

SI DE POR SI, LA ACADEMIA YA PIDE MUCHO DE NOSOTROS: RESISTING THE
PRODUCTIVITY SYNDROME USING [CHIS]TEMONIOS

by

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M.A. in English with a focus in Rhetoric & Composition, 2023

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of

English in The AddRan College of Liberal Arts

Texas Christian University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

M.A. In English with a focus in Rhetoric & Composition



December 2023

Graduation Year

APPROVAL

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Thesis approved:

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La Dedicatoria

I want to start off by dedicating the following project to my friends imprinted in this project as their *testimonios* are valuable to this co-collaborative project. Thanks to them, **WE** have the opportunity and **HONOR** to have profound discussions about racial capitalism and how students of color navigate the academy to be their authentic selves. Our presence means much more than mere physicality because systems at play disregard our identities and needs. Instead of trying to assimilate and find help from the systems themselves, we are having to go our ways to **BREAK THE SYSTEM**. Yes, we are “in” the academy, but we are actually still trying to make a difference in the academy, while also breaking away from the academy. I then to want to dedicate this piece to Dr. Carmen Kynard, my committee chair and mentor for believing in this work and truly supporting me. Without her, I would have not been able to break from the system by writing in ways not **TRUE TO MY IDENTITY**. Dr. Carmen Kynard has allowed me to write **FREELY and JOYFULLY**, breaking from this capitalistic thesis system played in graduate school. Instead, I write in Spanish, Spanglish, and *platica* form. I also want to thank Dr. Brad Lucas and Dr. Charlotte Hogg for their time and support, especially Dr. Lucas for helping me navigate toward qualitative and IRB work. Finally, I want to thank the support I’ve received from people not mentioned in the thesis process, but who are nonetheless invaluable to this work—Ms. Ammie Harrison, my *apas*ⁱ, my *familia*, *mis amigos*, and my husband and best friend, Erik. Ms. Ammie Harrison, thank you for your valuable wisdom told in stories and the research you have helped me compile. Nataly and Chris, thank y’all for your support throughout this process *¡Gracias a todos, y que Dios los bendiga!*

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ABSTRACT

SI DE POR SI LA ACADEMIA YA PIDE MUCHO DE NOSOTROS: RESISTING THE PRODUCTIVITY SYNDROME IN SCHOLARS USING [CHIS]TEMONIOS

by

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M.A. in English, 2023

Carmen Kynard, Ph.D., Brad Lucas, Ph.D., Charlotte Hogg, Ph.D.

This study illustrates how six BIPOC students practice self-care in their graduate programs at a PWI. Findings—reported as *[chis]temonios*, *testimonios* written in gossiping style—suggest that the participants practice self-care by attending to their bodies, immersing in their cultures via food & music, actively pursuing their communities, loved ones, & mentors, and staying true to themselves as their definition of success, a definition oftentimes not endorsed in academia. Overall, the findings suggest that the participants practice self-care by prioritizing themselves strategically and creatively within the academy. The major themes include: reclaiming time, rhetorical *herencia*, ancestral remembering, self-care in the academy, authenticity, capitalism in graduate school, productivity syndrome/the grinding, and *platica* as an alternative qualitative methodology.

CHAPTER ONE

My Vision and Intentionality

I long for a work that embodies me and my community. I want to continue writing in ways that speak to me and that don't lend to the productivity syndromeⁱⁱ embraced in the academy. In writing to find me, I have attempted to slow down, rethink, re-research, recharge, be inspired by those whose experiences are part of this work. This work should be a reflection of my slowing down in attempts to actually make this work be alive and real. I hope that my work is not constraining and or limiting, but rather a process from which to think about because it's never ending. It's a process, not an end product. It's not a checkpoint or part of a checklist for academia; it's much more special and personal. Every time I felt anxious, worried, or inadequate about writing what I was supposed to write about, I remembered the importance of thinking through the personal because our *testimonios* matter, and that is enough. I remembered slowing down, taking breaks, and rethinking it all. If I didn't feel inspired because my body needed a *bendito descanso* or just needed inspiration from something or someone, I stopped and let that become part of my thesis-making, my thesis process. At times, I would get trapped into the white capitalistic/neoliberal mindset and feel ashamed for not "producing enough," but then immediately stopped this vicious and violent thought process to remind myself of rest and respite, engage in embodied/intentional work, and practice self-love/self-grace. However, it was a battle escaping this capitalistic mindset as the writing at times became numb and constraining. At times, I was caught off guard and wrote just to produce. But I reminded myself every step of the way about slowing down and why this work is important and purposeful. *Despacio* Lolitaⁱⁱⁱ; this is not a race. In slowing down, I attempted the praxis of intentionality when deciding whose scholarship I would invite to the table. I was intentional about inviting people's work that spoke to this much needed conversation and/or topics that aren't visibly acknowledged in the academy.

Slowing down also meant talking to my mentors and receiving wisdom from them and then going back home and writing down what their words meant and how they had inspired me to keep on going. Slowing down meant allowing myself to take a sip of coffee or tea and feel inspired by the *entorno*^{iv} I was surrounded by. **Daydreaming/sonar despierto**, a concept I took to heart from Tricia Hersey, the Nap Bishop, also helped me revitalize my writing when visualizing what my work needed and what words to write down (93-126). Imagining helped me create something unique, something that attempts to break the rules of written essays and dissertations that are part of this machine-like journey in graduate school education. I remembered savoring my work because like Hersey Tricia says, capitalism does not own us and it certainly does not own our bodies (8). Because this is intended to be an embodied work, I have attempted to make it different, make it sound and feel like me and those of graduate comrades whose lives are enriching academic spaces, but often go unnoticed.

***Los [Chis]Temonios*^v: Navigating Through the Academy**

Initially, I researched the connections between racial capitalism/the productivity syndrome and self-care within the academy for students of color. I wrote my *testimonio* on how I have navigated the academy and realized that students of color navigate the academy in similar and different ways from each other. Hence, I find other themes that are also part of their collective struggle within the academy: themes like rest, self-care hobbies, connecting with their culture/family/community, reclaiming time, navigating strategically and creatively through the academy, pursuing their calling purpose/identities, and fighting against aggressions. There is also a prominent message of resistance and a healing process of recovery. These and many other topics are embedded in the *testimonios* or *[chis]temonios*.

By writing these *[chis]temonios*, I found meaning in my friends' struggles and how they are 'rebellious' within the institution. Ultimately, they are facing a violent system within the academy, impelling them to find ways to practice self-care. Let's remember that this institution is an extension of violence, in various forms. In attempting to understand the process of research inquiry, I concluded that the "interviews" are a combination of *platicas* and open-ended casual interview sessions. However, I would argue that my research embraces *platicas* as my methodology. Though I did not implement *platicas* in one session due to time constraints, I implemented this practice in all other sessions.

Since the academy does not educate us, Latinx students, about truer and familiar ways to engage in research, we—including myself on this occasion—do not realize until the last minute what our methodologies and theorizing are until we stumble upon readings that speak to our truer ways of communicating/expressing and what we have been employing all along. This happened to me; thanks to two articles I stumbled upon on *platicas* and one other advised by my chair and mentor, I learned that this methodology is legitimate because Latinx/Chicanx scholars have defended and written about our people's TRUE form of communication. *Lee estos artículos y me sentí orgullosa de cómo nos comunicamos—mi familia, mi familia mexicana, y las demás comunidades Latinas.*

Francisco Guajardo and Miguel Guajardo define the power of *platica* as "an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making" (160). They further emphasize *platicas* as a form of cultural communication that allows for relationship building, honoring the already authentic and organic form of storytelling, and knowledge making as we learn lessons through *platicas*—a pedagogical tool. *Los hermanos* Guajardo expresses *platicas* as

an *herencia* and identity marker from their parents and communities and use this already organic form of communication in their scholarship, *vida cotidiana*, and teaching agendas.

Like the Guajardo *hermanos*, Chicana/Latina Feminists like Socorro Morales, Alma Iltze Flores, Tanya J. Gaxiola Serrano & Dolores Delgado Bernal, also emphasize learning and reciprocal-building by honoring our embodied knowledge— being transparent and vulnerable about our emotions and our authentic ways of speaking and communicating, whether that be through language, *testimonios*, *chismorro*, joyful talk, mundane conversations, and heart-to-heart conversations (9).

Thus, *platicas* allow us to feel liberated when communicating because we are organically expressing in ways already comfortable and authentic—you know, talking like we normally do at home and with friends. Further, Morales et al., express the importance of the body and its role in communicating one’s oppressions for collective healing. Unlike *platicas*, I would argue that other institutional Eurocentric methods of qualitative research such as “informal conversations” (Swain and King 2022) lack embodied knowledge and relationship building. Although this method is considered “informal” and “naturalistic,” these lack reciprocal vulnerability and familiarity that comes from a culturally expressive community. Moreover, I would argue that such Eurocentric methodologies do not holistically honor the communities’ and researcher’s embodied knowledge through emotions, languages other than Standard English, and various forms of narratives.

I write a chapter on the [*chis*]teimonios of six graduate student peers at a PWI institution—who also happen to be my friends, *mis compadres/comadres del alma*. Hence, it was possible for me to *platicar* with them. Their voices are often ignored because they—some authority figures in the academy who don’t bother to change it up for good or who are actively

part of the problem—are not paying attention to how the academy continues to systemically recreate violence. In attempting to write my six friends’ political [*chis*]testimonios, I intentionally made sure my friends narrated their own testimonios through direct quotation. Additionally, as I was writing each of the [*chis*]testimonios, I made sure to write in ways unique to my *gente* and my essence. I wanted my writing to flow and sound natural and familiar and comforting to me. Hence, I used an epistemological method that is dear to many cultures, including mine. This methodology is known as *chismoseo*/gossiping or conversational dialogues/*platicas*.

As introduced earlier, “*platica* requires a level of relationship building” as we “enter community in a way that honors community member stories, rather than through classical approach of moving into a community to EXTRACT information” (Guajardo & Guajardo 161). In other words, through *platica*, I was able to share my own story and “form insightful questions that took *platica* specific moments in history,” my friends’ histories (Guajardo & Guajardo 161). Not only was I able to use conversation or *platica* as research inquiry and as a pedagogical tool, this approach also allowed me to write the *testimonios* as a *platica* as I imagined myself speaking to an imaginable character about the *dialogo* I had with my friends.

Moreover, I imagined this *platica* to be written as a *chismoseo*, a communication method used by many of my family members, specifically my aunts in Mexico. My mom’s aunts—my older generation aunts—sit on designated plastic chairs outside my *tia* Socorro’s house—the ultimate *chismorrea* aunt^{vi}—and *chismosean* about our town’s people and WOW events or simply have joyful talks about mundane topics. Their gossiping/rumoring and the physical act of sitting down outside this familiar multi-colored house has become a time and place for respite, *un bendito descanso* from the outside world and all the laboring that happens throughout the day. For my aunts, this is their break time. When I travel to Mexico to visit my husband and family

members, I make sure to sit down with my aunts, a practice that has become a ritual in our family. I also remember growing up in the United States enjoying adult *platicas* happening at home since my aunts and uncles dialogued endlessly throughout the years as they lived with us. I remember listening to their *platicas* and engaging with them. Even late at night, when my uncles came back from work, I would get up and listen. To me, *platicas* was a tool that allowed me to learn peoples' perspectives and thought processes.

Many times, *platicas* are accompanied with gossiping/*chismoseo*. Hence, my gossiping voice is embedded within my friends' *testimonios*. Parts of the *testimonios* are also written in Spanish and sometimes Spanglish, my native language/*mi lengua nativa* because I find that the academy does not allow for one's personal voice to shine freely. And though I did not know what to call this methodology at the beginning stages of my writing, I have now come to call it “[*chis*]temonio,” abbreviation form for a mix between *chismoseo* and *testimonio*. I got inspiration from my aunts, my culture, other cultures' communication styles, and Sandra Cisneros's “Woman Hollering Creek.” I'm not trying to sound smart or use difficult words because my writing is a political act against Eurocentric academic writing.

Instead, I have incorporated some Spanish & Spanglish sprinkled here and there—Spanish that is not always easily translated in the standard Spanish dictionary or in Google translate. However, I also make sure to translate these phrases in endnotes if they're not easily translated. Throughout this write-up, I write some poetry/reflections about taking our time/reclaiming time/enjoying time. In doing so, I hope readers can engage in these self-care practices and engage in *platicas* about these topics with me or with others. I have also written a chapter on my *testimonio* as a graduate student, detailing how I've navigated through the academy in resisting its capitalistic system.

Lastly, I include a chapter where I create a fictive liberating space in which I write letters to my friends and talk to them about what I would have said during our meetup, filling the gaps about what was not said, but because of time constraint, I was not able to achieve. I imagine myself dialoging in real time/live time, reclaiming my space and time. This fictive space is a rhetorical emblem of rest, respite, self-care, and embodiment as I engage in conversations that address our needs and bodies. In the future, I imagine engaging in real lifetime *platicas* with my friends. In both scenarios, I imagine a place where time does not exist, where time is not owned by capitalism, where time stops, where we can all slow down and be reflexive of our conditions, where time is not injected with stress or production-making that doesn't bring joy, but rather, a space and place of safe generative co-learning and co-existence because we can just be as we should be. By the way, I honor Tricia Hersey for the influence and inspiration she has molded in the words above. ***PORQUE JUSTIFICAR NUESTRA EXISTENCIA?*** Our bodies are divine for mere existing, not because they have to be overworked, especially for a system^{vii}! Some of the main topics covered throughout the thesis touch base on what self-care means to my friends in the academy, their communities of care, and their ability to reclaim time by connecting with their identities and cultural roots.

El Clamor: Como Empezo

I write my personal *testimonio* about how I navigate through hustling throughout my education, specifically at the graduate level. There are several definitions of *testimonios*, but I will write my definition that I identify with and that characterize the work I am “producing” here. *Testimoniando*—the act of writing a *testimonio*—is writing one’s sociopolitical experiences in any creative manner for the purpose of sharing one’s interpretation of the oppressive system

one lives in and call for action. Moreover, *testimoniando* is told in first person to name a specific oppression (Kathryn Blackmer Reyes & Julia E. Curry Rodriguez). In my *testimonio*, I touch base on how I perceive capitalism as someone who was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States with my parents. In detailing these events, I incorporate memories, artifacts, and some observations from English graduate student peers and teachers. I focus on ways of disrupting what I call the “productivity syndrome” in scholars or simply the productivity scholar as my great friend, Nataly, termed. The productivity syndrome that I call out here is pervasive and detrimental to our mental health when we allow it to become the only important aspect of our lives or when we don't know how to manage it in a healthy manner.

