and decided to analyze 7 years of autoethnographic leadership field notes on negotiating ethnic patriarchies in academe. Though my second reaction is elation at these milestones by women and especially women of color, I cannot help but wonder how in current times there are still so many of these firsts. My anger originates in this question, this reality of academe as still bounded and defined by specific identities and norms that make it profoundly difficult on a daily basis for those who are “other” (Chávez, Guido-DiBrito, & Mallory, 2003; Ibarra, 2001).

As a woman of color and a leader, scholar, and teacher in higher education I shouldn’t be surprised at this paucity of women of color in the highest levels of leadership. Though in student affairs, we have many more women and persons of color as senior student affairs officers, there are few women of color in dean, provost, or presidential positions. We are certainly not present in numbers to match the almost majority ratios of people of color and women in much of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Of the 186,505 executive/administrative/managerial professionals in postsecondary education, only 33,875 are from one or more of the four ethnic minority groups designated as underserved (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). This number shrinks drastically as you move up the executive ranks and narrow to women of color (Turner, 2007). Unfortunately census and department of education statistics separate ethnicity and gender, making it difficult to gauge the national numbers of women of color in executive level collegiate leadership. Though we have made important progress, we are still far from representing the ratios of women of color in higher education to women of color in the larger society. I have mourned as one after another of my friends who are women of color have left professorships and collegiate leadership exhausted from the experience of working in cultural and gender environs not their own.

Individually and institutionally women of color navigate ethnic
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patriarchies every moment of our professional lives (Rich, 1993). Since decision makers at executive levels hold much influence in the academy, it is important that we continue to diversify this professional group and culture (Tierney & Bensimon, 2000). It is also important that we continually transform from a very homogeneous practice of academe based on specific cultural and gender norms to a more diverse practice based on ways of being among many cultures and across gender (Ibarra, 2001; Ng, 2000; Wolgemuth & Harbour, 2007).

This article adds to the literature about women in higher education by illustrating leadership norms I faced as a woman of color and some ways I was able to negotiate them in service to students. It is an individual exploration from a diverse epistemological orientation to negotiate culture and gender in the transformation of practice. My hope is that readers will find both inspiration and practical ideas from my experience as a woman of color negotiating leadership environs founded on cultural and gender norms unnatural to me. I have organized the article into sections including discussions about ethnic patriarchy, borderlands, identity and leadership, a summary of the research process, findings illustrated through professional “teaching stories” about leading as a woman of color in academe, and recommendations. Leaders and other practitioners in higher education may find it useful to draw insights from these stories and recommendations to continue transforming their own practice toward a more diverse epistemology. I dedicate this article to women of color in academe and those who wish to enter, for we need to trust in our own ways of being as cultural translators; as role models; and as leaders, teachers, and scholars.

ETHNIC PATRIARCHY AND BORDERLANDS

Ethnic patriarchy is a term I use to refer to ways that patriarchy and culture intersect. As a woman of color I experience cultural- and gender-differentiated treatment and treatment that is a fusion of the two. Gender roles and expectations are defined differently within various cultural groups (Lorde, 1984; Green, 2007). The way I am perceived and treated by a group of Hispanic males is often very different than by Native American males or by males from a mix of Caucasian European origins. Institutionally, policies, structures, and practice are also framed differently across cultures and gender (Fried, 1995; Ibarra, 2001; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). To negotiate ethnic patriarchy as an executive leader, I must walk as effectively as possible in the borderlands of gendered cultural norms
of academe and among external groups influencing higher education. My leadership experience includes negotiating predominantly Caucasian male presidential/provost cabinets, regents, and dean's councils; Native American male tribal councils; and Hispanic male community groups. It is an often uncomfortable challenge to critique gender issues in groups that are already facing stereotypes and oppression, yet the reality of sexism within Hispanic, Indigenous, and other ethnic communities is very real, is differentiated in its manifestation of norms, and benefits from critique because women of color face challenges in different ways within as well as outside of culture (Lorde, 1984; Cannella & Manuelito, 2008; Green, 2007).

Negotiating borderlands of identity, organizations, and society is not a new concept. Borderland literature describes the profound experiences of existing in the borders between identity cultures as one who is different from the prevailing culture. Borderland scholars study and illustrate the experiences of those living across identity differences in many areas of society often through intense personal narrative. These studies include both the internal border interactions of multiple underserved identities such as being a woman and a person of color, as well as the experiences of entering into organizations and societal arenas as an identity “other” (Chávez, Guido-DiBrito, & Mallory, 2003; Fried & Associates, 1995; Ibarra, 2001). There are deep literatures out of gender studies (Anzaldúa, 1990; Frankenberg, 1993; Kipnis, 1991); lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender studies (Rhoads, 1994; Sanlo, 2005); ethnic studies (Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Borrego & Manning, 2007; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Rochlin, 1997); ability studies (Gerber & Reif, 1991; Strange, 2000); and studies on class (Borrego, Guido-DiBrito, & Chávez, 2008; Dews & Law, 1995; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DiBrito, 2008) to draw understanding of how individuals negotiate these borderlands. There has also been an explosion of research on identity in student development literature (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Guido-DiBrito & Chávez, 2003) and some exploration of the experiences of women of color as leaders in higher education (Turner, 2007; Valverde, 2003). Scholars of indigenous knowledge, philosophy, and scholarship urge us to incorporate many venues, methods, and ways of knowing to explore scholarly questions and transform education (Cajete, 1994; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Wolgemuth & Harbour, 2007) The falling ratings of U.S. higher education within worldwide contexts (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) are important indicators that the evolution of collegiate culture and practice across these borderlands is critical. This study adds to the literature on identity and
leadership borderlands by delving into deep autoethnographic analysis of the self in negotiating gender-cultured contexts.

