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## **Motherscholars Traversing the Educational Pipeline through Moments of Sacred Pause**

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### **Abstract**

By focusing on three Chicana Motherscholars pláticas, traversing the Educational Pipeline, I conceptualize sacred pauses as moments of joy, gratitude, and love (Tuck, 2009) as resistance and refusal. Sacred pauses refute the neoliberal university indoctrination of hyper-productivity (Hidalgo et al., 2022). This paper expands on the complex journeys of the academic bridges to what Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) calls 'passageways, conduits, and connectors' to illustrate the sacred journeys of overcoming barriers traversed through the Educational Pipeline towards doctoral degree completion for Chicana/e and Latina/e Motherscholars with children. The Motherscholar narratives characterize the potential of reciprocity and healing in bridge makers in Parents of and Women of Color.

*Keywords:* Sacred Pause, Pláticas, Educational Pipeline, Motherscholars, Bridges

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“[T]o mother ourselves entails doing what it takes to survive, but also to thrive by taking care of ourselves in ways that center experiences of joy and love” (Lara, 2018; Gumbs, Martens, and Williams, 2016).

### **Introduction: From the Margin to the Center, *Madres al Centro!***

Institutions of higher education maintain an analogous relationship to heteropatriarchal social structures of racism and sexism by historically marginalizing Mothers and Women of Color in the academy. Systemic sexism and racism impact Motherscholars of Color, who carry, like a veil, a “presumption of incompetence” (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012; Téllez, 2013) about perceived commitments and performance in higher education: or after graduate professional school (Anaya, 2011), well beyond professional careers and tenure track pathways. Black and Chicana Feminists, however (Hill Collins, 1994; hooks, 1984; Latinas Telling to Live, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2006) remind us of the agency and power of sharing our corporal realities through *pláticas* (Fierros & Bernal, 2016; Morales et al., 2023) dislodging oppressive and painful experiences by elevating “voice, documenting silenced histories” (Latinas Telling to Live, 2001, pg. 3). By sharing such moments of empowerment, resistance, and feminist research praxis, a healing process of resistance prevails. In this paper, I share snapshots of *pláticas* of three first-generation Chicanas/es Latinas/es who pursued doctoral degrees while parenting as Motherscholars at universities in the Southwestern United States.

The journey through the Educational Pipeline embodies multiple pathways, including those characterized by uneven terrain and shady, dark *caminos* that threaten the journey towards degree completion. In this way, the Educational Pipeline represents what Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) calls “passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives” (p.1). The journey through the Education Pipeline with companions, equipment, and support is feasible. I also believe there are multiple pathways within the more extensive Educational Pipeline journey; when one pathway is journeyed and completed, a new one begins. Anzaldúa reminds us, “[b]ridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl word meaning *tierra entre medio*. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p.1).

Building on mindfulness and theological definitions of sacred pause, I illustrate sacred pause as moments of joy, gratitude, and love as experienced by Chicana/e Latina/e<sup>1</sup> Motherscholars journeying towards a doctorate, allows and acknowledges recognition of themselves, their children, and their “mommy wins” amongst the demand, chaos, and stressors of parenting while in the academy. Bridge makers nod to Chicana feminist scholars, philosophers, and thinkers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and Audre Lorde, and its contemporaries, such as Dolores Delgado Bernal and Michelle Téllez. In addition, bridge makers are braiders (Caballero et al., 2016) of time and space, forging possibilities, and opportunities, such as great femtors<sup>2</sup>/mentors, allies, friends, students, and our children.

Impacted by the illustrative quantitative data of various iterations of The Chicana/o Educational Pipeline as a newly transferred undergraduate at UCLA, I was shaken to my core to visually witness the numerical representations of pushed-out first-generation Chicanas/es, Latinas/es, and other BIPOC folx. After teaching the Chicana/o Education Pipeline for over 14 years and traversing through the pipeline, I have found femtors and mentors, *comadres*, Motherscholars, and lifelong friends support my family and I navigate the academic bridges. Additionally, to acknowledge the importance of naming oppressions and systemic violence, I sought to elevate my scholarship. I applied what Eve Tuck (2009) reminds scholars approaching research in Communities of Color in “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” of the power and self-determination to selectively pivot from the pervasive impacts of colonization in research and focus on desire, agency, power, and survivance.