Anna Codrea-Rado, a journalist, podcaster, and author, has come to define it as productivity dysmorphia, a mix between burnout, imposter syndrome, and anxiety. She argues that although we have done enough work, we internalize the feeling that we have not done enough (Udavant, “Feeling Unproductive”). Although I agree with part of her definition, I have come to define it more in terms with Tricia Hersey’s description, *The Nap Bishop*. Although she does not coin the term as productivity dysmorphia or productivity syndrome, she describes grind culture in a similar manner. Tricia Hersey reminds us that “grind culture is a collaboration between white supremacy and capitalism” (12). Hersey calls the opposite of the syndrome as a political act, that is, when we practice resistance against grind culture. Tricia Hersey states that we have always been brainwashed into a capitalist and ableist mindset of work ethics and existence (38). Hersey’s depiction of political act is twofold: resting as resistance for our ancestors who were robbed of their spiritual rest and for those who continue to suffer today, as well as reclaiming our bodies as our own (31).

Hence the productivity syndrome in scholars that I define is a mix between other scholars who are talking about the grind culture in general and **Tricia Hersey's more profound definition**. Hersey's definition goes deep into the experiences of people whose ancestors have been oppressed and traumatized with labor, racism, exploitation, and marginalization. Through wise spiritual healers and scholars who share liberating theories of self-care and rest, I am learning to disrupt the productivity syndrome or the productivity scholar, as coined by Nataly. Now that I am rewriting/expanding on my *testimonio* as a second-year master's student, I realize that I had only written a quick glimpse of radical ways of resting and healing. As preached in Tricia Hersey's *Rest as Resistance: A Manifesto*, these liberating theories also serve as political practices of being and doing.

I expand more on the connection between power dynamics within the context of the productivity syndrome or the productivity scholar—as a great friend termed—to best fit our graduate student positionality. Thus, this research inquiry and generative piece documents these imperative sections, while also highlighting loudly the voices of graduate student peers who, like me, have probably felt an urgency to share and express their *testimonio*, but were probably not encouraged or were just not sure how to share their experiences in this hustle-driven environment.

This productivity syndrome narrative is *puro silencio*, always in the background but never spoken about. As a result, the productivity syndrome expects students to be brave enough to continue without breaks/brakes. But this is not to say that other oppressive forces are not taking place in the academy. These institutionalized forces are also taking place and students of color are having to find ways to navigate through it all and pursue self-care, while they stay true

to themselves. At the same time, many of these forces feed into the capitalistic system and are part of this vicious system.

In realizing I had missed out on the cultural richness of my Latinx community and the *herencia* that we inhabit through writing and speaking our voices, proudly and loudly, *sin tantita pena*^{viii}, I have intentionally made the effort to create a *testimonio, mi testimonio*. Hence, I write my memories and accounts with respect to academia and how my identity as a Mexican, first-generation college student has everything to do with how **we**, students of color, are pushed to practice machine-like work—by the way, work we are less unlikely to identify with, — and or, go with the flow on many of the practices and policies enforced by a systemic academy.

El Comienzo

But first, I want us to honor the *Purepechans*. You see, I was born in Mexico, in a small town in Michoacan, home to our indigenous *ancestros* known as the *Purepechans*, whose culture, traditions, and spirit keeps our Michoacan alive and vibrant of Mexican color. In sharing about my region's indigenous ancestry, I will share who I am and how this discovery of myself has brought me here. My name is Maria Dolores Perez Duarte, a Spanglish speaker, learner, first-generation college student, whitexican graduate student who came to the United States at age four. Remembering my vacation trips to my hometown, I realized I was in a place of privilege due to my skin hue. You see, there are many Indigenous communities, Afro-Mexicans, and brown-skinned families that are not given full respect, inclusion, and recognition in Mexico to this day. I remember people around me being proud of white-skinned colored babies; *esa guerrita esta bonita y yo creci morenita o prietita*^{ix}. These statements I would hear from people in town, and although they seemed “innocent” and harmless by those who spoke it and heard it,

they were actually pervasive and vicious. To this day, ideologies of racism and all isms are sadly part of Mexican culture and swept silently under classism; many *Paisanos*^x believe that classism and patriarchy are the only true problems in Mexican society, when in reality, racist and homophobic ideologies are prevalent, but hushed and not talked about.

I tell this part of my identity because I acknowledge my Latinx comrades who are disadvantaged and unnoticed as important not only in this “land of the free” but also back in our Latinx countries. Hence, I stand as ally not only for comrades here but for those of who live in Latinx countries. Moreover, I must acknowledge every part of my identity to speak from a place of true embodied work, one in which I cherish my true self which includes my *ancestros*, those who were particularly stripped of their humanness when conquered by Spanish oppressors, while I acknowledge the oppressions of not speaking from a place of true openness/*franqueza*. Although I am not proud of the racism and all oppressive forms experienced within my Latinx community, I am proud of my roots, my mom and dad, who gave me their last names, which motivates me to write the entirety of my name when I have the opportunity to do so—this is such an occasion.

My passion for mental health and social justice within rhetoric & composition began during my bachelor’s journey. In taking my first Black Rhetoric seminar at my institution, I realized I had been partially blind; It was not until then that I was introduced to DIFFERENCE rhetorics or rhetorics of difference^{xi}—rhetorics that speak about, for, and with communities not commonly spoken about in education. It was not until then that I learned how to go about addressing and connecting self-care/rest with social justice issues and intersecting disciplines of critical race theory and liberating intersectional feminist theories.

Moreover, after having experienced the heavy load of hustle-driven lifestyle throughout my education, including graduate school, I became hungry for alternative ways of doing and being. It was precisely in my first Black Rhetoric seminar that I learned about Black Feminist scholars and activists who practice healing and liberating theories for all. Tricia Hersey, The Nap Bishop, is someone whose work is one of the main inspirations for this project. Radical and liberating pedagogy practices in graduate school professed by some of my professors also inspired me to continue fighting for a fun, decolonial graduate learning endeavor, **AS IT SHOULD AND COULD BE, PERO NO ES. POR ESO, ESTAMOS LUCHANDO EN CONTRA DE ESTE SISTEMA EDUCATIVO.**

Counselors like Mrs. Bravo, Ms. Heather, and Mrs. Liliana have also led me to imagine new horizons, *nuevos horizontes en donde puedo ser y existir de una manera sanadora. Nuestros ancestros Latinx tambien han sido mi inspiracion* because their teachings/literacies are not yet gone as we continue to practice them today, everywhere we go. Composing a *testimonio*, my Latinx version of autoethnography, allowed me to envision a reflective practice of voicing my truth and that of my peers, who were probably too shy to admit they were also struggling or didn't know how to express themselves living under the chains of the ideal/ "successful" graduate student defined by Eurocentric graduate school mentality.

In riding the bus as my sole school transportation to school, I was fortunate to meet people whose identities are unacknowledged or deemed unworthy. With them, I learned about the importance of allyship. As an ally, I am aware of the brave conversations I needed to have with peers and friends about race issues. Today, I consider that my allyship and Latinx identity have partaken in my project's scholarly direction. As a graduate student, whose identity is of Mexican soils and whose first language is *Barrio* Spanish, —Spanish passed down

generationally and brought here to the United States—I have concluded that graduate students of color and/or students with other intersecting identities have it harder in this neoliberal/capitalist education system.

In my bus experiences alone, I have realized the struggles that many of us endure to obtain an education. In riding the 024 bus to teach a class on a Wednesday morning, I ran through some issues: the bus going to school broke down that morning, and I was already nervous about teaching. I emailed my professor to tell him that I was waiting for another bus to come. I waited patiently and told myself everything would be okay. I finally made it on time to class, and I attempted to **disrupt** the hustling that day by allowing my students to take ten minutes to themselves to talk about self-care, rest, and non-school conversations as a form of interruption from the outside world.

This bus incident, along with many others have allowed me to reflect on how other students who look like me or sound like me or are just themselves--(**as they should be**)—are also probably struggling to handle the institution’s demands and the realization that other students probably don’t run through the same troubles. Moreover, as a student of color, there have been multiple times that I find myself struggling to keep up with the school work because it sometimes doesn’t speak to me as *Mexicana*. Although I am what my Mexican comrades would consider whitexican, I am writing from experiences that occur when a Latinx body decides to pursue an education in a world not theirs, across the border. I acknowledge many bodies are by definition from the outside, from the other side of the border. Our hometown Spanish language is also foreign, and it stands out in the crowds. As an effort to discuss the issues that students of color endure, this research inquiry is geared towards race/power dynamics, and how we resist through **power tools** such as self-care and rest, *el bendito descanso*.

CHAPTER TWO

Testimoniando: Lolita's Testimonio

I begin my *testimonio* with my *nacimiento*, my birth place in a small town in Michoacán, Mexico. I am the oldest of three *hermanitos*, and I left my hometown Penjamillo to live with my parents in Fort Worth, TX when I was four. My small town, Penjamillo, is not only my birth place but a place I visit every Christmas and summer **break**. Yes, a **break** from school and the everyday hustling in the United States. I have vivid memories of visiting my aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandpa from my mom's side of her family. It is the place where I can *chismosear y platicar* with my *tias* outside my *tia* Socorro's house. This *platicar* and *chismosear* about events in town is restful and joyful for me and my aunts as we take a break together, *un bendito descanso* from the grinding. In Mexico, the grinding is different from the grinding here in the USA. Why? In talking with friends and family relatives from Mexico and those who reside in the USA, I've realized that the grinding in my hometown is less fast-paced; you see, if your birthday falls on a weekday, people make it a priority to celebrate it. However, in the USA, working class immigrants feel they have to *acclimarse al ambiente/acclimate* to the environment. *¡Hay no! ¡Hay que festejar el cumpleaños de fulanito de tal el sábado porque es cuando hay más chanza!* Oh no! So-and-sos birthday falls on a weekday, but let's celebrate it on a Saturday because it's convenient given everyone's schedule. And by fitting everyone's schedule, they refer to non-workdays—*dias de bendito descanso*. This phrase I would hear from my family members when our birthdays would fall on a weekday.

I start off by sharing on my ability to relax and rest in Mexico because it's a part of my identity as a Mexican scholar and student in the USA where the way of living *es mas apresurado*^{xiii}. Coming from immigrant parents and as an immigrant myself, I have heard about

the American Dream/*El Sueno Americano*. *Mi apa*/my dad had always said that we immigrants come here to work hard because that is the only way we can succeed, and with these words I chased the American Dream. *Mi apa me decia* that immigrants work hard *porque tiene ganas de salir adelante y lo consiguen. Así que ustedes le tienen que echar ganas a estudiar para que no le anden batallando como uno aquí, trabajando pesado, ganando muy poquito, y trabajando en algo que no nos gusta*. My dad would tell my brother and me that we needed to get an education and **work hard** in it because he didn't want us to **work laboriously**, not get paid enough to survive, and work on a job we didn't enjoy.

Sus consejos/his advice

¡Hay apa! Is the American Dream even a thing for everyone here in this country? I would question my dad at times, but I heard this advice all the time, and I started to believe it. Besides, **I wanted to make my parents proud**. Early from a young age, I remember bringing my schoolbooks everywhere I went. I wanted to make sure I obtained good grades, and my teachers told us that to get good grades, we needed to work hard. When I say at an early age, I mean 6th grade at a Catholic school where my mom worked in the kitchen to afford my education. I want to clarify that I had always heard the working hard mantra from teachers from a younger age, but I told myself that to make my parents proud and to **feel valuable**, I needed to begin working hard in 6th grade. To me, this meant not taking personal breaks with family members. If I did not work "hard" to keep myself occupied with schoolwork, I'd feel guilty and shameful, especially since my mom was working at the school's kitchen. I missed spending quality time with my family because when I left home, I took my books with me. I didn't enjoy the present moment; **I was merely existing**. You see, I missed out immersing in

our culture and being with family. We'd make *carne asada*, go to taco places, enjoy family celebrations and *platicas*, go to a local Hispanic mall, La Gran Plaza of Fort Worth, or just get out of the house for once. MY AUNTS and uncles ALSO TOOK LONG RIDES TO FORT WORTH'S CENTRO AND WENT TO MASS OR DECIDED ON WHAT MOVIE TO WATCH. Y'ALL SEE, GROWING UP, SUNDAYS AND WEEKENDS FOR MY FAMILY WERE **CHILAX DAYS** and they continue to be till this day, DAYS TO GET AWAY FROM THE GO-GO-GO OF THE WEEKDAYS. THOSE DAYS CONTINUE TO BE OUR SELF-CARE DAYS, *DIAS DE BENDITO DESCANSO*. Unfortunately, this concept of the "productivity syndrome" became ingrained in my lifestyle, and I didn't know how to get out of it; it had become pervasive. It became a re-lived praxis during the last year of my undergraduate studies and taking on too many responsibilities did not make it any better. **I wanted to be "successful" and make my *apas* proud.**

Y luego, later in my graduate journey, I finally made a connection with my *apa's* words and what I learned about race and power dynamics in this country. I deduced that part of my urge to follow a capitalistic mindset comes from how my immigrant ancestors, including my family, have been taught to believe that "success" in American land means working hard every day. For many people, including some of my family members, working hard every day means meeting basic living expenses, even if this lifestyle means not taking breaks. Luckily, as we got situated in the USA, many of my uncles and aunts lived with us in a four-bedroom house, making our lives easier because we shared rent fees, even if it meant not having privacy. Yes, I understand that my parents' and family relatives' labor is physical, but I nonetheless believe it's been ingrained in my work ethics, and as a child born of

working-class immigrant parents, I've learned to work hard, even if it's **intellectual labor**, a concept Catherine later in her testimonio terms.

Intellectual Labor

Mi apa came to the USA first and ever since his marriage, he's worked hard all these years. But I also think that he's been working hard because in my culture, *los hombres* are the breadwinners of the house. My *tios* and *tias* also came here after we arrived to Fort Worth, and they too, worked hard to send money back to Mexico for my *abuelita*, Amelia. The only times my family relatives rested were Saturday nights when they hung out with other close friends at family celebrations and or when they went to McDonalds for some fries or when they went to *el mol*/the mall. On Sunday mornings, it was *misa* time. *Pero mi papa*, he sleeps/*ronca*. Till this day, my dad comes home from work sleeping and or talking to my mom to release stress. Other times, my siblings or I scratched my dad's back and gave him messages for relaxation. My dad snores on Sundays after mass and usually doesn't wake up until we beg him to take us out; my mom usually goes out Sundays because she wants to leave home, her "working site" as *ama de casa*. Growing up, my *hermanitos* have asked my *apa* to take us out/*a dar la vuelta*: "*Apa, vamos a salir. Andale, antes de que cierren todas las tiendas, o vamos al parque a caminar. Vamos a comer. Vamos al buffet o a comer tacos de birria*^{xiii}." And then at times when I close the door to my room after mass, my mom knocks on my door saying, "*Lolita, si quieres ir? Vamos a ir a comer. ¿No quieres ir? Antes de que tu papa se vuelva a dormir; ya vez como ronca*."^{xiv}

Before my *despertar*, I stayed home and saw my family driving off, feeling sad and lonely, stuck to a computer screen trying to be “productive” on a Sunday afternoon. Today, I don’t hesitate to leave schoolwork and join my parents on Sundays.