INTERSECTIONS OF IDENTITY AND LEADERSHIP

I became a reluctant role model to other women of color at the age of 22 when I began my first professional leadership position as a residence hall manager at New Mexico State University. A young student who described herself as Spanish and Native American asked me about my professional experiences and if I thought she could be a leader. I spent the next hour listening to and sharing stories. I felt humbled when she shared that she hadn't thought she could be a leader until she saw my very Spanish female name listed at the front office. This experience made real for me the responsibility of intersecting roles of identity and leadership. For you see, I am Mestiza, a Spanish and Native woman from the high desert mountains of northern New Mexico. This cultural blending has roots in New Mexico from the mid-1500s when 16 families traveled from Spain and intermarried with Native peoples (Beck, 1962; Chávez, 1989). The term Mestiza signifies a blended and distinct culture that draws from both Latin and Indigenous cultural norms (Anzaldúa, 1987). Travelers who visit my hometown often feel they have entered another country and indeed, many cultural rhythms remain from long ago. It is often said that we stayed put and the border moved . . . and moved . . . and moved again . . . and we never knew.

Those of us whose identities and ways of being are not common in higher education walk in borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987) between our own ways of being in the world and those of academe. After getting to know me, a supervisor once told me he “didn’t envy the reality that I would always have to walk as a leader with feet in two worlds” (Schwartz, 1988). Differences can be so foundational and unconscious that even now I am often unable to recognize them until gender-cultured barriers rise up between me and what I am working to accomplish. Because so many of our students, faculty, and staff reside in these borderlands, we need to continually recraft academe from a more diverse epistemology of norms, values, assumptions, and beliefs (Ibarra, 2001). Unfortunately, as Kaylynne Two-Trees states, “privilege of any kind can act as a learning disability” (Personal Communication, 1996). Privilege enables individuals to move through situations with little challenge to their beliefs about the world or to norms they propagate (Hurtado, 1996). When one has the privilege of
being normative by identity, it is not as necessary to study others to survive in everyday life (Strange, 2000). I believe this leads to less motivation for ethnic patriarchies to transform or to make the way easier for those outside these norms. Since most executive leaders in higher education are not women of color (Turner, 2007; Valverde, 2003), studies from within the highest echelons of higher education leadership are essential to transformation.

THE STUDY

This study is drawn primarily from 7 years of autoethnographic field notes and interpretive reflections of my experiences as an executive-level leader at two very different institutions of higher education. One of the institutions is a very large, Midwestern research institution in the state's capital. Students of color make up about 13% of the overall enrollment. I served as dean of students while at this institution. The other is a small rural branch campus of a large southwestern research university and is located in the mountainous northern region of the state. Students of color, mostly Hispanic and Native American, make up over 49% of enrollment. I served as the executive campus director [senior executive officer] for this campus. To help protect individuals in my research, I have chosen not to name the specific institutions.

METHODS

I chose autoethnography as the research approach for this study to analyze dilemmas of negotiating gender-cultured leadership arenas as a woman of color in higher education and illustrate through professional teaching stories. Autoethnography is an analysis of the self in contexts of dynamic tension using an anthropological research lens to deconstruct, compare, and contrast values, beliefs, behaviors, artifacts, and assumptions (Holman Jones, 2005). “Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture; it is an autobiographical genre . . . that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). To increase trustworthiness of the study within an autoethnographic approach, I chose three primary methods of data collection: (1) participant observation of myself and others in a variety of contexts, keeping extensive field notes as often as possible during or just after meetings and other administrative activities; (2) daily journals of my reflections, feelings, and interpretations; and (3) initiated conversations with leaders about
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culture and gender. Using multiple methods made it more likely that I would minimize overly romantic or frustrated interpretations of the data, remain open to unexpected findings, and develop depth in understanding (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

For this study, I focused on strategies and insights that proved effective in negotiating for students inside and outside collegiate institutions and was careful to analyze the challenges within these situations. Two research questions served as my guide: (1) How does a woman of color negotiate groups of leaders dominated by males of similar and different cultures than her own? and (2) What strategies show effectiveness in negotiating across culture and gender with leaders in high-level positions of academe and in external groups impacting the institution?