Let’s face it. Some folks out there are always going to think of us as damaged, and not because they are so convinced of the devastating after-effects of colonialization. But it is crucial to recognize that our communities hold the power to begin shifting the discourse away from damage and towards desire and complexity. We can insist that research in our communities, whether participatory

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term Chicana/e Latina/e as my personal preference to challenge gender roles of mothers. Mothering is a social construction, as is gender. Therefore, to honor the multiple identities at the crux of mothering, gender, and sexuality I offer such spelling. Chicana and Latina remains unaltered if authors and scholars applied this spelling in the literature or studies I draw from.

<sup>2</sup> Femtors is a social, political, and *feminista* way of honoring femme labor in mentorship relationships. The first use of the term I heard was from scholar-activist Kimberly Soriano. It was then used and applied by a collective of femtors at UCLA throughout their praxis, in which it nods femtoring as an ‘*hermanitas*’ framework via the work of Claudia Cervantes-Soon.

or not, does not fetishize damage but, rather, celebrate survivance (Tuck, 2009, p. 422)

Tuck's above statement validates the necessity to celebrate moments of joy, agency, and love in the face of challenges and adversity. Chicanas/es and Latinas/es Motherscholars expressed parallel sentiments in their activism aimed at supporting graduate Motherscholars at the university.

Acknowledging that universities are not equipped with the resources to receive, support, retain and graduate parenting students, the onus to demand change often lands on the backs of parenting students for academic change (Caballero et al., 2016; Cisneros et al., 2016; Hidalgo et al., 2022). Mothers of Color in Academia (MOCA) assert in “Fierce Mothers: The Cords that Bind Us” (2022) that MOCA expresses the power of mother mobility and activism in their organized efforts. For over seven years MOCA demanded institutional change at their university. This included accessible and affordable daycare for parenting students, access to clean and stocked lactational spaces, and availability of lactation supplies at strategic locations on campus. While MOCA focused their fierce Mothering activism to transform practices and policies that excluded them on campus spiritual activism was similarly important. In part, this included the collective celebration of each other through moments of agency and love. MOCA activists shared:

“[S]piritual activism are the cords braided that bind us to one another through similar lived experiences, such as isolation within different departments, colleges, and disciplines. We came together and merged our academic journeys as Mothers of Color seeking to make changes through organizing, through our children, through our testimonios” (pg. 127).

MOCA demanded and materialized a different university (Hidalgo, Vega, Cisneros, & Reyes, 2022) even as they navigated degree completion deadlines, coursework, teaching obligations, as well as caretaking responsibilities, and dissertation writing. MOCA's *activism and comadrisimo*, fostered moments of sacred pause —ease, joy, celebration, and validation of each other amidst a hostile neoliberal university.

Such refusal is a compelling strategy that refuses the onus on Motherscholars in the neoliberal university by taxing Women of Color labor. As such, the moments of organizing and activism can serve as bridge making for future generations of Women of Color, mainly by

pausing for moments of rest, joy, gratitude, and love in the unforeseeable terrain of the Educational Pipeline. The term 'sacred' as defined by Merriam Webster dictionary (Merriam-Webster, 2023) adjective means to "devote exclusively to one service or use," "entitled reverence and respect," and "set apart in honor of someone." A sacred pause is a recognized moment to stop, breathe, and recollect in acknowledgement. Building on Irene Lara's (2001) *bodymindspirit* and Cindy Cruz's (2006) epistemologies of the brown body, a sacred pause is awareness through an embodiment of a Chicana/e Latina/e experiences as multiple micro and macro situations. Sacred pauses allow us to pause, stop and breathe, recognize a moment, accept the moment, breathe through the moment, and a body scan of the self, to move on to the next thing. Sacred pauses are also moments of recognition of micro-affirmations (Solórzano, Perez-Huber, Banks 2020). Below is a brief conceptualization of sacred pause according to mindfulness, theology, and the medical praxes.

Through the practice of sacred pause, we are better able to build academic bridges that allow Motherscholars to create spaces of belonging in a neoliberal university hostile to caretaking at large. Academic bridges, then, include the social infrastructure that Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) describes as the "passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives" (p. 1) which guide us to more just realities. Simultaneously, academic bridges are also constituted by the femtors, mentors, and students who help Motherscholars traverse from degree completion milestone to milestone. These bridge makers, then, become the sealant that prevent leaks in the educational pipeline for Motherscholars of Color.