El Bendito Descanso Growing Up

Despite my family taking a day or two off from work, I nonetheless followed in their footsteps of working hard at school and at home, helping my *ama* with chores/*quehaceres*. And then there was the pressure of wanting to make my *apas* proud by following a **timely academic path**, a concept endorsed in graduate programs. I assured my parents I would follow with education from start to end *porque si no, ya no vas a querer estudiar. Despues se desaniman y entran a trabajar en cualquier lugar para salir adelante*. I’d hear my parents telling my brothers and I that if we stopped our education path somewhere, we’d find any job out there and not finish our education.

After graduating with two bachelors in 2021, I was already feeling burned out with *no descanso*. I knew I would continue tackling schoolwork in graduate school, and my concept of graduate school was that I would have to work ten times harder. I was prepared to take on this task and perform, as I have been taught throughout my education in this country. You see, I had gone to talks about “surviving graduate school” and in one of my psychology classes as part of my undergraduate coursework, I was reinforced with the idea that graduate school is about keeping up with the rhythm. *Un ritmo muy atareado*/very busy paced schedule or lifestyle. Yeah, like the concept of “thriving or sinking” sounded harsh and daunting.

Un ritmo muy atareado

Of course, nothing connects my schoolwork in my undergraduate studies with my graduate school experience. I didn't know what graduate school was all about, and from the very start, when attending our "orientation" day, I could confirm what I had been taught about graduate school. *It is essential to be focused because certain expectations need to be met to graduate and strive.* During orientation, I didn't hear any emphasis on self-care or academic strategies that can help students cope with stress and anxiety. Instead, if I recall correctly, the orientation was about the steps we were expected to follow for the program. The following orientation days were about jobs in the marketplace, meeting with a faculty member, and understanding diversity and inclusion. Since my introduction to graduate school was mostly about striving or sinking, **I felt the obligation and urge to read every single page for all my classes, or at least, most of the reading;** this was part of what I had learned about being a "good" graduate student.

I realized that part of my exhaustion was reading for classes I didn't personally feel aligned with. Some of the readings didn't speak to me or didn't contribute to my growth as a Latinx, BIPOC, Mexican student/ learner. It was hard to tackle these readings, and at times, I read them in snippets and tried to make sense of them by highlighting and taking notes of sections I understood, at least, superficially. I didn't even know why I was struggling to find enjoyment in the readings. And because of the reading load, I felt more exhausted *¡Hay no!* *¡No más! ¿Como es esto relevante?* Why is this reading relevant and or important? How does it fulfill a purpose? How do I fit into this reading? And if it doesn't, then why am I reading it? But I felt obliged. To be/feel busy as part of my student "occupation." I read and wrote as I was indicated.

But besides finding these readings empty, I remember feeling deficient reading them. Looking back at a prekindergarten report card, my teacher marked “a needs improvement” and “developing” in language skills such as using new vocabulary to communicate. To this day, there are still several words I must look up in Google translate to keep up with the reading assigned to us, making it harder for me to enjoy learning. It was no exception in my master’s journey. But why do these authors have to write so challenging? Why can they just write like they speak? You know, in language that anyone can understand! The paragraphs were endless and at times, complicated to digest. In instances, I felt left out because for one, my Latinx/BIPOC identity was left out of the equation, and two, the language was unnecessarily complicated. No wonder some of us see graduate school as a laborious workforce, challenging to complete. Nonetheless, I forced myself to read these pages thinking that reading them is working hard, and is thus the way to ‘success.’ **I soon realized I was reading endlessly with no enjoyment.**

Fortunately, not all classes were unpleasant. I fell in love with a course and teacher my first year in graduate school. I remember feeling nervous that first day of class. I sat in the first row and thought to myself I had to “perform” and “sound smart.” But instantly, I learned my professor talked simply, like all of us in that classroom. She didn’t expect us to write endless papers or prove our “worth” in graduate school. She simply wanted us to learn, speak our minds freely, and write whatever we were eager to continue learning. She didn’t write a **laborious contract** in her syllabus and unnecessary grading system. Her course was joyous and “rebellious” because it didn’t fit capitalistic school standards. She allowed for creativity and authenticity. I soon began following her mantra of adhering to learning that is joyous, liberating, and healing. Like, her lesson plans reflected the importance of **maximizing**

learning by minimizing overburdensome and overloaded work. This liberating learning mantra has followed me through the remainder of my graduate school journey.

More importantly, it was in her course that I was introduced to Rhetorics of Difference and some Latinx scholarship. Moving forward, I intentionally began to look for Latinx scholarship outside of what's commonly offered in graduate school courses. And it was this professor who encouraged me to create an independent study course that included all that's Latinx. And it was in her course that I read Dr. Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Traces of Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Writers* and got inspiration from the following quote: "People who do intellectual work **NEED** to understand their intellectual ancestry; and people who do intellectual work need to understand **POWER** and how they are affected by it" (265). So, yes, I was encouraged and inspired to create an independent study course on my Latinx ancestry and how my community and I are affected in this country, specifically within the educative system. I created this course during Christmas Break and included readings on *testimonios*/research practices that represent us, our cultural richness, and worthwhile conversations as BIPOC students. Did it take courage to **resist** taking a course already listed in the list of courses for this semester? Yes! But it was worthwhile. I emailed the created Word document to the English graduate advisor and here I am, reading these scholarly works, feeling a sense of joy—the opposite of exhaustion because it is empowering to finally read scholarship that fulfills and represents me.

A Joyous Kind of Learning

Along with her class, I remember another professor who advised us to write about conversations that speak to us and genuinely interest us. It was the first time I had heard a

professor preach about writing on pop culture and topics outside the **ACADEMIC, RIGOROUS SCHOLARLY ARENA—THE BORING AND PERFORMATIVE CONVERSATIONS WE HEAR ALL THE TIME!** And although these classes and assignments did not exhaust me, I was still reminded of rest, naps, and self-care. Yes, self-care and rest! In these classes, we would embrace self-care check-ins! *¿Como están? ¿Que necesitan cambiar^{xv}?* Tell me a good and bad thing y'all want to share. It was like venting and reflecting all the way through. In one class, we would sit down and reflect on some self-care questions before we began our academic breaks. Usually, we journaled our thoughts and shared them in class. This reflective time allowed us to vent, slow-down, and empathize with other classmates who were struggling through the academic labor.

In another course, our teacher asked us to share one affirmation, hobbies, and practices of self-care—activities not related to school, reinforcing the invaluable praxis of wellness. And then, I remember in my first semester walking into another professor's office and feeling mentally exhausted, but I was comfortable expressing to her my anxiety and exhaustion. She welcomed any discussion on this topic, and we had multiple checkpoints about weekly preoccupations and challenges that speak to human connection. We also discussed how important it is to listen to our bodies and learn the art of knowing ourselves—when, where, and how we learn best. These real, open conversations were refreshing and helpful, especially when I came to learn I was not struggling in isolation.

Radical Pedagogies as RESISTANCE

Although, there were some professors who made it explicit to talk about their different political perspectives on how to reduce work for students and strategies that could instead

maximize their learning potential and their joy for learning, I still felt I was a failure as a graduate student because I was not “producing enough” schoolwork. Like, even if the readings spoke to me, if I didn’t read them to their entirety, I felt shameful and unworthy. But wasn’t I tired? Didn’t I deserve some rest? I have documented several reflection notes in which I have felt I was a failure for not completing my weekly readings for all my classes. One day before my Thursday class, my second year, I recorded the following journal entry:

Sometimes I want to isolate from others because I don’t feel like talking right now. I am feeling kinda down, and it has to do with the fact I feel like I’m falling behind. I am tired of trying my best to be productive and be a good student, and haven’t read for class today. Why is everyone so jolly? Are they all on top of things and are happy to be here? I know I should be happy to be here, but I feel like I’m going through a vicious cycle of trying again when I get back home.

On another occasion, I was feeling drowsy, tired, guilty, and unworthy. I hadn’t read a single page of our weekly book reading, but I engaged with the secondary reading and had knowledge of the book. One of my friends offered to provide me with a summary of the book and even though I learned the gist of it, I still felt like a failure and an irresponsible graduate student who didn’t do her work “correctly.” However, in trying to make myself feel better, I remembered that my friend had finished reading her book by listening to it in Audible and realized I didn’t have the financial opportunity she had. During class that same day, I felt the need to release my shamefulness by being honest and telling my peers I didn’t read the assigned book, but nonetheless was willing to learn from everyone else. One of my classmates applauded me for being vulnerable in class.

Although I was honest with my peers and professor and was challenging myself to be present in class, I ruminated on my “incompetence” as a student throughout the class session. Upon reflecting on these journal entries, I realized I’m not the only student who’s felt shame about not getting to all the assigned readings for their courses. There is a vicious cycle I note here that goes back to believing that we need to be a certain graduate student prototype that’s always performing exceptionally all the time, regardless of energy levels, responsibilities, circumstances, and positionalities. Y’all see, according to Carter, Catania, Schmitt, and Swenson, temporality of graduate education refers to the expectations placed on all graduate students, despite their circumstances to follow a predetermined, timely rate and “through each milestone **in a particular way**” (96). It is assumed that the bodyminds best suited for academia are those that “demonstrate discipline, restraint, productivity, and autonomy” (Carter et al., 95). I advocate that many of the graduate students do not have the same capabilities to follow a **predetermined** milestone set by academic programs, and or, are not willing to follow specific standards predetermined by a white capitalistic graduate system.

What’s hopeful about this reflection is that there’s always someone willing to detach us from this grinding or productivity syndrome to bring us back to the things that matter to us—that brings us joy in our learning journey, especially BIPOC graduate students. Besides professors whose radical liberating pedagogies are mostly healing, I was fortunate to find an **alternative narrative** from my friends, counselors, Black Feminist scholars/gamechangers, and *herencia* practices as part of my Mexican identity at a PWI in the south.

Alternative Narrative

Although we are all struggling to survive, we also find support from our close friends, *amigos del alma*. Yes, *del alma* because we have each other’s back. We experience the same

grinding and, in many instances, share a political perspective on **liberating learning**, learning that oftentimes is robbed from us in graduate schools and K-12 systems. “Pablo, I have a question and concern on so and so.” “Lolita, you want to meet up and talk about it as we walk around campus?” “*Si*, let’s meet.” Many times, I can speak Spanglish with Pablo and many of other friends on campus. Speaking Spanglish feels more liberating and graduate school *se siente mas llevadero*/more tolerable.

Many times, we support each other’s goals and feel comfortable discussing themes that concern us and our BIPOC communities. Starting on my second-year journey, I have intentionally asked my friends to meet up to *platicar* and get away from schoolwork for a *bendito descanso*. Yes, a *bendito descanso* through *platica*, a source of emotional and embodied self-care for many cultures. We vent; we encourage each other; we share our *herencia* practices, and we counteract the productivity syndrome as we give ourselves time to just be. Like sometimes, I talk about Mexican music with Pablo, try Catherine’s Mexican food in her apartment, go out to eat *duros* with *cueritos*^{xvi}, or eat on campus to catch up.

Yeah, like Tricia Hersey urges us to reconsider how we view rest and self-care. When I first read Tricia Hersey’s *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* riding the bus, I finally began seeing “non-school” activities as valuable as schoolwork, *Deje de sentirme mal* when engaging in hobbies. I don’t feel bad about taking space and time to rest and **connect** with my friends anymore. Before my *despertar*, I remember hesitating to talk before class because I was too busy trying to complete assigned readings, especially if I hadn’t finished and felt too guilty. I equated socializing and having the time to be around friends with being on top of it all. Hersey’s quotes reminded me of this true form of self-care not really preached in academia: “Our rest is centered on **connecting** and reclaiming our divinity, given to us by

birth”; moreover, “we are **not** resting to be productive” (62). Today, when I meet with friends, I don’t see it as a way for me to be more productive later, but as a blessing to connect with them, who like me, are struggling too in a capitalistic system in graduate school. *Hoy en dia, es dificil conectar con los demas*. In today’s age, it’s hard to have real human connection, whether that be through *platica* or just being together in the same space, knowing that we’re all breathing and journeying together in this world. Like-minded friends? *Quizas*, but we journey together in graduate school and that is a beautiful thing.

Sometimes when we can’t meetup, we encourage each other through texts and keep us accountable when we work. *Mis amigos* are present when I have an urge to do more assignments than I can reasonably complete. They say statements like—“*Focus on the ones coming up*” and “*which one is the easiest for you to complete right now?*” One of my friends has taught me to work on the more manageable tasks first so that I don't spend most of the time working on assignments that require more time. When we meet on Zoom to work on our assignments, we steer each other's negative thoughts about throwing in the towel once and for all and running for our lives (*tirir la toalla de una vez por todas y salir corriendo*). **More importantly, when we feel tired and unproductive, we remind each other to take breaks, naps and sometimes take the day off. There are times when we feel better after reminding one another that it’s okay and healthy to take breaks.** We support one another by reflecting on our moments of distress and burdensome; this reflection helps us “solve” our underlying problem, allowing us to find tangible solutions. I advocate that friendship support systems keep us going and help us maintain a healthy “productivity” praxis.

Amigos del Alma

Besides *amigos del alma* whose voices counteract this vicious discourse in my journey to resist the productivity syndrome and its pervasive effects, my counselors like Mrs. Bravo and Ms. Heather have been with me every step of the way. However, **I acknowledge that I keep going back and forth between the syndrome and positive reflections that attempt to resist its adverse effects.** I began my counseling sessions with Ms. Bravo during my undergrad at Texas Wesleyan University. I remember confiding with her multiple times about my frustration in completing school tasks. She asked me what assignments I needed to finish. *"I have about five or more things on my list and it's like 5 pm. Do you realize that you can only complete 2 or 3 tasks from that list given that our session ends at 6 pm?"* She also asked me why I had the urgency to complete every item from the list. I remember explaining to her that I felt I had not done enough. *Te lo puedes creer?* I hadn't done enough, I told her. Girl, you've done more than enough, she'd reply.