**Data Analysis**

To develop thick description (Geertz, 1973) and gain a deep understanding of my experiences of gender-cultured aspects of leadership, I first utilized thematic analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1994), categorizing specific gender-cultured dynamics and strategies common across my experiences. Second, I developed systematic coding (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) to analyze and reduce data according to identified themes and to search for outlying themes. Third, I analyzed data to identify professional teaching stories that each illustrated and brought to life several of the thematic findings.

**The Power of Teaching Stories**

I use teaching stories to make sense of and illustrate findings of this study. Teaching stories are both the creation of metaphorical stories to teach larger lessons and the telling of real events to illustrate a concept or idea. They are a tradition in my family and a primary way that learning takes place and knowledge is transferred in both of my cultures. This tradition stems from a belief that it takes the heart, mind, body, and spirit to fully understand any phenomenon (Anzaldúa, 1987; Gunn Allen, 1989; Pelias, 2004). The use of storytelling is a strong ethic of Indigenous, Latina, and critical race feminisms (Parker, Deyhle, & Vellenas, 1999) and of indigenous knowledge traditions (Villegas, Rak Neugebauer, & Venegas, 2008). Teaching stories are distinctive in going beyond typically shorter and fragmented interview quotes often used to illustrate qualitative findings to tell a story with some type of dynamic tension and learn from how the issue was resolved (Cajete,
A lesson is often embedded within the story, usually about deeper wisdoms in life, and is a way of passing on insights to those who follow after us (Gunn Allen, 1989). I have always found strength in hearing the stories of others with similar experiences. Somehow this makes me feel less “other” and less alone as a woman from cultures less common in higher education leadership. I also find in my work with those from different backgrounds that it is helpful to hear their stories so that we can find ways to work effectively together.

I write this article as one way to connect with others through stories of our experiences that may assist us in continuing to transform higher education. By choosing professional teaching stories selectively from analyzed autoethnographic field notes and journal reflections, I am able to illustrate key study findings to the reader in ways that have influenced human choices throughout history (Cajete, 1994; Grande, 2004). I relate experiences from my own leadership as a gender-cultured outsider (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001) to engage readers cognitively and emotionally.

**FINDINGS: LEARNING FROM PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STORIES**

Themes emerged strongly from the data, which was only somewhat of a surprise to me after facing numerous cultural and gender challenges as a leader of many years. I was surprised at the depth of institutional norms and was reminded of Lukes’ (1974) three levels of power, in which he describes the most insidious barrier to social justice as the power to define underlying norms, values, and definitions within any context. To compound this, most leaders I’ve worked with, whether having altruistic or self-serving intentions, seem completely unaware that their professional norms and priorities have a basis in their own identities. This makes the burden of leading across differences quite challenging for identity outsiders. Many we work with assume that their practices, values, and beliefs are normative rather than originating in specific cultural or gender constructs and at best are often irritated when others act from different foundational norms and beliefs (Chávez, Guido-DiBrito, & Mallory, 2003). The following professional teaching stories each illustrate two or more of the major findings of this study—remaining ourselves; bringing together heart, mind, body, and spirit; learning yet pushing the edges of cultural and gender rhythms; identifying and seeking advice from cultural
translators; and learning to speak the language and priorities of those you wish to persuade. I chose each teaching story as an important example of working across subtle yet powerful gender- and culture-related norms for the overall benefit of students. I find in my own professional life that it is usually these subtle rather than more overt situations that prove the most difficult to negotiate, because especially as gender-cultured outsiders it is so tempting to question ourselves rather than directly resist or confront institutional norms.

September 11—Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit

I chose to share this story from my field notes, though it is often a role of deans of students to serve as the “heart of a campus” responding to crisis with words of compassion. I learned from responses to the speech I gave that going a step further and admitting that professionals might be feeling fear and confusion, emotions not typically associated with strong leaders, seems uncommon even and perhaps especially when there is a crisis. This story illustrates the importance of ‘remaining ourselves’ and leading authentically amidst gender–cultured constructs of leadership. On September 11, after a long day of emergency operations leadership as dean of students, I was asked to speak at an evening vigil and had 45 minutes to prepare. I sensed intuitively that it was up to me as a leader to go beyond an official measured response of compassion to something I find rare in the public selves of collegiate leaders. As I reflected on what had been happening on our campus, the beauty and the ugliness of responses, the personal mixed with the official, the grief, anger, and confusion, I knew it would be critical to connect to both positive and negative emotions, to inspire goodness in others, and to offer empathy and reassurance. A brief excerpt from my speech follows:

It is at tragic and frightening times such as we are faced with today, when we are called upon most clearly to rise to our highest character. At times like this, we are faced with many emotions—anger, fear, helplessness, sadness. . . . Please know that we as administrators, service providers, teachers, and scholars are with you in heart and in spirit. We too are hurting and confused and questioning, and we will be turning our energy to assisting you and our community to cope during this difficult time. . . . We will be with you along the way.
In the weeks and months following, I learned that excerpts—especially my words “We too are hurting and confused and questioning . . . and we will be with you along the way”—had been broadcast around the world via Internet. I received hundreds of e-mails thanking me for speaking so clearly about emotions, spirituality, and connection as a collegiate leader. Most individuals I heard from told me that by admitting to feelings of fear, anger, and confusion I connected with them in ways that they had not experienced among leaders in academe. One male student shared that he was experiencing strong feelings of hate, and hearing that faculty and administrators also might feel strong negative emotions kept him from lashing out against others. He felt that his emotions must be normal if professionals might feel the same. Along with the thanks, I also received a number of negative responses from male executive leaders on the campus including my own supervisor, a male leader of color, who expressed concern that I should focus on positive emotions so as not to encourage acceleration of negative ones. In this instance and in many of my other interactions in academe, I find that leaders and professors are often expected to separate and not acknowledge certain emotions, body, and spirit. This is one of the very controversial dilemmas of being a woman and especially a woman of color in academe. We are often pressured to choose between the integrated selves encouraged as beneficial in our gendered cultures and the emotionally separated expectations of leadership in academe.

This seemed to gain in normative power as I climbed the executive ranks of leadership, as did the levels of disapproval I experienced from other leaders for the practice of acknowledging, discussing, or sharing, especially emotions considered weak or otherwise negative. I understand some of the reasons for these choices, based on the danger inherent in opening yourself to personal attacks. High-level leaders receive so much scrutiny and challenge that it is not surprising so many choose to show only a positive or neutral public face. Yet, there are many times when our campuses need the personal; and when showing how we feel and what we believe helps calm, reassure, and heal our college communities. I have seen many collegiate leaders respond to student racial protests with removed, measured, legalistic words that triggered even greater negative responses when some statement of feeling, of empathy, and of personal connection and commitment would be helpful. It takes a kind of moral courage as a leader (Kidder, 2005) to share ourselves in more personal ways in times of crisis, in the classroom, the boardroom, and in our work around the campus. Though we have come a long way because of scholars and leaders
who push the edges of practice, the foundations of higher education are still based very substantively in only parts of ourselves as human beings and in gender-cultured constructs from specific origins. I believe it is our role to show a more holistic and authentic face as leaders.

**BECOMING PATRONA: BALANCING MatriARCHY AND MACHISMO**

As the executive campus director for an emerging college only 12 years old, a primary role in my leadership was to garner funds for and facilitate the building of a physical campus so that our primarily very low-income students could travel to one campus proper instead of between seven rented locations around the county. To do so, one of my challenges was to negotiate the predominantly Hispanic male arena of public leadership and construction professions. I was able to achieve this by “identifying and seeking the advice of local cultural and gender translators” and “learning yet pushing the edges of cultural and gender rhythms.” In keeping with norms of the Spanish American public sphere in this region, Hispanic male leaders, architects, contractors, and craftsmen tended to approach me with great formality, kindness, and a kind of patronizing brotherly or fatherly protectiveness. From the beginning, these Latinos showed a greater comfort in working with the Hispanic male business operations manager for our campus than with me. I decided to contact several elders in the community for advice and to consider the historical roles of men and women within the Spanish cultures of this region (Beck, 1962; Chávez, 1989). The following excerpts serve to illustrate.

Today I met for the first time with a number of public officials, architects, contractors, and craftsmen who will be involved in the design and construction of our next campus building. Most of these individuals are local Hispanic males, and I was the only woman at the meeting. I noticed that each of these professionals greeted me in the highly formal, courtly, and relational way that is common to this region and traces to social traditions brought from Spain in the 1500s. Each individual made a point to find some way to connect with me in a personal way, sharing that we had gone to high school together, they had high respect for my grandfather, or they shopped at my sisters’ store. Each also with a flourish of a hat or quick bow tried to reassure me that they would take care of things so that I did not need to “trouble my mind or dirty my graceful hands.”
This is a common phrase by men to women in this region, often spoken in Spanish. I decided at the time to listen, observe and to contact some individuals longer in the community to process some of these gender-cultured constructs and how to best lead amidst them. An excerpt from later that week reads:

I met today with my father for his advice in leading within the highly Spanish male context of construction professions in this area. I explained what I had experienced; and my father, who has served as a public official, smiled and suggested that the trick would be to find ways to honor their courtliness and to translate their protectiveness to partnership by connecting my experience to theirs.

Later that week, I sought the advice of an elder in our community who is a Mexican American female building contractor and well-known artist. She suggested from her own experiences within this professional community that I invoke aspects of a Latina matriarchal role to lead within this machismo context, explaining that patriarchal roles had shifted with colonization from equal matriarchal and patriarchal roles to this machismo version with patriarchy taking the main stage. She pointed out that Latina women showed much leadership and power in more informal ways, often as voices for our service to community and family. She encouraged me to find ways to bring the power of this matriarchal leadership to bear as I led these men. I knew that I was likely to experience some polite and possibly some hostile responses to my bringing this leadership into realms not typical for Spanish females in this region. An excerpt serves to illustrate what I chose to do.