### **Conceptualization of Sacred Pause**

I first learned of the "sacred pause" through lectures, podcasts, and meditations from teacher and therapist Tara Brach. In an audio-recorded meditation led by Brach (2015), she asks meditators to re-imagine a world with necessary pauses. Her argument reminds us that anxiety drives society, consistently 'doing,' feeding the neoliberal capitalist machine of over-exertion.

There is an anxiety or restlessness in us. So, instead of pausing when we are stressed, we do the exact opposite — the primitive brain drives us into activity to defend ourselves or to grasp onto what we think we need. As a result, we engage with doings that cause harm and lock us into a doing-self. They lock us

into a feeling of a self in trouble — deficient, separate — that needs to keep doing (pg. 4, Brach, 2015).

In parenting workshops of mindfulness, the sacred pause is the critical moment of instant self-reflection to recollect ourselves from challenging and emotional situations. The moment is impeccably essential, and a pause is necessary for the parent and the child. According to Wiederkehr (2008), a theological approach to sacred pause are the moments throughout the seven hours of the day intended to stop and pray as significant moments devoted to prayer and mindfulness. To be mindful, Wiederkehr suggests, is "striving to live mindfully is the art of living awake and ready to embrace the gift of the present moment" (p.2). A medical study by Kapoor et al. (2018) identifies the ritual of sacred pause intended to assist the staff in addressing unresolved and cumulative grief from deaths and burnout in the intensive care unit (I.C.U.). A "sacred pause" in several medical units' studies, are ritual to honor a patient's passing recognizing the healthcare teams' efforts. It brings closure and improves professional satisfaction by lowering burnout syndrome.

Building from the concept in teachings of mindfulness, theology, and medicine, a sacred pause are moments of celebratory acts of joy, gratitude, and love. My vision is a re-workings of a definition of a sacred pause applicable through a Motherscholar journeying the Educational Pipeline, honoring agency, self-determination, resistance, and refusal to keep hyper extensions of labor production. In my analytical coding of existing data from *pláticas* (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) with three Motherscholars, I sought moments illustrating love, gratitude, and joy. A sacred pause at times, was as simple as a Motherscholar catching their breath, a quiet minute to have a meal while I held their baby, a meditation, or the recognition of exchanging love between parent and child. These are everyday acts of love and joy emblematic of resistance and refusal against the mechanisms of the corporatization of academic hyper productions in our society. The pivot to acknowledge the sacred in the 'every day,' surpasses challenging moments indicative of what Anzaldúa (2002) affirms "[b]y redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, *algo para compartir* or share with others so they too may be empowered" (p. 540).

Therefore, the following questions guide this paper: What were the sacred pause moments of joy, gratitude, and love for Motherscholars traversing the educational pipeline? And what can we learn from the examples of bridge makers for Chicana/e and Latina/e Motherscholars?

### **Traversing Bridges through a Motherscholar Identity**

Throughout my graduate studies and becoming a parent in the early stages of my doctoral program, I organized with Motherscholars in and out of my campus. Now, as a junior faculty and after the labor of love as a campus organizer with Mothers of Color in Academia and The Chicana M(other)work Collective, my sense of agency was rooted by my parenting and my Motherscholar activist identities. To be clear, the stigma of a Chicana Parent in the tenure track remains racialized and gendered, and it does not limit my experiences of discrimination in various spaces – also known as Maternal Microaggressions,<sup>1</sup> a term my *comadre* and fellow Motherscholar in the struggle Dra. Cecilia Caballero and I identified. To be a Mother of Color in academia is an encumbered politics of intersectional identity, responsibility, and *movidas* because our bodies are markers of discrimination. To embody an epistemology in my parenting status, I hold deeply onto the words of Cindy Cruz (2006) while I continue to traverse the Educational Pipeline as a Faculty of Color:

“[O]ur production of knowledge begins in the bodies of our mothers and grandmothers, in the acknowledgement of the critical practices of women of color before us. The most profound and liberating politics come from the interrogations of our social locations, a narrative that works outward from our specific corporealities” (Cruz, p. 61, 2006)