However, she redirected my attention to working on the most urgent items. She advised me to keep my day's schedule to 2-3 items and not go over that item list unless I had more energy and time to continue working. She was intentional about discussing the importance of being realistic with what I could complete based on what I knew about myself—my learning style, attention span, roles outside school, and energy levels. I still remember her voice whispering to me about SELF-CARE. *"Maria, your self-care is vital to our existence. Self-care is much more than taking a shower, eating, sleeping. Self-care is our survivance and human right. Self-care is living in the moment and enjoying what WE CHOOSE to engage with."* Looking back, I'm like for reals! She's a wise *mujer*.

Mrs. Bravo advised me to practice TRUE breaks: 1) take them frequently, 2) get off the computer and other electronic devices during breaks, and 3) step away from your seat and

do activities other than brain work. Today, I attempt to follow her advice on taking TRUE breaks, but sometimes I fail, just like many of us do. When I work on my school assignments and feel dreary or unmotivated to continue working, I spend my "mental break" imagining myself wearing *SHEIN* clothes instead of closing my laptop and stepping away. I feel an urge to be on my computer even if I am not making progress because I think that if I decide to leave, I am not trying hard enough to make some progress. Somehow, if I step away, I am not trying hard enough to continue working, so I become "tied (*pegada*)" to my computer, LITERALLY. *Hay* Mrs. Bravo, here I go again, making the same old mistake!

Ms. Bravo, *Sabia Mujer*

Pero como Mrs. Bravo, Ms. Heather *llego a mi vida*/my life journey. She too, guided me through the process of practicing healthier work habits. Though younger than Ms. Heather, she was also a wise woman, *una sabia mujer*. In one of my counseling sessions, Ms. Heather guided me to illustrate how we submit to a vicious cycle in which we forget that, as humans, we have boundaries that cannot be exceeded. I believe that when we trespass these boundaries, we fall into the productivity syndrome.

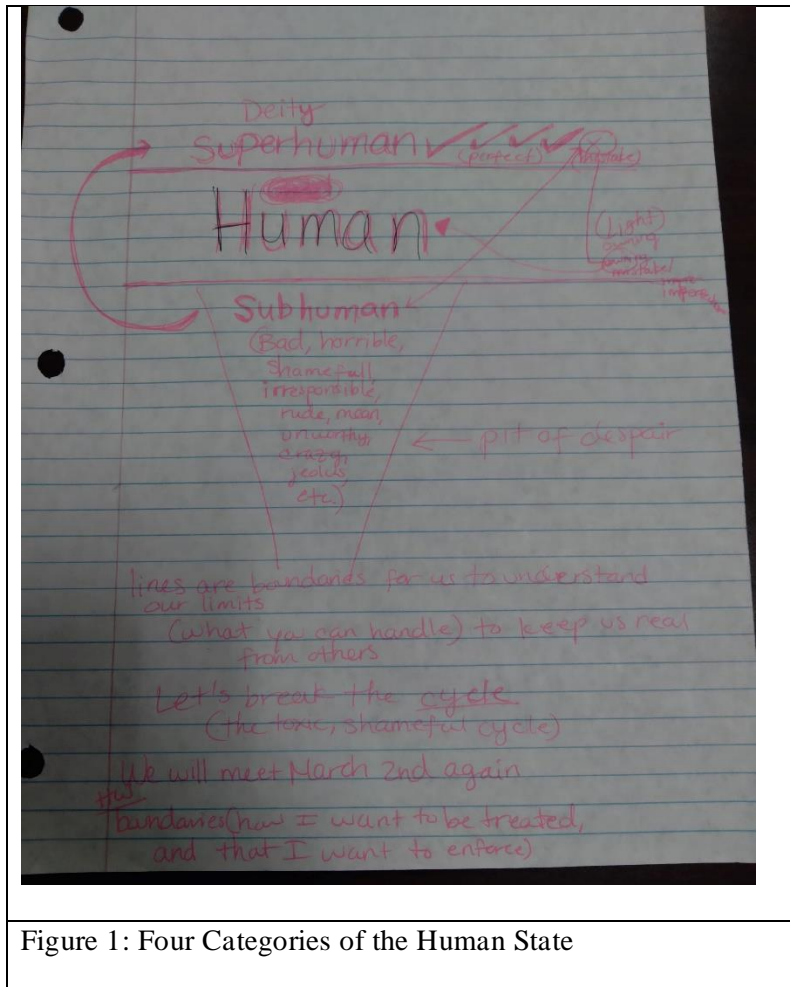


Figure 1: Four Categories of the Human State

The image in Figure 1 illustrates four categories: deity or God, superhuman, human, and subhuman. When we transport to the superhuman category, we feel flawless and excellent because we believe everything is going perfectly fine. When we are in the superhuman category, we think we've done our very best in whatever roles we perform. If we stay in the human section, we are setting healthy boundaries about how

we view ourselves and allow self-grace and forgiveness to be part of our lives; we recognize that we are imperfect and thus take full responsibility for our mistakes. When we transport to the subhuman section, we fall into a pit of despair. The subhuman category is characterized by shame, what we perceive as irresponsibility, rudeness, unworthiness, and other negative adjectives that become part of how we view ourselves—only if we allow these negative thoughts to intrude our minds.

Ms. Heather explains that when we spend less time in the human section, we experience this vicious cycle in which we transport from subhuman to superhuman and vice versa. As graduate students, we fall into the superhuman category when we feel accomplished and proud of producing "enough" work. That is, when we read every page of an assigned text

and adhere to a prototype successful/able-bodymind graduate student. Staying in the superhuman/super scholar category only exhausts us because we cannot be perfect all the time. When we "fall short," we transition to the subhuman section, leaving us to feel shameful, irresponsible, and unworthy. Consequently, we experience the productivity syndrome.

In working with Ms. Heather, I have learned more about boundaries and what it means to experience a vicious cycle between being superhuman and subhuman. In reflecting upon this lesson, I wrote a personal reflection that addresses how we constantly have to do something perfect or productive the next day to feel worthy. We don't realize we are humans who will sometimes make mistakes and be unproductive. *Ese mismo dia*, after counseling, I began reflecting on the importance of setting boundaries and began scheduling my days as I realized I was pressuring myself to do too many items in one day.

Un Ciclo Vicioso

Part of healing is recognizing and accepting our learning and working capacities. Hence, I began asking myself when I'm most "productive." In the next counseling session, I told Ms. Heather I compared myself to my other graduate peers, and she reminded me that we're all different. My time to focus is not the same as my peers. I cannot work in the same spaces as my peers. I cannot multitask like my peers. I can only be myself—Lolita works like Lolita. Imagining how Lolita works best is radical. Such statements were liberating and radical. Below is a to-do list, along with some reflection notes I wrote at the end of the day:

Yeah, I know what you're thinking; she's doing too much! The image in Figure 2 showcases several assignments I set myself to do for two days, last year. Some of the assignments range from readings to writing prompts. By the end of each day, I remember feeling anxious because, of course, I didn't accomplish all the items on the list. The items highlighted in yellow were completed that day. I also remember writing reflection notes on this same paper the next day delineating what I had learned from Ms. Bravo about focusing on a few assignments each day, specifically working

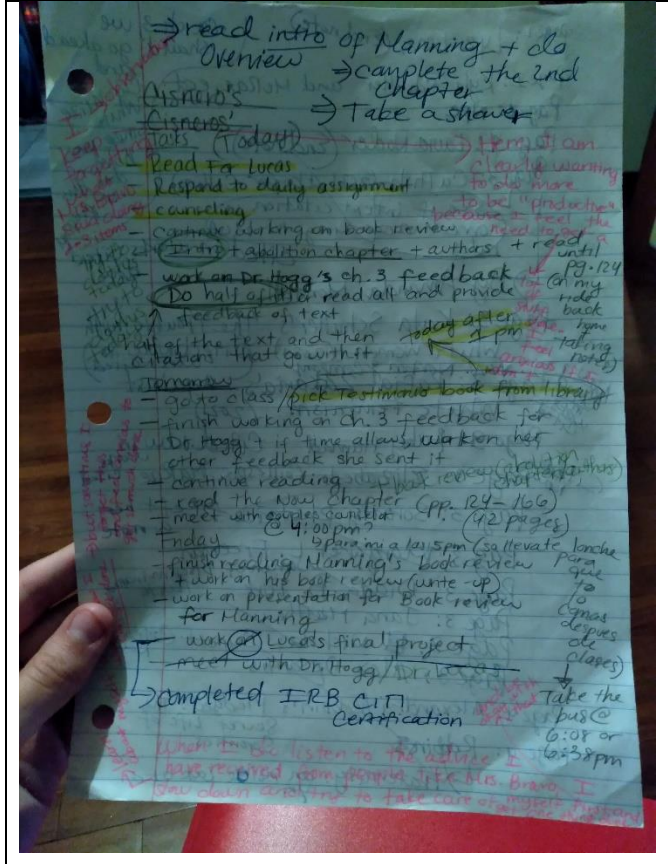


Figure 2: The Chaotic Schedule

on the ones that needed my immediate attention. I also wrote a note stating why I tried to carry out many tasks; I felt that I would fail and fall behind if I didn't accomplish all these goals. *"To be prepared in class tomorrow, I need to read all the readings, and if I don't work on other classes, I will feel like I didn't do enough work."* There have been times throughout the semester when I have ruminated on these thoughts. There have been healing aspects of taking therapy in my graduate program. I have grown in the sense that I know about healthy boundaries.

I jotted down some insights on how I've come to subvert the syndrome. Below is a diary reflection written on March 8, 2022:

How do I define productivity? It depends on what our brain and bodies can take that day.

It's about defining what is too much work that day. It's self-care. So, for example, I am tired today, so my "productivity" also consists of taking care of my body and listening to it, not because it will get me working later, but because it's my right. Just like bell hooks suggests, I need to take care of my mood first and decide to do the easier tasks first (like Dr. Blank's assignment and reading book for Dr. Blank because those require less brainpower). I tried working on Citi, but it didn't work out for me today. It was too much for my brain to handle.

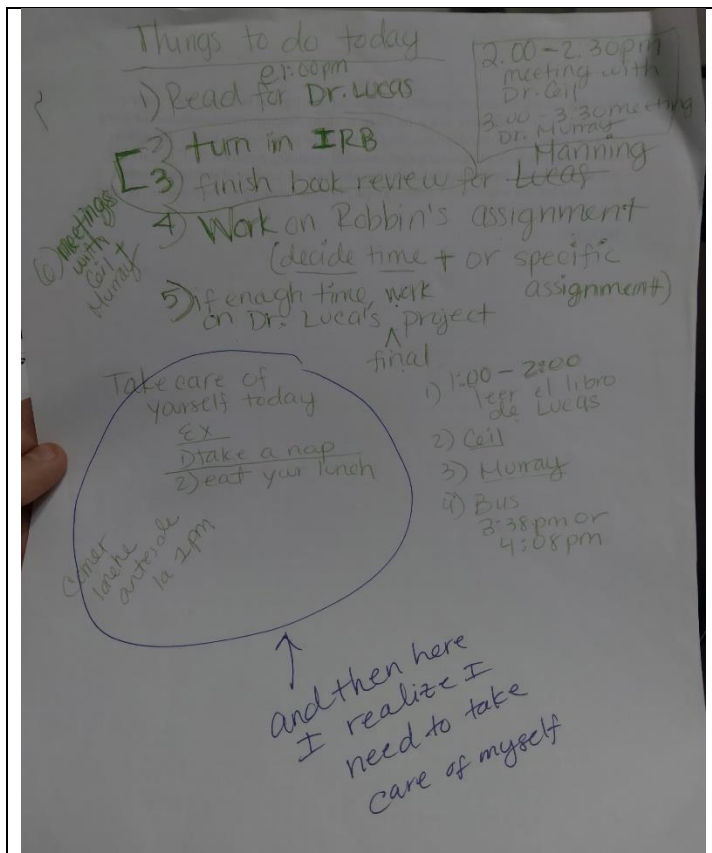


Figure 3: My Radical Realization of NO MAS

There were other instances when I redirected myself to practicing self-care because I was running into a cycle of wanting to “produce” a ridiculous amount of work. Figure 3 is an image of my radical realization.

Yes, my counselors have helped me navigate how to work best and set boundaries, but Black Feminist Scholars have been a pivotal guidance to **REST AND SELF-CARE PRACTICES AS RADICAL ACTS OF RESISTANCE**. *Que como*

aprendi de Tricia Hersey and other

Black Feminist scholars? Well, in one of the already mentioned courses above, my professor showcased Nap Ministry pics in our course website. Curious to know what or who they were,

I checked them out and found interviews, a playlist to slow down, and the main page site. Wow, the message was to resist by resting, taking naps, and daydreaming. I was amazed and that same semester in the same course, a friend presented on Tamika Carey's *Rhetorical Healing: The Reeducation of Contemporary Black Womanhood*. There, I learned about Black women scholars who are at the forefront of liberating their communities via discourses that are part of a **learning cure** because knowledge is power. According to Carey, Black women scholars liberate their communities via literacies and discursive strategies that invest in **emancipatory language** and messages that resist the dehumanization of Black communities (28).

Though these scholars do not directly speak to graduate students, I deduced that their discourse on mental health and rest was rhetorically healing for all oppressive communities. In one of the YouTube videos, Tricia Hersey speaks about joint care and rest as forms of resistance against a continuation of grind culture from slavery to the present day in which white supremacy and capitalism—whether that be neoliberalism—prevail. She explains that bodies are being pushed to their limits to produce and engage in work that is not valuable to them. Hersey completely disregards machine-like bodies and claims that bodies are divine vessels (Sounds True, “Tricia Hersey: Rest & Collective Care as Tools for Liberation.”) In my second year, I began employing more rest and naps in my schedule. Heck yeah! Hearing these messages allowed me to embrace sleep and not be ashamed **to take naps on campus. Yes, NAPS!** Like I have designated spaces on school where I take naps when I feel tired and or overwhelmed. I don't hesitate to stop and slow down. I make it a ritual, carrying a blanket and playing on some rain music. Though I must confess I don't bring a blanket with me sometimes because it's getting hotter and I have a lot to carry. I usually sleep in my department building in a reserved room that's usually unoccupied. Then, I wake up, fuel my system with *bendita*

comida and or tea, and get back to work. But if I still don't feel rested, I take a break from school and head home, riding the bus where I listen to *bendita musica Mexicana* and daydream.