Yesterday, I met for the second time with the building team for our newly funded project. To begin signaling leadership I made a point to call the meeting through my office rather than having this done by my business operations manager as I had for the first meeting. I chose to start the meeting on a knoll of land overlooking what would become the center of campus, knowing that the energy of the land would help us come together. I invoked our partnership by speaking of the great honor in building a college together that is already making a profound difference in our community. I spoke as well of knowing the hard work of construction from my own and my sisters’ experiences of crafting adobe [mud] bricks for our family home as a child and again more recently with members of the congregation to repair our church. I then outlined generally how I would lead the work, getting
us together bimonthly to facilitate larger decisions and review budgets while encouraging more targeted meetings led by the business, facilities, and project managers to handle daily decisions. When I finished, there was a moment of silence when I noticed some nods of approval as well as some angry and uncomfortable shuffling and glances. An elderly member of the group broke the silence, saying, “Patrona, we are here with you to serve our community.”

I heard later that another individual grumbled about the Chávez family’s inability to contain their women, and I did eventually lose one individual from the team who said that he would not work for a woman. Yet most of these men seemed to come around. By invoking the power of matriarchal leadership already existing in Spanish traditions and honoring our mutual dedication to the community, I was able to successfully lead in a very Spanish male context. Over time, I learned that many on campus and in the community had begun to refer to me as *patrona*, a female version of a male term for leader-employer-landowner in many Hispanic communities. Unlike many stereotypes of Hispanic and Native women, my early and current experiences are of women who are simultaneously fierce, assertive, and compassionate. By leading through these characteristics, which are often considered opposing in U.S. culture but are often interwoven in my experience of Native and Spanish American women, I have been able to negotiate for a variety of student needs. It is also my hope that I have been able to dispel myths of the “passive Latin women of color” for a few of those with whom I have worked. However, this has never come without the challenges of being patronized or undermined.

**Healing the Unforgivable: Troubling Choices by Good People**

I chose this professional teaching story to further illustrate the concept of “remaining ourselves,” learning yet pushing the edges of cultural and gender rhythm,” and “learning to speak the language and priorities of those you wish to persuade.” By listening to and responding from my own ways of being while working to understand someone else’s way of being, I was able to facilitate some healing during a difficult time. While serving as a dean of students, the university where I worked made headlines when someone noticed photographic discrepancies on the cover of a marketing publication. It was revealed that a photo of an African American student had been inserted into a photo of a crowd of Caucasian American students, and reporters descended on the University. As dean, I contacted the African
American student to offer assistance, fielded some of the media, and offered support to groups of justifiably upset students of color. In addition, I chose to offer support, assistance, and accountability to a decision maker in the situation. Journal reflections follow from that time.

Today I met with an African American student whose photo was inserted into another photo for a marketing publication. He has been hounded by reporters and is struggling to cope with unasked for and unwanted national attention, the use without permission of his image, and trying to keep up with academics in the midst of turmoil. It is heart wrenching to know that all I can offer is empathy and a bit of support on campus. I am so very impressed with his graceful dignity and compassion in dealing with all of this.

An excerpt a few days later:

Yesterday, I heard calls for firing of the leader who decided to portray diversity by altering a photograph in a University publication. Though I am angry too, my reaction has been far different. I want this White male leader to stay and make reparation to the campus! It is too easy to walk away, and in my cultural traditions it is important for all to consider longer term relations, regain dignity, and make amends by being held responsible for repairing the damage of our actions.

An excerpt a few weeks later:

Today I had lunch with the leader who made decisions about the photograph. It has been a difficult 3 weeks, and I can see that he is down. I asked him if he would find it helpful to know what I have been hearing from students of color and others on campus. He seemed distraught as he spoke of meeting with minority students and feeling like they hated him. He spoke of how he was trying so hard to build the student diversity of the campus and was dedicated to advocating for students of color to improve retention. I asked him a few questions about what behaviors from students made him feel that he was hated, then reflected for a moment on how I might assist him in finding healing and in continuing with this priority. I told him that I didn’t believe these student behaviors showed hatred. They were clearly frustrated, angry, and hurt about being used and not served well; and their main concern in my experience is to work with us as leaders to improve the campus for those who come after them. I spoke of how misinterpretations are often made across cultures when there are differences in how much
we show emotions and asked if part of what he was feeling might also be from an upbringing of low public displays of emotion. He looked startled and said that yes; he had been raised to show mostly positive emotions and had been taken aback at the strong emotions shown by these students. He asked me how he might go about working through this; and I suggested he meet with some of these students, share how he was feeling, ask for their assistance in significant ways, and work to apply as many of their ideas as possible.

By putting aside my own frustrations and empathizing with this leader from a *Mestiza* framework of lifelong relationships, accountability, and healing, I was able to facilitate shifting his focus toward understanding, connecting with students as partners, and finding solutions. In a small way I assisted a well-meaning person to overcome a profound misjudgment. It was important in this situation for me to draw from the concepts of Spanish and Indigenous cultures to frame every relationship as a lifelong one, healing beyond mistakes, and making reparation to those we harm. It was also important to work at understanding some of the cultural and gender perspectives of this leader and to assist him to reconsider his assumptions about students of color. As I began to urge others on campus to support this leader in making reparation, I found that ethnic patriarchy manifested also among cultures with long-term relational orientations like mine. Many continued to call for his firing, some becoming angry at my call for us to work through this together. My greatest ally in this instance proved to be the African American student who had been added to the photograph. He came out in a very public way to offer forgiveness and urge the campus to work with this and other leaders to heal the community and learn from this mistake. In this way, we were able to negotiate some of the individualistic, quick-solution orientations of White ethnic patriarchy (Ibbara, 2001) that can prevent healing, reparation, connection, and longer-term solutions within the diversity of our campus communities.