The corporal reality of Motherscholar traversing the Educational Pipeline affirmed the need to research the everyday lives of Chicanas/es and Latinas/es Motherscholars, beginning with the body as a location of knowledge. Driven to investigate maternal studies and theorization, came during my pregnancy and the birth of my son, which coincided with the release of “Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women of Color in Academia” (2012). Additionally, Michelle Telléz’s (2013) “Lectures, Evaluations, and Diapers: Navigating the terrains of Chicana Single Motherhood in the Academy” formative article exposed the reality of pregnancy, Motherhood, and the tenure track. Reading imperative work and reflecting on my experiences and encounters heavily fixated on racial, gendered, and maternal microaggressions, provided me with scholarship and vocabulary to validate my experience and pursue my

research on parenting students. My spiritual and academic community uplifted, supported, and listened to my critiques and elevated my stance in ensuing this work. A Chicana Feminista Methodology reinforces that naming such oppressive and painful moments is accompanied by joy, laughter, love, and uncovering *los papelitos guardados* (Latinas Telling to Live, 2001), activates a healing process.

### **Women of Color Strolling and Straddling the Education Pipeline**

At a national scale, Chicana/es and Latinas/es women are less likely to complete postsecondary degrees compared to other groups. The Ph.D. attainment rate for Chicana/e Latina/e women remains the lowest among other racial and ethnic counterparts. Chicana/e and Latina/e women represent less than one out of every 100 Ph.D. recipients (Perez-Huber et al., 2015). Out of 100 Chicanas/es who begin their schooling at the elementary level, 63 will graduate with a high school diploma. Additionally, 13 out of 100 will receive a bachelor's degree, 4 out of 100 will receive a graduate degree (master's, professional), and 0.3 out of 100 will obtain a doctoral degree. For every 100 Latinas/es, 60 will receive a high school diploma, 11 will receive a bachelor's degree, three will receive a graduate degree, and 0.2 will receive a doctoral degree (Perez-Huber et al., 2015). The numbers are staggering. In a study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that in 2017, more women than men earned Ph.D.'s, however, the pay was far less (2018). Motherscholars with children under five pursuing faculty positions are less likely to receive tenure (Hidalgo, Vega, Cisneros & Reyes, 2022; Caballero et al., 2019; Téllez, 2013). While these related educational pipeline numbers are powerful on their own, without a complementary narrative, quantitative analyses risk homogenizing experience (Covarrubias, et. al., 2018: pg. 256). Therefore, the stories Motherscholars share about their academic journeys are critical in complicating their pathways through academia.

MOCA reminds us that "[t]he intangible traditions of individuality, meritocracy, and overworking Women of Color that permeate academic culture are rooted in white supremacy and heteropatriarchy." (Hidalgo, Vega, Cisneros & Reyes, 2022, p.123). In addition, Doswell (2004) states, "[t]he intensity of the Ph.D. process requires a candidate to continuously self-motivated and focus their attention on the task at hand" (pg. 4). To trek this process requires monumental motivation, particularly in isolated moments. Doswell continues to state the illusive political dimensions of impacting *ganas*, the will to push forward:

These dynamics contribute to an elusive political landscape. A political culture exists in most professions, and higher education is no exception. Being a person of Color further complicates navigating these already murky waters. The status quo maintains the "perfect" edges of the landscape. Thus, minority women in higher education often find themselves precarious. Our presence chips away at the established order (Doswell, 2004, p. 4).

Indeed, it is an elusive political landscape where our presence is a refusal to repute the status quo of the academy. Doswell asserts the importance of bridge making and the call to action and anthologize voices of and from Women of Color are heard and forge a place and space of existence and success. In response, the anthologizing of books, podcasts, and discussions in and outside the classrooms is an act of collective resistance from and by parents and Mothers of Color in and outside the academy. In the last decade and with a raging pandemic, we have witnessed the necessary and welcomed works of collective voices, such as the two-part anthology "Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia" (2012) in conversation with newer edited versions of works from Women of Color cannon not limited to "This Bridge Called my Back, Fourth Edition: Writings by Radical Women of Color" (2015) and "The Chicana M(other)work Collective Anthology: Porqué Sin Madres No Hay Revolución" (2018). A common thread between the groundbreaking work is the collective voices of critical narratives and bridging the everyday lived experiences between each other.