Descanso, Naps, & Self-Care: The Healing Power of Black Feminist Epistemology

Yes, *bendita musica Mexicana*, is the source of energy and joy for my body. *Musica del alma*. If I'm away from my Mexico, Mexico is certainly closer to me through its music. My body feels it, and I begin to imagine myself dancing and singing next to Mexico's great composers/singers—Vicente Fernandez, Jose Alfredo Jimenez, Joan Sebastian, Juan Gabriel, and today's newest band groups like Banda MS. *Mariachi* music, *corridos*, *banda*—I listen to it all. I plug in my earphones as I wait for bus #24 heading to Sierra Vista Transfer Center. It's riding the bus where I take a break from the grinding. Like seriously, it's the perfect time to stop. I listen to music, continue to read Hersey's book, and daydream/*sonar despierta* on how great it will be when my husband comes to the USA or just how fun my break will be when I go back to Mexico. Even the bus drivers take their breaks—before leaving home on bus #54, the bus drivers talk on their phones, walk, chat with passengers, play some music on their phones, read books, and eat. I take their slowing down from all the driving and experiencing traffic as necessary and healing. And it is during this time on the bus that, I too, slow down as I'm encouraged and inspired by everyone else surrounding me.

Why Race & Power Dynamics? *¿Porque Expandir la Investigación para Incluir Intersectionality?*

After analyzing my *testimonio*, I realized that many of my comrades are experiencing similar and different struggles in graduate school. Ultimately, race and power dynamics are

REAL, and there is no exception in the graduate school journey. I realized that self-care/rest is **ESSENTIAL** to our well-being and divinity. *¡Así que arriba ese ánimo que si se puede!* ^{xvii}

In *platicando* to a graduate friend, I noticed how we are continually engaging in conversations about self-care and how the academy is part of the problem. In these conversations, we are continually resisting the productivity syndrome, although, unconsciously, my friend ultimately falls into the trap of engaging in unhealthy production-making and anxiety. I realize that although he's not a student of color, we have all been indoctrinated in the ways of working in a hustle-driven environment within the academy. I am continually reminded of Tricia Hersey's message to the world: "I feel like a legacy of exhaustion resides somewhere in all of us, but specifically resides in the bodies of those who have melanated skin. To those who are descendants of plantation labor and those marginalized, this exhaustion is deep" (18). Yes, Tricia Hersey writes to dismantle exhaustion and decolonize it for everyone, but she is also speaking to and with people of color. In hearing my friends' *testimonios*, I firmly believe that various factors have generated stress for students of color contributing to their unrest and perpetuated by capitalism, as preached by The Nap Bishop.

In other words, although we (graduate students) all experience the hustling/productivity syndrome and other pervasive systems at play, I believe there is a **historical and generational trauma** that is linked to oppressions experienced by those of us who do not embody white heteropatriarchal able-bodies. This inspiration and thought process represents what I read in Hersey's *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto* and that of Resmaa Menakem's *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma*. The Nap Bishop claims the following statement, and I firmly believe it: "America is not a welcoming place to all bodies" (33). *Es vital y poderoso/vital* and **POWERFUL** to know that our identities are present in how we experience the grind culture

today and how we navigate through it. These oppressive ties are found in all kinds of systems in the USA, “the land of opportunities for all.”

Bodies matter when addressing issues of injustice and capitalism. Karma R. Chavez's "The Body: An Abstract and Actual Rhetorical Concept" shows that "through bodily difference in contrast to the unspoken, yet specified, white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual male standard, **particular bodies come to matter**" (242). In bringing forth Chavez's articulation of bodies, I make note of how one's positionality and multiple oppressions contribute to the conversation on this pervasive syndrome. Chavez indicates that when bodies attempt to dis-align with conventions, they are stared down and suddenly become visible to the public (247). This same **textual stare** happens when people of color attempt to be themselves in a place where they are expected to conform. Hence, bodies matter because it is not until they are non-Eurocentric and non-abled-bodies that they experience a visibility/invisibility paradox.

In recognizing that actual “**bodies and bodily experience are always relevant to rhetoric in situational and particularized ways,**” I analyze how power dynamics within my *testimonio* matter and those of my graduate peers (Chavez 248). Hence, a rhetoric of embodiment is a major concept in this *testimonio*. Resmaa Menakem's *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* also speaks of **actual bodies**, particularly Black or dark bodies, policed bodies, and white bodies. His argument focuses on how black/dark bodies experience **racial trauma** that is linked to the systemic oppressions cultivated in this country. He centers on mending our bodies to healing practices that will allow us to recognize how we have been traumatized. His concept of healing bodies is part of the rhetorical scholarship that Chavez undertakes as bodies are no longer abstract themes, but rather actual bodies whose “misaligned” visual differences from white-abled bodies are

scrutinized and stared at. When we listen to our bodies and know that our bodies are connected to our ancestors/*nuestros antepasados*, whose bodies are also real and not just abstract models of the past, we are engaging with the politics of why bodies matter. Hence, the past connects us to the present and the way bodies in the past were treated, scrutinized, or stared at (textual stare), and shares a connection with present generations who are also experiencing the textual stare.

In a Red Table conversation, I heard a powerful message that resonated with Black women and people who have been oppressed historically; many of us have learned or were taught to be strong providers for everyone else because that is how our ancestors were trained to survive. They were taught to keep on going to survive in a racist and oppressive environment, despite their body aching or feeling troubled. Thus, I believe that Menakem's racial trauma encompasses aggressions, racism, and body exhaustion and or overlooking/attending to our bodies.

In the Red Table, I remember Sheree Zampino, a participant and host for that day, shared with everyone else that she did not know how to allow her son to express himself during his childhood. She quotes, "And how rushed we are through things. I'm in autopilot. I'm not even real. That's how we were brought up. Strong mothers. You need to be tough. We don't even know what we feel." This conversation is an example of how oppressed people have been taught to be strong and dismissive of their internal aches for the purpose of surviving.

As a person of color, I attempt to seem confident when translating for my dad because I don't want others to think he doesn't have someone to be a voice for him. There is almost this fear of others knowing that nobody is there to protect him because he can't speak the English language this country pressingly professes. For us graduate students of color, we need to recognize that our racial trauma is also inclusive of body exhaustion because we've been taught

to be strong to survive in a toxic environment where we are also asked to conform and assimilate to this Eurocentric culture. However, our labor is exhaustive because this environment has almost cornered us/*nos acorrala* to perform in “extraordinary” ways to prove our self-worth.

Mariachi Music y *Corridos Pa Mi Cuerpo: Un Pedacito de mi Tierra*

When my body has had enough, I sing to mariachi music. I listen to *corridos*. I immerse myself in my music. I imagine/daydream myself in familiar and comforting spaces, like the ones situated in my hometown in Mexico. And then, my body moves and imagines. When listening to Mariachi, I relocate to romantic serenatas, festivities, and *canciones de dolor/pain* music. I recharge from the outside *ruido* and discomfort. Yes, my Mexican music is my self-care outlet as I allow myself to breathe and rest. I imagine myself singing closely with Vicente Fernandez, Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, Jenni Rivera, Banda MS, Javier Solis, Chalino Sanchez, and many other iconic Mexican singers. Their voices align with mine as I sing from the bottom of my *corazon*. *Con un grito*, I embody my *clamor*. *Cuando escucho música mexicana, se me enchina todo el corazón. Siento bonito y lloro de placer*. And as I listen and sing to Calibre 50’s *Corrido de Juanito*, I realize such songs make me feel liberated because, guess what?! Y aunque me miren pa' abajo

La cara levanto empinándome un bote^{xviii}

Como quiera soy amigo y también Mexicano

Mexicano hasta el tope (Sung by Calibre 50—“Corrido de Juanito” and composed by

Eden Munoz)

Y tu? Que musica escuchas? What music brings you closer to *bendito descanso*? What music allows your body to move and imagine/daydream?

Why Grad School?

Taking it from

Experience

Grad school **could**

and should be a space of

healthy/generative

learning where students

Table 1: *Un Pedacito de Mi Tierra* Playlist

1) “Volver Volver” sung by Vicente Fernandez, composed by Fernando Z. Maldonado
2) “Corrido de Juanito” sung by Calibre 50, composed by Eden Munoz
3) “Esclavo y Amo” sung by Javier Solis, composed by Jose Vaca Flores
4) “Camino de Guanajuato” sung and composed by Jose Alfredo Jimenez
5) “Ay Jalisco No te Rajes” sung by Jorge Negrete and composed by Manuel Esperón, Maria Grever, Carlos Gardel, Alfredo Le Pera, Luis Demetrio
6) “Amor Eterno” sung and composed by Juan Gabriel
7) “Ya lo Se” sung by Jenni Rivera, composed by Pepe Garza
8) “Sangoloteadito” sung and composed by Joan Sebastian

learn about themselves and find themselves as opposed to a place of continual oppression from this capitalistic/neoliberal Eurocentric system. Hence, I, along with other much needed voices, radically and *rotundamente* resist mass scholarly production over the enjoyment and fulfillment of graduate student work. Moreover, we *rotundamente* resist conforming to the system’s ways of doing things. My dear professor and mentor once told me that if what I was writing or doing was too painful, that I stop doing it. Today, I hold tight to this concept of living passionately and joyfully throughout graduate school journey while being my Latinx self and learning to take breaks from all the reading and writing. Second, grad school is part of my lived experience now as I speak and write, and part of the journey of many other peers. However, I acknowledge that these oppressive systems are also taking place in other higher education arenas, because I too, have experienced a grind culture in these educative spaces.

CHAPTER THREE:

Methodology/Importance of *Testimonios*/[*Chis*]temonios

I fell in love with Jacqueline Royster's *Traces of Stream* because she foregrounds the liberating ways that Black Feminist Rhetors write essay-formatted scholarship to use them as tools for healing/transformation and for speaking their truth. Like the essay format, *testimonio* has also been a respectable form of writing because it allows one's truth to be heard and reckoned with in essay form. When Royster discusses the ways in which Black American writers have written essay forms to speak of their truths (theirs and their community's), I was fascinated with the liberating ways that they approach essay-writing; for instance, they write in first-person, they use essays as an instrument for healing, and they use a remix of genres as a rhetorical practice to disrupt and "liven essay discourse up." Thanks to Dr. Royster's influence and inspiration and all Black American ancestor rhetors/writers, I write this thesis in ways that also disrupt the academy's chosen way of writing essays, and then I'm reminded of the testimonios I read in *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*, a collection of *testimonios* from Latinx women from all walks of life. Their *testimonios* are authentic, fun, and "rebel"—not fitting Eurocentric ways of writing.

I insert meditations between sections of thesis writing and write in first-person when allowing myself to write with my community. Such an example is found above under the section "Mariachi Music y *Corridos Pa mi Cuerpo: Un Pedacito de mi Tierra*." These meditations or poetry sections allow for a pause—a break from reading. Moreover, it allows me to intentionally connect and share my true self in ways that bring me joy as I navigate through the academy. These sections also allow us to reflect on how we can engage in self-care. To write with my community, I intentionally write in *testimonio* form as it is an empowering tool that allows us—

graduate students on this occasion—to resist and decolonize the dominant narrative found in graduate school discourse on themes such as the productivity syndrome to resist and decolonize the dominant narrative of the “good/successful” student.

I’ve discovered that through my story and that of others in diary form, I can reevaluate my perceptions of the productivity syndrome to help others also revisit their own. As shown above in my testimonio, I have self-reflected on my own observations and experiences and have redefined productivity and resisted the productivity syndrome the academy has so persistently drilled upon us. I’ve jotted down eureka moments or reflections about my experiences as a Mexican graduate student who is in the process of learning how to resist the productivity syndrome, which so happens to consume our brains and bodies in exhausting ways.

Moreover, I attempt to do the same with the [*chis*]testimonios of my graduate peers and friends by honoring their work respectfully and compassionately. The six participants in story-study here are all friends, one in his master’s program and the rest in their doctoral journey at various stages of their graduate program, either in English or education. I’ve selected them for the study as they’re students of color and are motivated to share about issues of race and power dynamics and self-care in the academy. Since I’ve established a friendship with them, it was easier for me to begin a more intimate and casual *dialogo/platica* with them. Two of the participants are housewives/*amas de casa*. All participants are of Latino or Black descent; three of the participants are of Black descent and three are of Latino descent. The six participants are studying areas of research closely related to their identities and passions and representation and equity, especially for people who are excluded. In writing about their narratives, I am centering their experiences in the forefront of this collaborative project.

Lilia Fernandez's "Telling Stories About School: Using Critical Race and Latino Critical Theories to Document Latina/Latino Education System" centers Latino/Latina students' stories in the research, instead of using them as mere accessories. In other words, their stories allow us to "[understand] the issues these students face in contemporary schooling" (45). To honor their work, I revisit with my friends/participants the writing to their responses during our *dialogo*. Some of the following questions are part of the *platica* process:

1. Can you describe 1-2 experiences that have impacted you most as a graduate student?
2. Do you have "go-to" strategies for self-care, rest, or mental health in your graduate education? If so, what are they?
3. Can you introduce yourself and your areas of research interest?
4. What are your hobbies?
5. How have you balanced school requirements and expectations with life?
6. How do you see race/power dynamics in relation to self-care and rest?
7. What does it mean to you to be a "successful" graduate student to you?
8. What community self-care activities bring you closer to your community/culture?

Though the above *platica* questions were discussed in dialogue, I spontaneously added some new *platica* topics during the *dialogos*. I have "interviewed" and recorded six graduate student peers' *[chis]temonios*, whose graduate studies encompass either English literature, English rhetoric & composition, or education. I call the meetups *platicas* because our *dialogos* were casual and the questions were not asked in a particular order. At times, I asked my friends similar questions to the ones I emailed them. To best document their accounts, I recorded each of their testimonios,

wrote detailed accounts and then re-wrote and re-listened. I then proceeded to write their first drafts, documenting in first and third person.

Hence, as a narrator, I wrote as if I was gossiping and then wrote each of the participants' quotes to reference back to their own telling of their stories. In the beginning of the *[chis]temonios*, I wrote a general summary of each of the dialogues and the essence of each of the participants. During the process, I met with each of the participants to co-edit their testimonios. Some provided detailed feedback either through email or Zoom calls.