**ROLE DANCING: COLLABORATING WITH NATIVE AMERICAN MALE TRIBAL COUNCILS**

Perhaps one of my greatest challenges as the leader of a campus in the southwest was to gain entrance and start collaborative partnerships with Native American male tribal governors. This teaching story illustrates three concepts of negotiating ethnic patriarchy suggested by this study, “learning yet pushing the edges of cultural and gender rhythms,” “seeking the advice
of cultural translators,” and “learning to speak the language and priorities of those you wish to persuade.” There are 22 distinct tribes in this state, and this small institution serves two tribal pueblos. Both of these tribes are highly patriarchal in public aspects of government, and only men sit in governorships and councils. Women hold important roles in other aspects of tribal life but are rarely permitted in this public aspect of government. To complicate matters, most of the Native American students we served at that time were women, and even before my arrival many of these women were beginning to make demands to become leaders and have a role in the more public aspects of their tribal governments. Excerpts from this time read:

Today I met with the Governor of the Pueblo after a series of meetings and discussions with the tribal secretary, the tribal administrator, and several friends who are members of the tribe. Though I have much Native ancestry, I was not tribally raised and it is with great care that I need to proceed. Knowing that women are not typically allowed in tribal council meetings, I considered sending our male dean of instruction in my place but decided that my leadership as a woman would be important to Native women and to the college. After consultation with tribal members about cultural and governmental protocol, I determined that calling upon relationships I have with individuals near the governor would be critical to gaining entry. I walked into a room filled with Native American male council members, introduced myself with my family and clan names, and spoke of my wish to serve the tribe. We had much discussion about collaborations that would benefit the tribe. I was treated with great formality and respect as a leader in education. This surprised me to some extent since I had observed Native women of the tribe reprimanded publicly on a number of occasions for speaking up.

I was told by several leaders including a pueblo governor that few community leaders ever approached the tribe except to ask for something and my very formal and respectful leadership demeanor, attention to protocol, and offer of assistance and collaboration made a difference in garnering partnerships between the tribe and the college. In the almost 4 years I served as campus leader, we built needed academic programs, negotiated policy changes concerning credit for tribal languages, developed courses in Native Studies, held retreats to boost student success, and collaborated on sustainability initiatives. By taking the time to learn appropriate protocol,
build long-term relationships, and take on the activist stance of entering all male domains as a woman, I was able to serve as a catalyst for collaborative endeavors between the campus and tribes. As I look back now on that first meeting I am humbled that I gained entry into this male world and yet troubled that this is such a rare occurrence for women in the tribe. I believe as well that some of my own stereotypical beliefs about male and female tribal roles would have gotten in the way if I had not contacted several individuals within the tribe for advice and assistance in gaining entry. As an outsider to this tribe, my influence was mostly leading by example as a woman of color, and it is hard to say if my actions evoked transformation.

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND FORMING ALLIES: PROACTIVELY DEVELOPING CULTURAL TRANSLATORS**

In situations such as those described earlier, I identified and contacted individuals to serve as cultural translators on negotiating ethnic patriarchy. I find that it is helpful to do this on an ongoing basis so when needs arise there is already a relationship. One way that I have often applied the practice of gathering over food common in my cultures is to invite campus leaders to coffee, tea, or lunch to ask about their beliefs and priorities. I find that individuals are often startled when asked what is important to them. I long ago lost track of the added benefits of this technique, yet two stories serve to illustrate—one in targeting specific cultural translators and the second in looking for these individuals through daily activities. While serving as a part of the dean’s council, I was told that a particular academic dean at the university was difficult to know and I noticed that he was often contentious in meetings. It took me awhile to arrange a meeting with him, but he finally agreed to a walk for coffee on campus. Excerpts from my field notes illustrate.

Today I met with an academic dean to start building our relationship. I took the opportunity to ask him how he came to be a dean. He looked at me strangely and sighed, launching into a fascinating account of his dislike for administrators and yet his passion for student learning and the development of knowledge. On our return toward his building, I asked how I might be of service to him, and he told me that he would have to think about this.

I left it at that but then began to notice that he would seek me out at deans’ meetings to chat about many things including identity privilege and how
we might each use our own privilege to benefit others. A few months later my field notes read:

I spoke up passionately today in dean’s council for the needs and contributions of students of color and drew a blank look from almost everyone. I have become used to having my ideas ignored as one of the few women and the only person of color on the council. I paused for a moment in frustration and suddenly, this dean stood up and spoke. He urged everyone that student learning and the development of new knowledge would be benefited if we paid attention to the diverse ways of our students. He then spoke of his esteem for me and that with me in the council and my extensive background in working with diverse students, we might have a chance even in this state of making progress. He turned to me saying “Dr. Chávez, we would be honored if you would continue.”