### **Chicana/e & Latina/e Pláticas Methodology in Motherscholar Research**

The qualitative data used for this paper is part of a larger research project collected during my five years of scholar-activism. This included in-depth Chicana/e and Latina/e in-depth *pláticas* and ethnographic field notes. I participated as a participant observer at parenting student actions, protests, meetings with college and university students, administration organizations, and community organizations. I completed 11 in-depth interviews of Chicana/e and Latina/e Motherscholars. For this paper, I focus on three *pláticas* where joy, gratitude, and love were central themes to interviewees. The *pláticas*, were often over two hours long, where rich and intimate moments of personal exchange reciprocating healing felt validating for me as well as for the Motherscholar. Chicana Feminista scholars remind us, that *pláticas* occur in

“unconventional spaces, and for parenting students in my study, I had pláticas between small availability gaps within busy schedules. Accommodating them was critically important to me, where at times, sojourner, or what scholar Gaxiola Serrano (2023) calls, walking pláticas was my method of catching a conversation. When walking pláticas was the best option, it allowed me to catch parenting students in moments of transit and walking between places.

At times pláticas included check-ins about school, our children, and our progress with the dissertation. Other interviews took place during t-ball games, in empty classrooms after class, or while holding babies while I asked my series of questions to ease the responsibility for mothers. While much academic writing has rightly focused on the various ways mothers in academia are regarded as broken, incompetent, and irresponsible, this paper seeks to turn inwards to focus on the celebratory moments of joy, gratitude, and success. Within my own corporal reality as a parent myself, I employed *Movidás* that were intentional to collect data with special care, and attention to parenting students. Thus, those narratives are importantly written about. Therefore, my research analysis of sacred pause and bridge makers are part of Tuck’s (2009) invitation to re-imagine how and about our research. Tuck states, “I invite you to join me in re-visioning research in our communities not only to recognize the need to document the effects of oppression on our communities but also to consider the long-term repercussions of thinking of ourselves as broken” (pg. 409). I coded and analyzed transcripts from interviews, for moments where Motherscholars experienced joy, desire, and celebration through their Educational Pipeline journeys.

In my research analysis, I apply a Chicana/Latina Feminista Pláticas Methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Morales et al., 2023). Fierros and Delgado Bernal’s approach as a practice honors researchers’ and research participants’ intersectional and complex epistemological positions. For Motherscholars, the transformative embodiment of parenting and caretaking serves as a place of knowledge production – not solely in birthing or carrying a child, but in its multiple manifestations. There are five contours<sup>3</sup> that compose Chicana/Latina Feminista Pláticas: (1) Rooted in Chicana/Latina Feminist and other critical theories; (2) Honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge; (3) Bridges between the everyday lived experiences and research inquiry; (4) Foregrounds the potential space for healing and (5) Relies

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<sup>3</sup> I understand contours as a blending of one another, and one may inform the other while all principles may build from each other and are significant for the functionality of each other.

on reciprocity, vulnerability, and reflexivity. Most recently, Morales et al. (2023) asserted that pláticas rooted in Chicana/Latina feminist epistemologies provide “opportunities for healing, connection, kinship, theorizing, laughter, joy, pain, and a myriad of other emotions because they center a reciprocal relationship between the researcher(s) and collaborator(s)” (Morales et al., pg. 3). In the following, I offer examples of sacred pause in addition to brief profile narratives of Chicana/e Latina/e Motherscholars to demonstrate how and where these sacred pauses were fostered moments in their lives—with special attention to moments of joy, gratitude, and love.

### ***Somos Las Madres de Esta Generación: Motherscholar Profiles***

Ayari identifies as a Chicana and Motherscholar Activist and is the mother of three children. As a doctoral student, she lived in various cities until finally settling in California to complete her dissertation. She had her first child during the second year of her Ph.D. program and had her second child while writing her dissertation. Her third child was born as she completed and defended her doctoral degree. Ayari is a senior lecturer in Southern California and a founding member of a Motherscholar-Activist advocacy group.

Born and raised in South Central Los Angeles, Libertad is a single Motherscholar of three boys. She is completing her Ph.D. in Southern California. Libertad identifies as a Chicana and has deep roots with her Mexican and Salvadorian parents. During her youth, Libertad was affiliated with gang life and has since transformed her powerful epistemological truth towards critical research while being awarded numerous accolades, prestigious fellowships, grants, and international recognition.

Xochitl is a fierce Motherscholar who identifies as Mexican American. Xochitl is a first-generation immigrant in the U.S. with bi-cultural parents who traveled and lived between their hometown of Jalisco, Mexico, and South Central Los Angeles. Xochitl was not the first in her family to attend college, however. Within her family, a few of her siblings attended various universities graduating from Ivy Leagues and University of California schools. She attended R-1 universities in Nuevo Mexico, and became a mother to her one child during her doctoral studies.