Analysis Process from the *Platicas*

Just a disclosure that there's no perfect recipe to "gathering" information from *testimonios*, especially since all the information the participants provide are important and valuable. However, from the get-go, you begin to see patterns and major call-out points. After writing the first draft for all the *[chis]temonios*, I re-read them, highlighted some main themes, and took notes on major/overall theme and subthemes. I then asked each of my friends to take a look at them for an accuracy check. Although some participants answered the *platica* questions, some of their experiences were directly related to the questions asked. For instance, when Hope was asked about her self-care activities, she did not answer this question as being in community with other Black faculty and staff at the institution. But clearly, this has been a self-care method where she has found psychological safety during her graduate journey. Hence, I tried writing these observations under the subthemes and met with my co-participants to make sure that information was accurate. Meeting briefly with the participants for clarifications was part of revisiting and making sense of their experiences. I casually asked some of my friends for minor

detailed information based on their [*chis*]*testimonio* write-up to better organize their *platica* responses.

Notes on Overall themes/subthemes

After analyzing each of these subthemes for each friend from the list found in the appendix, I began freewriting ways to group them into **themes** that would pinpoint an overall picture—that is, I attempt to include everyone’s responses into four main themes—practicing self-care, being strategic/creative about staying true to themselves, finding a safety net through community/loved ones/mentors/family, and navigating through the academy due to their identities that speak to their need for self-care—in other words, the big picture of why they practice self-care in the academy.

In attempts to further organize their *platica* responses, I began **freewriting and describing each theme** and found similarities and differences between each of my friends’ messages. For instance, when freewriting about self-care practices, I noticed that all males exercise and/or play sports. Furthermore, under the theme of self-care, I began **coding** how my friends define self-care, what each person considers self-care to be, and then grouping these self-care practices into three main subcategories—1) immersing in culture via food/music, 2) seeking community/loved ones/mentors/family, 3) attending to the body via naps, exercise/sports/moving around/eating healthy/journaling/breathing. In doing this descriptive analysis, I realized that a safety net through communities/loved ones/mentors is part of a form of self-care for some participants. In an appendix, I share a note on what I wrote for overall themes and subthemes for each friend. For instance, Catherine’s heartfelt *testimonio* shouts out her beginning stages to a healing journey and re-evaluation of her academic journey.

Porque incluirlos/ Why Include Them?

In writing this *testimonio*, I've realized that the methodology is liberating because it speaks to my community's *herencia*. I felt that in order for this project's methodology to be liberating, it needed to include the voices of my peers and friends. I noticed my peers also go through this productivity syndrome and or other oppressive systems and how race and power dynamics are also part of the equation. Additionally, I wanted to disrupt the academy's promotion of practicing individual achievement and advocate for the praxis of collective experiences as unified knowledge production. I wanted to resist writing in isolation and pay attention to how my peers also have important themes to discuss. In my co-collaboration, I wanted to make sure I was familiar and comfortable having a casual *platica* with the participants. Hence, I sent email invitations to **friends** I've established a relationship in this graduate journey.

More about the Methodology

Throughout my first and second year at this institution, I met friends whose identities I identify with, and hence, decided to co-collaborate with them. I chose six students and emailed them individually about being part of this project. The email invitation also contained the sample questions. First, I went through institution's IRB process and emailed my friends the IRB and my available schedule. I met with them via Zoom or in-person and recorded each of the dialogues, audio and or video, depending on their signed consent forms and availability. My second meet-up onward began with a quick breathing exercise. My friends and I engaged with the exercise for a minute. We then proceeded with the questions I had outlined for them. The "interviews" turned out to be open-ended and very casual. Hence, sometimes we got sidetracked with other topics related to our questions because they became more conversational or *platicas*. There were many times when we would generate knowledge from our back-and-forth *dialogo/platicas*.

El Sitio del Dialogo: Emblem of Rhetorical Respite as Inspired by The Nap Bishop

Shout out to Tricia Hersey, a dear Black feminist mentor who is my paper mentor ^{xix}and healer. Thanks to the Nap Bishop, she allowed me to imagine a space free from time constraints. Bear with me on this imagination, on this daydreaming that I experienced when reading Tricia Hersey on the bus as I patiently waited for our bus driver for that day to proceed....

I stopped for a moment and felt Hersey's mystical presence as I imagined how our dialogos, mine and my friends, could be transformed into a felt/palpating space for embodied generative knowledge. I imagined that our dialogos are situated in spaces where comfort, peacefulness, hope, and rest reside. We are connected with the earth that allows for human connection and interaction. We listen to each other's conversations and exchange words of knowledge/wisdom and liberation, a term that Hersey describes as an ongoing process/praxis for healing (98). We bring with us histories and ancestry heritage/herencia. We bring with us people who are dear to us, to our lived experiences. We bring with us historias y memorias that are part of how we have come to the academy. We bring these memories and recount our stories. We bring in our hardships and joyful events. Rest and self-care are avenues we seek when exhausted. We dialogue together in this safe space. Imagine that these dialogues are a rhetorical emblem of rest, respite, self-care, and embodiment as both my fellow comrades and I are engaging in conversations that address our needs and our bodies. Imagine a place where time does not exist; where time is not owned by white supremacy and capitalism; where time stops; where we can all slow down and be reflexive of our conditions; where time is not injected with stress or production-making; but rather, a space and place of safe generative co-learning and co-existence because we can just be as it should and could be.

CHAPTER FOUR

[Chis]temonios: Platicando with Six Students of Color

Que les Pica is a Spanish *Barrio* phrase, and it literally means what pokes y'all? This is a reference to the overall theme or essence of what each friend is experiencing in graduate school based on recurring themes they shared during our *dialogo*. Gosh, I'm trying to find the wording that encompasses what I'm trying to define here. Maybe, current essence/diagnosis/assessment is a good way to define it. What's bothering them or what they are **mainly** going through? *Que Les Pica?* What are they urgently voicing? *Es* their *sentir*; what is their heartfelt experience they want to share with you all and with me during our *platica*?

Platicando con Pablo: Contexto and Feel of our Platica

Mi buen amigo "Pablo" is a Latinx/Mexican Ph.D. candidate in the department of English, attending a PWI in the South. His research passion is centered on Latino Rhetorics and Border issues. During our *dialogo*, we spoke in Spanish and English and although we went off by the original "questions," we also spoke of other themes related to his testimonio as I asked him questions that were not part of the original set. I shared my anecdotes to connect with him on a personal level. Our conversation felt familiar because we connected with our culture, values, experiences, and language. Although he was shy and quiet, he laughed with my comments and his answers connected with his identity and our culture. Pablo was careful about what he shared, but his testimonio was nonetheless REAL, inspiring, and intentional. In our *dialogo*, Pablo shined a light to these main topics: self-care activities, values/*familia*, resistance/protest, aggressions/trauma/defense mechanism, and navigating through the academy as a non-white student. Pablo is essentially a student who lived a transnational experience

growing up. However, to accomplish that dream, **THEY** must navigate through the system, resist/protest, connect with their culture creatively and intentionally, experience aggression, power, and racism, and live with conflicting/juxtaposing messages about family and academy values. His character is real and emblematic of situations *que muchos de nosotros experimentamos*.

El [Chis]temonio: ¡¡Hay, Deja te Cuento!!

Te cuento que hable con Pablo el otro día. We couldn't talk much though. Sabias que Pablo grew up in the border region with a close-knit and supportive family. Si. I didn't know he grew up there. Y también Pablo notices his parents' work ethic: "Noto mucho como trabaja [mi apa]. Nunca ha tomado descanso él." Pablo piensa que "para sobresalir tenía que trabajar duro" su apa. Pablo sees his apa working hard for the family. "Eso se me hace como que es parte de la perspectiva de que es ser un hombre; es decir trabajar mucho. Mi mama también trabaja, pero en la casa."

Y como te decia, Pablo left his familia, his sister, his friends, and his hometown to study. ¿Te imaginas lo difícil que ha de ver sido eso? "Even if I say I value family, it is not evidenced in my actions." And so, Pablo believes that a successful graduate student can practice and uphold certain values for themselves throughout their graduate schooling process. Pablo notices that Ph.D. students are pushed to find jobs at prestigious institutions which is antagonistic of family values. So "In this context, I do prioritize self-care; but, in the larger context, I left home and, so I left a lot of people—su familia, amigos, y hermana—behind and that so that's kind of prioritizing school."

Sabias que, para Pablo, ¿le estresa mucho esta incongruencia? For Pablo, not being able to fulfill personal values during his graduate school journey creates a lot of stress for him: “That creates a really juxtaposing position of values, which I think plays into how I perceive myself, which creates stress or less stress and adds to the situation of being a graduate student.” *Que difícil ha de ser esta situación para él. Yo lo entiendo, y no sabía de esto. Hay que animarlo, ¿no?!*

El Estrés

Anyways, in the process of practicing activities that qualify as self-care, Pablo has gone his way to intentionally and creatively be himself by doing the things that bring him joy and a peace of mind outside schoolwork. *Que bien por él. Es lo menos que puede hacer para sentirse mejor. Por ejemplo, Pablo enjoys long rides with music, particularly corridos tumbados, norteñas, and banda (música mexicana).* And I was like, I don’t blame you because I love listening to Mexican music *de mi rancho* at campus; it just feels more like at home, more you. You don’t get enough of our music here in campus. *Pero, tambien habla con sus apas.* Pablo calls his parents to ask him about traditional Mexican food. *Que bien, ¿no? ¡Que padre que les pueda marcar!* ^{xx}*¿Sabes que cocino Pablo la última vez? “Lo último que trate de cocinar fueron lentejas. Super fáciles, pero no las había hecho antes y esa vez le hable a mi ama porque me gusta como las hace ella. Me relajo.”* *La comida/the food* is what sustains him: “When I came to Fort Worth, I did a quick search of Mexican restaurants; I still make it a point to go to a Mexican restaurant once a week, typically on a Saturday morning or Sunday morning for breakfast.”

¿Y sabes qué lugar de comida le recomendé? I recommended Pablo to attend a local Fort Worth place where *Carnitas* are made every Sunday morning because Pablo was planning to

invite a friend over to eat Sunday breakfast with him. I'm telling you. This is one of the best *Carnitas* places in the area. That's why I told Pablo to go. Well, back to my *charla* with Pablo. When Pablo goes to these spaces, he feels like they are a very prominent self-care activity to him because he gets to taste his food—*el bendito café de holla* is an example of a traditional drink that fills him up—and listen to people talk different types of Spanish.

Sabes, I don't blame him. I also love hearing Spanish and eating some good ass Mexican food, especially *Menudo* on a Sunday morning just like we do in Mexico. Ohhh *y con tortillas recién hechas* with homemade *tortillas*. "It's the individuals that surround that cooking" that brings him joy/*alegría* as he realizes he is a non-white student at a PWI institution away from his *familia*. And I don't blame him. *Yo también me aviento unas Carnitas en la mañana los Domingos con tal de recodar mi tierra*/I don't mind at all eating some *Carnitas* Sunday mornings to remember my Mexico.

Es como estar en casa; con tu gente, con lo familiar. Ya Tú Sabes

Fíjate que también disfruta comidas de otras culturas. Besides his Mexican food, Pablo enjoys other cultural foods, like Korean food, especially when people who prepare the meals are from that culture: "I have found a couple of spots that have Korean food; I like enjoying how they communicate with each other, the different ingredients that they might be using." *Ya tú sabes—esos momentos cuando te sientas a comer y te sientes en comunidad/en casa por el simple hecho que la gente puede ser quien son, libremente—así nomás*: "Beyond a physical fulfillment, because of the food, I think it's also mental and emotionally, I like to be in those spaces." In Pablo's experience, food and the cultural communities that surround them are what

allow him to navigate and stay alive through a white institution as a Ph.D. candidate. I love his energy!! *Le voy a decir que nos invite a desayunar a un lugar en donde venden birria.*

Korean Food

Hey, guess what! Pablo also enjoys hanging out with friends he has met outside school in social gatherings and parties; *es lo que lo ayuda y le da vida* because he realizes that school isn't his whole life. He knows that once school becomes one's central focus, it can deteriorate one's mental health. And this is why he makes it an intention to have friends he can talk to about life—not just school. *Bien por el.* I sure hang out with friends I don't have to talk about school like 24/7. It gives me a breather. *Y no solo eso,* Pablo likes to exercise, particularly basketball and weightlifting. These activities relax him and allow him to feel balanced. *Como que 'balanced?'* “So, I have noticed, when I stop doing all of these things, I really lose rhythm. My sleeping really goes off; my ‘productivity’ also goes down; I feel like I am less able to focus, and I feel less relaxed.” Like this week, he has and will intentionally work out. *Cuando Pablo no hace ejercicio diariamente, el empieza a hacer la tarea ya más tarde porque no se puede enfocar y tarda más para terminarla.*

El Bendito Ejercicio

But apart from Pablo's intentionality to exercise—to feel better—let me tell you that when Pablo was in college station at Texas A & M, he was lifting a lot of weights because he didn't feel safe/*seguro* in the campus. *Asi como lo escuchas.* “I was just trying to get just physically bigger, and it wasn't like maybe five years later when I was looking back to it, that I started thinking that that was probably a strategy to adapt. Maybe not self-care, but maybe in the

context of race and privilege.” You see, he was unconsciously trying to get big because he experienced **overt racism** at the institution, like people calling him names and wanting to fight him in basketball games. *¡Hay, ya me dio coraje! ¡¿O apoco a ti no?!^{xxi}* And apart from these aggressions, Pablo did not feel he could relate with many people. *Pero deja te cuento* that here at our campus, Pablo does not fear for physical aggressions and realizes that race and power work differently than at college station; he doesn’t feel the need to get buff as a **self-defense mechanism**.

Exercise as a Self-Defense Mechanism

Though Pablo doesn’t have to defend himself physically at our campus, he also acknowledges that non-white students have to mitigate what they say in class as there is **less diversity** in the classrooms. Yep! *Muy cierto*. Pablo believes that students of color experience stress due to campus policies and lack of faculty members that can represent them. Pablo *atestigua* that these factors contribute to needing more self-care and rest. Like that one time when Pablo told one of his professors straight up that he wasn’t going to read or participate for that class time because the author they were assigned to read went against his values and beliefs. Did you hear about that? Well, I just recently found out about this situation in our *platica*. *“Estaba medio asustado, y medio enojado, y super incomodo. Y como quiera le dije al [profesor] que no iba a participar.” Ya te imaginarás que incomodo puede ser esta situación porque como Pablo atestigua, él era el estudiante. Así que este tema tiene que ver mucho con raza y poder—como bien lo explica Pablo.* I admire Pablo for this; I would’ve been scared to voice myself out like that. Good for him. *Y luego, despues de la clase*, the professor and a classmate asked him how he was doing, *y pues Pablo no vio este gesto genuino* because he had

already explained to them why he was not going to participate in class that day. Like yeah, didn't Pablo already tell him beforehand why he wasn't participating?