Though I could have been upset that it took a White older male to get the attention of this council about the needs of students of color, instead I felt so very grateful to have found a way to connect and ally with someone who already had the influence to persuade an important group on campus. When I thanked him later he responded that conversations we’d had taught him that he had a responsibility to use his White male privilege to make a difference among his peers. Though my struggles within this very White, older male council continued, I felt less alone in standing up for students.

As a dean of students, I often met with groups outside the university to garner their support for students. While having lunch with a group of Chinese American businessmen, one individual caught my eye and silently motioned to how he was holding his teacup to be served. When the waiter served me, I too bowed my head and held the cup with one hand while placing finger tips of my other hand beneath. When I looked up, I noticed nods of approval from around the table and the leader began to invite me directly into conversation and ask how he could be of assistance to the University. After the luncheon, the man who had motioned to me shared that this one small act signaled that I was a leader who paid attention to the importance of small things, was willing to go beyond my own comfortable rhythms to work with others, and who would be a person of honor even in difficult times. I was amazed that my small act had communicated these important messages. I began to seek this individual’s advice in continuing to work with this group over time in support of the University. This was often a bumpy road as a woman working with an all-Chinese male group.
I often encountered disdain, dismissing of my words, and sometimes was completely ignored, yet this cultural translator allied with me consistently to understand and work through these barriers. By taking a proactively relational stance with other leaders, I have been able to continually form critical allies and cultural translators for the work of advocating for and serving students.

**DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: NEGOTIATING ETHNIC PATRIARCHY**

In this section, I discuss key recommendations illustrated in the professional teaching stories for those working across culture and gender to benefit students. Developing cultural competence as leaders is essential if we are to continue transforming education within a highly diverse country and global society (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). Remaining ourselves, learning and yet pushing cultural and gender rhythms of others, seeking advice from cultural translators, and learning to speak the language and priorities of those you wish to persuade are primary strategies I find critical as a woman of color leading in higher education. These are not easy practices, and we must each find our own ways to push gender-cultured boundaries of identity in higher education.

**REMAINING OURSELVES: BRINGING HEART, MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT**

Recently, I had yet another experience of individuals becoming irritated with my cultured professional norms while simultaneously receiving strong positive remarks from others who believe that my cultured ways have had a profound effect on them. I reached out for help to a longtime friend and partner activist and asked her how I might make sense of these opposing messages. She explained that I am the same person in both situations; and the same qualities that some may see as wise, compassionate, and helpful to education are seen by others as problematic, irritating, disruptive, and even dangerous to the status quo of academe. She explained that those who actively transform organizations and who by our very identity have a transformative impact are often seen negatively by those who are happy and comfortable with the current culture of education (Chagnon, 2006). I have to admit that I was stunned by her interpretation. As someone who is very introspective and constantly trying to improve myself, it had never occurred to me that the same qualities could attract such opposite
responses. I kept thinking that if I could just improve or get rid of my “bad qualities,” things would be fine.

Though I will always strive to discern which of my professional traits and behaviors might be problematic and need improvement, this was a freeing revelation to me as a *Mestiza* whose essence in many ways is opposite to much of academic culture (Ibarra, 2001; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). One of the most powerful social tools in pushing for conformity to identity norms is to make others feel as though their ways are problematic, and it is when those who are different and their allies stand up and give voice that this begins to change (Anzaldúa, 1990; Lorde, 1984; Lukes, 1974). So how do we as women and especially women of color negotiate this tension of opposites? How do our allies work with us to transform academe so that many ways of being are welcomed, encouraged, and garnered as assets to our work? Audre Lourde provides perhaps one of the best guides in her now famous urging not to dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools (1984). With these words, she was urging African American women not to respond to ethnic patriarchy with White male strategies and norms, cautioning that these would reinforce the status quo rather than transform systems. As a leader, teacher, and scholar, I strive to avoid the competition, individuality above collectivity, power over others, and the separation of parts of myself as a leader that are all too common in collegiate culture (Ibarra, 2001). In keeping with tenets of indigenous and Latina feminisms that urge a balance of ways among differences (Garcia, 1995; Green, 2007), I purposefully contemplate and experiment with ways to integrate my own ways while honoring the ways of others. I do this by striving toward behaviors that are congruent with my beliefs and discarding those that derive from what I believe are destructive institutionalized forms of “the master’s tools.” Though I sometimes face negative reactions and consequences from other leaders, these practices allow me to act in small and large ways as a transformative leader and educator (Rhoads & Black, 1995). It is not only others who serve as barriers. I find I also have to struggle to deconstruct and critique my own stereotypes, gender-role expectations, and cultural values. This is one of the reasons that as a leader and teacher, I also urge professionals to make time regularly for purposeful contemplation and self-assessment.