### **Sacred Pauses: Love by Any Means Necessary**

#### ***Libertad***

To love as a parent, a Caretaker of Color, and a mother while traversing the Educational Pipeline, is filled with anxiety and uncertainty. Nevertheless, per Angela Davis

(1981) and Patricia Hill Collins (1994), birth, caretaking, adopting, fostering, and raising Children of Color in U.S. society is a political act of revolution led by love. During this current political climate, Parenting and Mothering as Folx of Color reinforce solidarity with grief while children and mothers (parents) are separated, and the children are caged at the U.S./Mexico border. The collective response to such violence and societal injustices are rage and frustration. Nevertheless, the new possibilities of hope for transformative love, organizing, and advocacy are represented in the children we care for and raise. Libertad's sacred pause is located within the everyday practices of love she shows her children.

As a mother, you can do everything. You can be a guide. You can be . . . a doctor; you can be a cook. You can be a teacher. You can be so many things at once, and you can raise little minds however you want. You can mold them. All of that is done with one primary purpose, which is to give love. Always to give love and to guide them to become whatever it is that they want to become.

That's the approach that I take in my teaching and my being a friend and being a daughter. My passion for my research. I am doing this with the idea of giving and spreading love. (Libertad, *plática*, May 15, 2018)

Libertad is clear that giving love is a sacred pause for her every day as a parent, teacher, friend, or daughter. Additionally, she indicates how valuable her research is as she fosters a practice of love. Critical moments of sacred pause are compatible to critical teaching and conducting ethical research as they allow Libertad reflexivity to do good work or, as Gloria Anzaldúa suggests, doing work that matters. Libertad shares how everyday acts of love cumulatively become a guidepost for her life.

All I know is love helped me get here. The love of my ancestors, the love of my mom, the love of my dad, my siblings. Teachers, people that cross my life at certain points. Although they might have not said I love you, the love that they gave me and the support they gave me at that time I got a ride, the time I got whatever.

Libertad shared additional examples of supportive love such as when her advisor leaves a meal in the lunchroom for her and her three boys. For Libertad, such actions are affirming as they help accomplish one task from her extensive to-do list by saving her from cooking for an evening. While such actions may seem minor at first, her advisor's actions are important because they make the invisible visible. Spiritual activism's call to action, according to Anzaldúa,

is accountability to support each other and make the invisible visible. Similarly, Vega (2019) states, "Likewise, to be seen and be visible lends itself to the important interventions of femtorship and mentorship by others who may have also experienced marginality" (pg. 76). These acts of kindness inform and feed our *bodymindspirit* (Lara, 2003) and allow us as Motherscholars to pause and recognize that we are whole beings. Libertad continued by including how we, as researchers and Motherscholars, can lead with love in our careers. The critical impact of completing our degrees and being true to our authentic selves can provide for our children and our communities through our career paths. She continued:

I think we materialize careers, and I get it. Finances help us survive and all. However, if we do not do it with love and with passion, as we do our Mothering, then what is the point? What is the purpose of life? It is always about love. How can I give my kids love so that is what they know? That is what they spread. Ultimately, I will end up where my love takes me. My love for the people...My home girls who passed away, [I] have a lot of love for them. And that shows through my work. My brother who was deported who is hurting and continues to hurt for many years, have a lot of love for him. (Libertad, *plática*, May 15, 2018).

Libertad has been deeply motivated by her love for her students as an educator. During her *pláticas*, she equates her love and responsibility for her children translates in her pedagogy translates in the classroom. Similarly, her love and commitment to her South Central LA community translate into how she conducts her research. bell hooks (1994) remind us that when passion is present in the classroom, "rooted in a love for ideas, we are able to inspire, the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized, and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears" (hooks, 1994, pg. 195). Libertad's commitment to ethical and critical research rooted in love motivates her research pursuits. Her love for her community and those who have been hurt and faced the implications of violence and criminalization continually motivates her. Therefore, her sacred pauses are her children, her students in the classroom, her research of her community, and her daily meditation practice that keeps her grounded. Libertad closes with a message for Motherscholars: "Mother with love and everything else follows" means that we must continue to allow the work to move the *bodymindspirit*, and we

will ultimately end up where we need to be. Libertad highlights the power of teaching her children about love, mindfulness, and well-being while reciting daily affirmations.