Resistance

Well, when I asked him what else impacted him the most in our grad program, guess what he said? Besides this memory that impacted Pablo in graduate school, Pablo *recuerda* when he and his classmates marched during a class to protest for Atatiana Jefferson's homicide by a police officer in 2019. *Hay, antes de contarte más, let's SayHerName/DigamosSuNombre y recordemola como se debe. "Estaba relacionado a un curso que estaba tomando en ese momento y fue la primera vez que vi que literacy can mean a lot of things; like now I know the term, embodied literacies or protest as a way to try to get some type of response or change."* In that moment, Pablo felt a little uncomfortable, but he knew he had to march with his classmates and provide support. *Bien por él.* At least this experience was good.

¡La Marcha!

Bueno, también te cuento que Pablo no solamente tuvo estas experiencias en la academia. To be able to take classes that would contribute to his learning development, he intentionally petitioned to take four courses in the fall and one in the spring his second year because he was trying to avoid faculty that couldn't and wouldn't represent his culture and values. *Así que Pablo tomo una clase en la que se sintió muy cómoda* in the sense of feeling comfortable learning. Like let me tell you that the text he read helped him expand on previous knowledge or helped him learn new content that he would otherwise have not been exposed to in another class. Also, the course he took allowed him to speak freely about what he thought and

felt: “The professor was also really great at not only receiving my ideas but then asking me questions or suggesting readings that really helped me develop those ideas even more. And it shortened my writing because I started engaging in specific topics that I hadn’t engaged before.” Since Pablo enrolled in a course that allowed him to feel identified, he felt that his writing was more focused in his own area of study, reflecting his ability to connect with his passions and interests in ways he had not been able to develop before. I would call Pablo’s act *como agarrar el toro por los cuernos* because guess what, he did what he had to do to take courses that would help him and make him feel *seguro* to be himself. *Hay, que bonito es lo bonito^{xvii}*, feeling identified in one’s culture in school is the best. No, I have no idea who’s the professor, but if you want, I can ask Pablo tomorrow, and maybe we can take that professor next semester. *¡Agarrar el Toro por los Cuernos!*

Platicando con Leezon: Contexto and Feel of our Platica

My good friend Leezon is an intellectual, *pensante* person who loves to engage in thorough, profound conversations about identity. At all times, he also asked me questions and our *dialogo* became a shared conversation/*dialogo* more so than a simple meet-up. He was curious about how I thought about some of the topics I introduced; hence, he actively asked me similar questions. Leezon is a gay Latinx male Ph.D. English student at a PWI in the South. During our *dialogo*, Leezon was reflective about the story he shared of himself. He would always stop and think thoroughly through each of the questions, making sure he answered them “correctly” and that he was sharing his true lived experience. Leezon enthusiastically prepared for our *dialogo*, sharing with me his “interview” responses beforehand. Proud of his gay Latinx identity, Leezon’s *[chis]temonio* was centered in it.

El [Chis]temonio: ¡¡Hay, Deja te Cuento!!

Let me tell you about Leezon. Yeah. We took class with him. Well, he started talking about his *familia*: “We always valued family; family was a big aspect of our community.” *Su familia es grande*, with 9 to 10 aunts and uncles roughly. *Una familia grande*. Leezon was born and reared in Southern Michigan in a small community. Reared in a Mexican American Latinx community and household, Leezon saw the value of *familia* and helping one another whether that be in providing food, babysitting, or giving someone a ride to work: “We always went to our family for help.” Well, they would ask their immediate family members for help. Being part of a small close-knitted community meant that members of the community all knew each other as generations went to school and worked together. Since “[their] grandparents all knew each other,” the kids Leezon grew up with in the 90s—*su camada*^{xxiii}—all knew each other as well. *Ya tú sabes, como cuando vives en el barrio; todos se conocen desde chiquitos. Yo también soy de un pueblito en Mexico*. So, I totally connect with him in that way. I mean, we all know each other.

La Familia

Tambien, growing up, Leezon remembers how hard they worked: “We just worked really hard as Mexican *Latinos*; **we’re just told to labor, to be laborers**. I think that’s part of how we are in this program; we labor as well, just as hard as the other non-POC. We do more work because I think we lack certain skills, certain understandings of this institution where we have worked just as hard, twice as hard sometimes to get to that level.” *Asi me siento*. I feel like hell yeah! We definitely have to navigate through school, *y mas* first-gen. *Dejame decirte que asi*

como lo escuchas, Leezon realizes that students of color sometimes need to perform harder than their counterparts and navigate through the academy to know who to build relationships with and who to consider an ally. I definitely agree. I'm so happy he shared that. However, "I think POC view self-care and rest differently from non-POC. I think labor has been embedded in our roots, but the rest as well, played a major role in the whole of who we are as a collective. We value rest/family which is self-care and rest is a major aspect of our culture." *Y no dise mentiras*. I mean, we've talked about this before.

Ya tú sabes, nuestra gente descansa colectivamente.

Pero hay mas because Leezon sees how students of color navigate through the academy differently than their counterparts. One day, Leezon read an article that stated that for students to focus, they need to move away from their *familias* to stay away from the drama. *Ya sabes que si hay problemas a veces en las familias*. I mean he's not wrong. *Que, si no es una cosa, es otra*. *Pero también, como no querer a nuestra familia. Bueno, deja te sigo contando*. Knowing his positionality, Leezon realizes that it's different for students of color. And then I can hear Leezon's potent quote: "*I think labor has been **embedded in our roots**.*" You see, "It's very common for white students to go away to the university, go away from home, and by going away from home, they are going away from that family drama. Whereas people of color are doing it differently; they live at home; they're going to pay for college, working."

Navegando en la academia es diferente pa/for nosotros, PERIOD.

Como vez, Leezon realizes that he is part of what society deems a member of a marginalized community. *Por eso mero*, he practices self-care in the academy: "Taking care of

ourselves, first and foremost” is important to me. He continued: “What’s important for me is being healthy; taking care of myself so that I can be able to finish this program for one.” To do so, *sabes que hace* Leezon? He eats healthy and exercises. For Leezon, keeping his sanity means exercising without having to pay a cent to go to the gym or drive there; he gets to exercise anytime. *Buena idea, no?* Let’s walk someday. I also hear that going to the gym at school is free. Well, anyways, Leezon enjoys playing volleyball, bowling, and tennis. *Y sabes que mas hace?* Leezon walks to school in the morning and bikes in the evenings to get some clarity as it grounds him. Oh, well, **clarity/claridad** means to “**just push all that away** from out of my mind and for that time period to just clear my mind on all the reading we do, all the emails we see coming in, the requirements to do—this and that.” At least that’s how Leezon describes clarity.

Claridad

¿Sabes que más me compartió? He shares that graduate school isn’t just about being a student/scholar and producing all this work. *Sabes, él tiene otra perspectiva de lo que significa ser estudiante en la academia,* and I admire him for that. Leezon sees value in giving back to the community and connecting his scholar/student identity to his community. Again, “It’s not just about being a student and being a scholar, studying, producing all this work; that’s part of it, but to me, I think there is more value in the community.” *Me encanta su actitud! A ti no? Como vez* Leezon attended a class workshop online, and there they honored Dr. Jones Royster’s work. You know, the symposium I told you about. *Con decirte* que Leezon’s professor and another rhetoric professor organized the event: “I think [the] symposium talked about the community and the school and connected [both].” I definitely didn’t know Leezon did community work outside school. Did you?

Community Scholar

Pero sabes que, ahora que recuerdo, Leezon me compartio algo más sobre este tema.

Living in Southern Michigan for the longest period in his life, Leezon learned about the importance of family and community and when he moved to San Antonio, he found a community there he considers family. I learned “how community/[*familia*] is not always your blood but making a community—making family” wherever you live. In San Antonio, Leezon met new people, built relationships, and worked in a community. Coming to Fort Worth, he felt the need to be involved in a community as well. Last Fall, Leezon was introduced to a local trans group. Well, Leezon told me that in that *comunidad*, members meet virtually and discuss issues and concerns about trans identity and although, most of the members are Caucasian parents of trans people, Leezon sees a purpose in planting the seed/*sembrando una semillia en ellos* about representing trans people of color. *Sabias que, en esas juntas, ¿Leezon se muerde la lengua?* “I bite my tongue a lot because they don’t really raise issues about trans of color.” It so happens that last week he attended the meeting. I’m telling you, Leezon was not going to just sit there and not say speak up. Leezon shared with them 5 trans of color narratives/ *narrativas que no conocen y no tienen conocimiento de.*

Sembrando una Semilla

Hay, pero Leezon doesn’t stop there with his community work. Leezon volunteers Mondays through Thursdays after class at a local middle school in Southside Fort Worth. Leezon shares that predominately these students of color are coming from low economic family backgrounds: I engage in this community work because we “try to keep them off the streets—out

of trouble, providing them a safe space/ [*un lugar seguro*] after school. Leezon provides them with food and activities. *Como ahorita, si vieras lo que están haciendo de deporte.* He's teaching them how to play tennis—one of his favorites, by the way—and basketball. And then they have an area where there's a whole bunch of activities. *Y le dicen el PORTAL. Hay, tienen tantas actividades ahí.* I would have loved having these after school programs growing up. Did you have them growing up?

The Portal

¡Pero hay más! Leezon is also “starting to incorporate regularly throughout the week,” lessons on college awareness, leadership, and book clubs. He even named each day. So cute, right! “Mondays is college Mondays, Tuesdays is leadership Tuesdays, Wednesdays, book club Wednesdays.” Leezon provides the children with the opportunity to know about basic *conocimiento/por lo menos una introduccion* on college because for one, he personally does not remember anyone talking to him about college as a kid—certainly not middle school. I share this growing up. Like all I remember is like teachers telling us to dress up for career day. Y una vez, Leezon asked his students, “has anyone talked to you about college?” And although some share they know something about it, Leezon makes it a point to talk about it: “well we're going to talk about college.” You see, Leezon's goal is to take them to colleges in the area and just walk around and let them feel what it means to be on campus. He continued: “There is so much good!” in helping these students; “like, on Thursdays, we do community service at this middle school. They have a food pantry,” where the students place food into food baskets as “the families come through the food pantry. These kids are not only doing community service, which is good for college, they learn that even their classmates need help. We are all struggling at some

point and it's okay to need help. They take food home if there are leftovers. Not only am I doing the work in the institution, but I am doing work within the community. It gives me joy to break away from this studying and reading and going; hanging out with these kids is just amazing.” Did you know Leezon has been volunteering in the K-12 school system for the last 5 years? He just loves the creative and energetic vibe that these kids bring to the learning space. I'm telling you; I am learning more about Leezon than I ever knew before! He's a great guy!

His Students

Within the *academia*, Leezon strategically practices self-care by connecting to his identity. We do the same. I mean we kinda have to. Like, Leezon *esta presente con si mismo* and with his identity through his reading selection outside classroom requirements. These readings are “focused on the Latinx narrative; I go to something to read that is soothing, that connects to my identity.” Yea, Leezon goes through a selection process when looking into books that speak to his *identidad* as a gay Latinx male. Love it! I do the same thing. Like for that one class we took last semester, I was literally looking up the authors. I mean, if they vibe with me, I'm good. I “always look at the last name and see, ‘is it a Latin, Hispanic, Mexican-American name before I even dive in—to pick it up. Then I try to find authors that are speaking to my identity.” Like in a course he's taking this semester, he found a book from a selection of readings called *The Stars and The Blackness Between Them*.

In doing so, he **intentionally** selected a book that speaks to his queer identity. Leezon was like, “Although I am not a Lesbian from Trinidad, it still speaks to that identity, and I think about how I can incorporate it into my future teaching because I need to be well-versed, and

when I want to teach this topic, I can't just teach Latinx male gay narrative. Finding reading that is focused is important for me—for self-care.” *Asi como lo escuchas*.

I wouldn't blame Leezon for finding his identity in the academy. *Dejame te cuento* when Leezon noticed he desired to do more research on his narrative. During his mid-semester of his master's program, Leezon recounts an impactful moment in his graduate school experience. He had an **aha moment** when he realized that his professors were merely teaching him about white dead men—men who don't represent him. And they sure don't represent us: “**I need** to research more; **I need** to find that narrative; **I need** to do that labor that my professors are not doing. **I need** to find that work and read into it because that gave me that drive; that gave the passion to want to continue forward in this study that's not being represented in this graduate atmosphere; **I AM GOING TO HAVE TO BRING THAT INTO THE CLASSROOM.**”

Asta ahora, Leezon has made profound discoveries in research about his Latinx queer identity, whether that be found in scholarly work, theory, fiction, and non-fiction, *con* lived experiences/*experiencias de verdad*. Wouldn't you agree we're both in Leezon's same situation. Yeah, like every time we take classes that don't speak to our identities, it's gets harder for us to go through them. It almost feels like labor work. What do you think?

Navigating the Academy to Find His Narrative

Pero no te conte que tambien escribe. In writing, Leezon also grounds himself in writing what's in his mind. Yeah, like after he's done teaching his morning composition class every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, he intentionally writes about his teaching experience: “That ability just to reflect/free write in that notebook of what was touched on in the class, who was absent, what I want to go back on—is a writing exercise that has helped me just, get my thoughts

out.” Guess how he started doing reflective writing? He picked that writing practice from a professor. After one of his professors was done teaching a class, Leezon walked in and saw his professor writing in his journal. My professor said, “I am reflecting; I’m writing in my journal about what happened in class today.” Reflecting on this practice, Leezon *me dijo*: “so now, teaching this semester, my first year, I was like, ‘I need to practice that.’ However, “sometimes when I’m sitting there, like, I don’t want to write, but I’m like ‘LEEZON.’ Like I’m forcing myself to write after class, and I’m like, ‘slow down dude, just relax, put your thoughts down. I just want to get up and go. I think that’s a real big struggle sometimes as we write. We just want to GO, GO, GO—as Americans, Mexican Americans, Mexicans—just living in America, we pick on that concept of **GO, GO, GO all the time**. Yup, I think we all struggle to slow down. I don’t know about you, but I used to get anxious about getting assignments done. Speaking of slowing down, do you want to get some coffee? We’ll keep chatting. There’s still so much to talk about.”

Slow down. Tomalo despacio.

Respirando profundo. Respirando Profundo... She literally counted off...” breathe in, breathe out” for about 5 minutes. *Ahorita te cuento quien le decia que respirara.* Leezon would think to himself: “Why are we wasting 5 minutes on the breathing exercises? It took me a long time to participate in the exercise and feeling comfortable doing it.” *Bueno, pues to cuento que era Leezon’s maestra*: “She was a feminist Latinx Chicano woman that was introducing this practice to me” in our class.