**Learning yet Pushing the Edges of Cultural and Gender Rhythms**

Individuals who work effectively in other nations such as international educators, military personnel, and global corporate employees know the
power of constantly staying vigilant in their study of the language, etiquette, mannerisms, and rhythms of others while remaining true to their own ideals (Torbjörn, 1994). This is true within the United States as well. Learning and respecting others’ social and cultural norms is an important sign of respect. Yet to transform higher education toward a diverse epistemology and practice we must continually push these norms. I respect as well as push cultural and gender norms by including my ways while paying attention to and practicing at least some ways of others. Integration is a way of showing respect practiced by women in both of my cultures. In this way I am able to remain true to who I am while respectfully negotiating another’s cultures. This seems to be one of the most contested aspects of feminist theory across cultures (Green, 2007). Indigenous and Latina feminists originate in collaborative cultures where it is considered healing to work toward solutions that are in balance for everyone (Canella & Manuelito, 2008; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). This often leads to questions about our authenticity in remaining true to ourselves. Yet by working collaboratively across differences and honoring ourselves even as we honor others, we are staying true to our deepest gender-cultured ideals.

**Identify, Form Relationships with, and Seek Advice from “Cultural Translators”**

As noted in most of the professional teaching stories in this article, I have been blessed to identify, cultivate, learn from, and partner with many cultural translators in my professional life. This in part comes from my own gender-cultured tendencies toward relational strategies and lifelong relationships. This is a kind of leadership activity I consider highly essential to negotiating ethnic patriarchy successfully enough to truly benefit students across campus. I encourage leaders and other practitioners to purposefully make time to cultivate relationships on a regular basis, to remain on the lookout for those who might be empathetic and helpful within a group needing influence, and to seek targeted cultural translators for assistance with distinctive gender-cultured situations. I continue to be thankful for individuals willing to assist when I approach them with a sincere desire to learn. Yet even in the caring atmosphere common in student affairs, I often received disapproving comments over the years about my highly relational working style. More than one supervisor has cautioned me to spend greater time on projects and less time relationship building even if they also express that my productivity level is at 150%! I was always amazed that this kind of feedback usually came from women and that these leaders didn’t seem
to understand that my productivity was a direct result of my relational style. We still have a ways to go even within ourselves to transform gender-cultured campus norms.

**Learn to Speak the Language and Priorities of Those You Wish to Persuade**

I am often struck by frustrations I see as individuals in higher education try to persuade those from other professional or cultural groups using their own professional jargon and priorities. Voices rise, words are repeated, and the group is often blamed for not understanding or caring. I learned long ago that to persuade effectively I must learn the language and frame things in both my own and the priorities of others. I often add differentiated language to persuade faculty, administrators, student affairs professionals, donors, and regents. For example, the language of knowledge, autonomy, and governance are common among faculty while the language of student development, community, accountability, and leadership are some of the strong terms and priorities of student affairs. When I first moved from student affairs to faculty environs, then again from faculty to central administration, I found that if I was going to benefit students widely it was critical for me to learn professional language and priorities of many constituency groups. Even when priorities are similar, different professional language or jargon is often used to describe the same things. I find that I must be innovative in making connections based in the professional language of different groups and framed to support their priorities as well as my own. Similarly, various ethnic and gender groups often share language and priorities. Since I do not have a background in every subculture, I find it useful to learn from group insiders and to observe groups prior to trying to persuade them of something. I have spent countless highly productive hours attending meetings of groups I need to persuade such as faculty senates, student organizations, city councils, and regents. In addition, I gain insight toward assisting in their mission. The key for me to do this authentically is to offer rationale from my own priorities mixed with rationale that I believe is in line with theirs.

**Conclusion**

Since I began writing this article, we have been through a historic time when a White woman became speaker of the house and a Black man has
been elected as president. Though I see how much race and gender were exploited in the process and wonder how long before we see a woman of color as contender, I find hope in this progress. I also find great hope in the subtle and overt activism I see on college campuses, in the courage of students and colleagues who continue struggling in gender-cultured environs not their own, and in my own mixed Mestiza blood . . . La Sangre running through my veins and through the diverse blood of this country. Ethnic patriarchy is something we must acknowledge and deconstruct in higher education as we serve a global society. There is much to be done within ourselves, in working with others, and in recrafting our collegiate institutions toward a more diverse set of identity-based epistemologies and practices.

Crafting our own ways of leading authentically within the borderlands of identity is an ongoing endeavor. While remaining true to ourselves, we must continually learn to negotiate the cultures of others if we are to serve students in the halls of academe. A quote by Susan Wooley shared by a longtime friend and colleague as we negotiated across our cultural differences provides powerful testimony.

We have lifetimes of undigested, unassimilated experience to be unpacked, catalogued, and crafted into theory, providing the foundation from which to later speak with men. The only way to stop being outlaws is to become lawmakers . . . at last trusting our own experience.

I often imagine the marvelous possibilities of research, leadership, and teaching if we would use our full, complex, and integrated selves in each moment, each endeavor. Perhaps our most radical and important daily act is to be fully ourselves so that we can collectively imagine a more diverse epistemology of higher education and work together to transform.

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