### **Ayari**

Ayari shared how her love for her children drove her work and motivated her to continue researching. However, she also described the realities of not wanting to leave her children behind to conduct research, especially when the institution does not reciprocate the same love or respect.

Suddenly I would not have the drive to work with [my research] ... I would not care about it. It is not that I would not care, but I would not have those same passions. Something about me biologically and chemically changed to where my love would be my children. That would be my whole life. And I would get swallowed up in that. Then I would not care about grad school. In my mind I thought, maybe that is why so many mothers drop out. [Because] they love their babies so much. They do not want to leave their kids, so their academic pursuits become less important. That is why they drop out, right? That was what I naively thought. (Ayari, *plática*, May 15, 2017)

Ayari talked about love and sacred pauses differently when she explained her fears and the anxiety of loving too much and not completing her career path as a researcher in a Ph.D. program. Biologically, the body grapples with an influx of hormones and chemical changes after birth. For some mothers like Ayari, there is a desire to be with their babies and bond.<sup>11</sup> These sacred pauses, or "stopping out," are moments of deep reflection and reconsidering what is valuable. At times frightening to think that perhaps, Motherscholars stop out of higher education because the desire is to remain at home caring for the new baby and to pause and heal. Although in reality, these stories remind Motherscholars that mothering our children also requires the same kind of love and patience to love and mother ourselves by any means necessary. Our identities are no longer at the margin; instead, we bring all the Motherscholars with us from the margin to the center along with all the children, othermothering, doulaing, nurturing, healing, and loving ourselves into existence. Our children and our bodies are sacred, and to acknowledge this is the most potent form of resistance, sacred pause, and self-care activism any person can enact in the face of survivance.

In my *pláticas* with, Ayari talks about access and equity for her students as they advance through the Educational Pipeline. Her love and commitment to her students led her to continue her advocacy work. Ayari's sacred pause is bridging a gap as an educator who advocates and braids the leaks and cracks of the Educational Pipeline on behalf of students. She states, "For those of us who are getting through the pipeline, at least for me, I am very committed to making institutional change. As much as an individual can rally the resources around them, the university [must] be held accountable." The importance of her student's success is one example of sacred pause. When they succeed through the difficulty of completing their programs, she witnesses their joy and accomplishment, illustrating the importance of her role as a bridge maker and the moment of joy as a sacred pause. Likewise, Ayari's goal is to be mindful of students who may not feel a sense of belonging as "non-traditional" students, such as parenting students, Women of Color, Veterans, and other identities at the crux of intersectional identity. She continued with a critical stance on the responsibilities of the university, as she embodies bridge-making:

They [the institution must] be held accountable to the fact that there [are] students who . . . are no longer White men who have wives that stay at home. So, that is not who the university is for anymore. Especially universities that are like state universities. I think more than anything I would tell them [parenting students] that as someone who is making it through the pipeline that, I am committing to advocating for those institutional changes so that they're not alone . . . that these are structural problems. (Ayari, *plática*, May 22, 2017)

### **Xochitl**

During Xochitl's time as a returning and re-enrolling student at a public state university in California, Xochitl was exposed to powerful Mentors of Color through her reentry to the Educational Pipeline. Xochitl credits the director of a program called *Nuevos Encuentros* that supported students subject to dismissal by providing a nurturing space to receive and retain students. As a result, she faced a second opportunity to return and re-enrolled in academia. She then provided support services and nurturance for students who returned to complete their Educational Pipeline journey. Xochitl explains that she was grateful to have been exposed to mentorship and sacred pauses in the daily while doing important work with students.

Like Libertad's example of feeling visible to her adviser, Xochitl's experience in witnessing firsthand the care work and love were built by her mentors to ensure a successful education journey as a returning to school. Simultaneously, she supported students' return to higher education as a bridge maker herself. Her experience working with *Nuevos Encuentros* daily reminds me of sacred pauses that espoused joy and gratitude by providing support services for returning students; not only were these sacred moments important for her healing, but it was through her nurturance of students while also feeling nurtured (reflexive), that she understood the core of social justice as an act of retention by providing support, as a bridge maker herself. As a result, her journey through the Educational Pipeline encouraged her to apply and attain her Ph.D. Below she states how this impact was part of her coming to consciousness through femtorign, is another example of sacred pause and bridge-making.

The students touched me and had the most impact on me. I mentored students on the brink of academic dismissal, creating, along with undergrads and graduate students, a peer mentoring program that allowed more students on academic probation to graduate, so retention. Moreover, walking them through and pairing them up with projects that they were engaged with. (Xochitl, *plática*, June 2, 2018)

Xochitl, a bridge maker, reflects how important her students became for her bridge makers as they succeeded and graduated through the leaks and cracks of the educational pipeline where they pushed out. Working alongside students who mirrored her experience provided Xochitl to celebrate moments of joy, gratitude, and love. Sacred pauses encouraged her to reflect, recollect her thoughts, and surrender to the possibility of her success traversing the Educational Pipeline.

### **The Educational Pipeline as Reflexión**

*“Academia and motherhood are crucibles that provided us with moments of rupture, moments that called into painful clarity the impossibility of moving forward with the status quo.”* Mothers of Color in Academia (Hidalgo, Vega, Cisneros, & Reyes, 2022 pg. 129) – Feminist Formations

Since my first encounter with the Educational Pipeline as an undergraduate transfer student at UCLA in 2004, I paused in rage and reflection, questioning my educational trajectory to address the leaks. For over two decades, the Chicana/Latino Educational Pipeline became a visual representation validating the marginal experiences of Students of Color in the U.S. I became invested in the pedagogical practice of teaching the curriculum surrounding the

Education Pipeline, theorizing the cracks and leaks, and through my advocacy and research work, to name and address the pushout culture. As a transient of the pipeline, I simultaneously journeyed with other Motherscholars and learned the importance of solidarity and carework for each other. It became apparent the need feverishly as I witnessed first-hand the unjust experiences Mothers of Color and parenting students were experiencing.

From the short but powerful examples illustrated by the three Motherscholars, Ayari, Xochitl, and Libertad, moments of pause were sacred in their classrooms, with their children, and as femtors/mentors. During the surge of COVID-19, a global pause forced us to look inward and reassess the over-exertion over production of the neoliberal machine. Ladson-Billings (2021) reminds us of the four pandemics, including COVID-19, racism, the threat of economic collapse, and impending environmental catastrophe. The world was in pause. Homeschooling became overwhelming and exhausting within the confines of COVID-19. My sacred pause became the outdoors, signaling moments of pause and reset for my then seven-year-old child and me. We ventured into local Los Angeles hikes and made camping a sacred ritual with other Families of Color. These moments bring maximum joy to our family while maintaining our refusal to overexert ourselves. In addition to taking to the outdoors, the aforementioned above were examples of Motherscholar organizing for change. MOCA's agentic and solidarity activism of fierce mothering solidifies transgression and survivance through their activism and pushout culture in the Educational Pipeline as bridge makers, stating, "Mothering and activism are complementary endeavors...[o]ur work is a leap of faith, an act of hope, and an investment in a future tantalizingly different from the one we know" (MOCA, pg. 123). Their spiritual activism unified and solidified activists' relationships with each other and their children as they navigated the Educational Pipeline.

In alignment with the multiple years of research, I engaged in collaborative organizing with Motherscholars in and outside the University, I re-imagine what it means to practice a sacred pause to celebrate joy, gratitude, and love. I aimed to honor those small moments that can change the course of a journey and serve as a moment to recollect oneself before continuing an arduous voyage. My analysis shows how each mother had at least one person who motivated them to pursue higher education and could be considered a bridge maker. Continuous academic journeys as first-generation Women of Color pursuing a higher education continue to enroll in Ph.D. programs in the U.S. Pláticas elaborated on a Chicana Feminista

methodology, where they “argue that Chicana/Latina Feminista pláticas are a methodological disruption...to heal from and resist research approaches rooted in whiteness, colonial logics, and white supremacy” (pg. 3). hooks remind us how love counters capitalism while describing the dialogues in her classroom with students thinking deeply about capitalism and how it informs how we think about love and care. She asserts, “the way we try to separate mind from the body” (pg. 199), and as an example, a Motherscholar identity is deeply corporal. It is impossible to separate our mind and body while navigating higher education when our experiences are rooted in the body. The sacred pause reminds us about a pedagogy of self and communal love, the call to action in recognizing bridge makers while honoring the important moments to acknowledge the silence in moments of joy, gratitude, and love.

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