Deja te doy contexto. Leezon recounts when he was introduced to these breathing exercises roughly during the end of his bachelors and beginning of his master’s program by a

female Latinx woman. During his graduate program, Leezon has experienced different types of self-care methods from his teachers—like check-ins, but nothing like breathing exercises. *Te cuento que por eso* Leezon wishes more professors could incorporate breathing exercises in class because he’s experienced the impact it has had on him: “Once I realized the impact it had on me—of the slowing down and breathing and being present in the classroom, was just something I’ve been taken with me to want to incorporate in my teaching practice in the future.” *Ojalá si lo haga.*

Breathing In Breathing Out

¿Te acuerdas cuando te conté del symposium de Dr. Royster? Yes, the symposium is part of course he is currently taking this semester. Well, in that symposium, he could choose which session to attend. “I attended the one by Christina Scott, and she did the same practice of breathing and told everybody to stop their tracks. Anthony *recuerda* her saying, ‘because I’m presenting, because I’m in this platform, I NEED this, let’s DO this; let’s just SLOW DOWN.’ And I was really impressed and kind of caught on guard with that, but I was like...’**FUCK YEAH**, you’re in charge; you’re doing this; you need a moment to collect yourself; **we’re** here with you; **we’re** going to collect ourselves with you.” *¡¿Que hermosa sesión no?! I would’ve loved to be there.*

Platicando con Hope: Contexto and Feel of our Platica

Mi buena amiga “Hope” is a Ph.D. student at a PWI in the South. She is passionate about mental health—“the mental health of people of color,” specifically, women of color. During our *dialogo*, Hope was very thoughtful and intentional about the terms and memories she shared. Her

voice was soothing and understanding as she also listened to my experiences. Hence, we shared experiences about self-care, anxiety, school in general, and real-life topics that are heartbreaking, especially as she reflects on how she's become **The Hope** she is now—a renewed Hope at this point in her graduate school journey.

El [Chis]temonio: ¡¡Hay, Deja te Cuento!!

Dejame te cuento que Hope is passionate about mental health—"the mental health of people of color," specifically, women of color. Did you know that her goal is to bring awareness through research about mental health in women of color? Hope assures that there is not enough research because women of color are commonly seen from a place of deficit. In addition, Hope believes that school is a source of stress for many children and wants to bring awareness of mental health into the system. ¿¡Estamos o no de acuerdo en esto!? ¡Digo, por ejemplo, mi hermanito a veces no quiere ir a la escuela! We wonder why!

Hope's on a Mission!

Hope has been married for 15 years and has four beautiful children. And let me tell you about her grandmother: "She was born and raised in a freeman's town—town founded by freed slaves." Her [*ancestros*] were freed slaves, and she was born in this town: "It was a flourishing town for a long time until systemically, you know, it was very systemic—the policies that kind of caused the dwindle." And you want what happens every October, there? "People who live there still come together every October for homecoming. And so, we would go down there with [my grandmother] and learn about our ancestors. The buildings are still there and the cemetery; there is just a lot of HISTORY." And you know what?! Although Hope's grandmother passed

away, Hope still goes down there every October with her children. Yeah. She just went this past October, and she says there's a museum—kind of like archival work that preserves the town's history: "I'M SO PROUD TO HAVE THAT ATTACHMENT, THAT CONNECTION. MY GRANDMOTHER WAS MY FAVORITE PERSON!" *Que bonito, no?! Abuelitas* are the best!

My Favorite Person

Yo, this is where I connect with Hope. Hope's *muy bedecida*/very grateful for everything because, as shared with me, growing up as a child, she went through a lot of anxiety: "In retrospect, I can see how anxious I was. My thoughts were really detrimental to me—with the pressure I was putting on myself and how it really took like some really hard lived experiences for me, in addition to some deep inner work to begin to change that story for me and understanding what was most important to me and learning to prioritize that, instead of prioritizing titles and degrees and other people's perceptions." *Como vez*, those were the things she was trying to accomplish, subconsciously. *Hay, pero con tantas expectativas, quien no se pone a pensar. Bueno, pero Hope ya agarra el toro por los cuernos*, and instead, she asked herself how **SHE WANTED TO LIVE HER LIFE**. "It's really given me an opportunity to make some **BOLD** and **DARING** choices that have gotten me to a place of gratitude/*gratitud*." I'm telling you, she's awesome!

Bold and Daring Choices!

Pero ahora en grad school, Hope *escucha su sistema nervioso*/her nervous system: "I will never learn to live without my anxiety; I befriend my anxiety." *Asi como lo escuchas*. To befriend her anxiety, she is learning to listen to her body/her nervous system. This "has been a

huge self-care strategy for me; paying attention to when my body is tensing, my heartbeat is racing—like learning the sensations that let me know—HEY, SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT, HERE. And also learning how to shift that, which a lot is stretching, breathing, moving my body.” *Pero, tambien hace esto:* she asks herself if whatever is causing her stress in that moment, anxiety, or worries “will matter 5 minutes or 5 years from now?” *Y si no*, she simply gains a new perspective.

“IT’S THAT RESET”

But do you know what else she does? She practices boundaries. For reals! Like she told me this: “I call myself kind of this recovering people pleaser. So, learning how to disappoint people and say NO. It never feels good, leading up to it, but it always feels GREAT afterward. Feeling like I have to commit to everything.” Not being perfect and like people not liking her is what she’s learned to let go off. “**Letting that SHIT GO!** Because when I set the boundaries, then that creates more time and space for me to **REST OR DO THE THINGS THAT ARE MORE IMPORTANT.**” *Que chingona, no?!*

“LETTING THAT SHIT GO!”

As Hope argues, “I have rejected the word ‘BALANCE’ BECAUSE **THERE WILL NEVER BE A BALANCE.**” You can imagine why. I mean some things require more of Hope’s energy than others “at any given time.” Picture this: “this weekend, [she] had an assignment due [11/16/22] and two of [her] children had projects due [that same day].” You’re probably thinking what I was thinking hearing her say this. *Pero*, but Hope was like: “It was a matter of working on my thing the weekend so that when the time comes, I can focus on like being able to sit down

with them and help them glue and cut and those things.” But it doesn’t end there because Hope likes to integrate. You see, she **integrates** by bringing her children or work wherever she needs to go. *No pierde tiempo*; she finds the time to get to it! And wait, there’s more! She “pulls in support and resources when necessary.” So, it’s not trying to do it all; it’s not **BALANCE** what she’s doing in the academy: “I think when most people say balance, they’re thinking--‘let me try to figure out how to do all the things,’ and I have just realized that I WILL NEVER DO ALL THE THINGS.”

Not Doing All the Things!

In our *comadre dialogo*, we both agreed on this: **BALANCE ARE ELUSIVE**; THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS BALANCE. Imagine this: Hope relies on her husband when she needs him. Like she tells him to help her out with the kids when she knows she won’t be able to do x, y, and z. Like “Sometimes I have to pass out to my husband—when talking about pulling in my resources. Lea tells her husband, “**YOU GOT TO DO IT, YOU GOT TO DO IT, I GOT TO FOCUS HERE.**” And in our *platica*, I was like, “And do you think all that takes creativity and problem solving? And Hope was like, “yes, **creativity and problem-solving** is perfect.” All her life, Hope was a rule follower and now that she’s in the academy, she has realized something: “I got here and again, just noticed my white counterparts having NO hesitation to ask for extensions or ask for alternative assignments and things like that. So, I started doing THE SAME THING.” Good for her! It was interesting like, just the fact that I never even thought that was possible. Hope never thought about thinking outside the box until now: “I do think that people of color feel a different set of expectations and pressure, to like, prove themselves or not break the status quo.” **Don’t question it! Just keep on going and do**

what's asked of us! But you know what, “Seeing that modeled and then doing it myself, it’s worked on my favor!” I’m telling you; Hope is not messing with her time.

No Mas!

But guess what?! She also LOVES to read for pleasure—“ever since [she] was a girl. AND, [she] really enjoys eating good food.” *LA BENDITA COMIDA!* She also enjoys concerts, festivals, and art museums: “Those types of things, I just really have a great appreciation for people in the creative space. I feel like I was creative once upon a time when I was much, much younger.” I am loving her already. She feels like she no longer has the artistic talent, but she enjoys it. These are all part of Hope’s self-care practices, and she engages in them throughout her graduate school journey. We should hang out with her more often. OMG, love her energy!

La bendita comida and everything in between!

Apart from these activities, Hope has expressed a gratitude for community and being part of one’s culture/people of color. For one, Hope affirms that **attending church** brings her closer to her community/culture. Moreover, she has expressed a gratitude for community within graduate school: “On campus, it has been great to connect with other black women on academia, whether they’re students or are just working here. The safety of it—the **psychological safety**.” Just connecting with other cohorts that allow for that safety. I don’t blame Hope. I have to be around people I feel comfortable around. She’s our girl fo sho!

That Safety!

Like for instance, Hope shared that “[Her] best experiences were ALL with women of color here and that [her] worst experiences were with white women.” Like that one time when Hope visited her professor in her office and shared with her about her dislike of writing. And you

know what? It's not that Hope isn't good at writing, it's just that she doesn't find joy in it. I sure don't want to write sometimes. Before being in this Ph.D. program, Hope thought that she would find pleasure in it through practice: "But I have found that I've become more resistant to writing." So, like about a month ago—sometime in October 2022, Hope visited her professor's office. To Hope's surprise, her professor was like, "**It's not you.**" That day, her professor made her realize that Black people communicate in more **TRUER** ways. Hope was like, my professor made me realize that I should "honor that and stop trying to force [myself] to fit in this box, and helped me understand I'm not alone, and how many other students of color share that experience." Like you can imagine, how that experience must have been to Hope: "So affirming and so freeing. It's kind of taking like a weight off my shoulders." *Qué bueno que pudo hablar con su maestra.*

AND THEN SHE FELT SO MUCH FREE-ER!

Pero, Hope has also had bad experiences with white people on campus. You see, there was this one time when she "was trying to figure out funding so that [she] could plan appropriately. She didn't care for her tone; she didn't care for the emphasis [she] picked up on—[she] felt like she was talking to [her] like [she] was stupid." Hope didn't understand what she was saying. She didn't understand what Hope was asking. She wasn't answering Hope's question. And you know what? Hope asked other women of color about this person, and they all agreed to have felt similarly around her. Yup. I have a feeling for this lady now. At the end of her conversation with this person, Hope felt "really offended and unsettled by the entire experience." You know what? I don't blame her because Hope felt like this person wasn't answering her question and wasn't listening to her. Thus, Hope looks for mentors in the academy

that allow her to be herself, “finding other professors who have similar research interests as me, and most of them have not been within the college of education. So, I’ve got to get creative in that way. I’ve found a professor interested in mindfulness and the therapeutic arts I mentioned. I had to get creative and look outside of what was right in front of me.” *Y vaya que Hope ha agarrado el toro por los cuernos y ha sido creativa.* Hope’s already a successful graduate student *y no se da cuenta.* All along, she’s been doing her thing in the academy and trying to find her true self. *¡Hay, quiero ser como ella! Tú, ¿no?*

You Got to Be Creative!

Hope *atestigua*, “a successful graduate student is one who can come here and stay true to what they’re eager to learn. Not allow that to be stolen from them—that joy of learning. But also, someone who can navigate the academy in a way that doesn’t require them to sacrifice their essence or lead them down a path that’s not beneficial to them.” *Bien dicho* Hope! And Hope is like, “what if someone doesn’t want” to be in the [tenured track] and the academy is preparing them for that. So, “being able to stay TRUE to with their goals, their dreams, their visions are for themselves instead of allowing that to be dictated by this structure and this system.” Like this is the semester that Hope has been able to **feel alive**: “I’m so grateful that I am in [so’s class].” And it’s true; Hope sits down in so’s class and feels so safe and joyful because she’s able to learn things that align with her interests, goals, and everything that is Hope. Let me tell you that she’s so enthusiastic in class; in class, when it’s time to like share something, Hope is confident in sharing her experiences. She laughs and just speaks herself out with no regrets. Just imagine her smiling and being affirmed by everything she knows—*asi de facil y sin tantita pena.* I wish I had more classes like these, every semester, but I’m glad Hope can be herself in this one class and

actually find joy in learning there. This third semester “has been a shift for me because last year was not good. There’s been a shift and it is because of the courses I’m taking and the professors who are taking them. But that again has required me to be true to choosing courses that align with my interests and learning things that BRING ME JOY.” *Que decepción cuando no hay más opciones en clases.* What options do we have next semester? Fingers crossed!

¡Agarrando el Toro por los Cuernos!

Hope is a firm believer of intersectionality, and all her experiences and those of people of color are a projection of that: “The more intersections you have, the more you are prone to stress; there are more systems at play, oppressing you. **IT’S JUST THE TRUTH.** That requires a higher level of care, self-care, community care, but while it does, it’s such a tension. Like how do you create that [community/self-care] when these very systems are against you? We got to do it collectively.” **THE POWER OF THE COLLECTIVE** gets us the change we need. But Hope recognizes that she is privileged in this country because she’s married: “I feel like I have privileges in being married. If I wasn’t married, I couldn’t be a grad student right now. I think we all have to be cognizant of where we’re oppressed, but also, where we’re privileged.” **THE POWER OF THE COLLECTIVE!**

Oh, but I forgot to tell you something else. She’s also grateful to live in a thin body; she finds it to be a privilege. *Aquí termino mi charla con Hope*, but I hopefully we can talk to her again. It’s so hard with our different schedules.

Platicando con Uche: Contexto and Feel of Our Platica

Lastly, *converse con* Uche, a doctoral student in the department of Education. *Mi buena amiga* Uche is expecting to graduate soon. Her research focuses on “a lot of anti-racism work. So eradicating policies and practices that have historically left out minoritized individuals.” She does work on her Black community, assessment measures, and racism & whiteness, and how those influence [her] research agenda.” During our *dialogo*, she was enthusiastic and confident. Her energy radiated throughout our *dialogo*, and she placed a lot of emphasis on leadership, intentionality, her faith, and how she came to be the person she is right now as she follows her purpose and calling. Uche is literally one of the many Black educators Dr. Jacqueline Jones Royster shares about in *Traces of a Stream*—a contemporary educator. Her leadership and intentionality within academia are clearly shown.

El [Chis]temonio: ¡¡Hay, Deja te Cuento!!

El otro dia me agarre en la plática con Uche before leaving from our break. Hold on because her life story is so inspiring! And you know she’s always so inspiring. *Bueno, te cuento que* Uche’s parents came here from Nigeria about 30-40 years ago. And although Uche was born *aqui en los Estados Unidos*, she considers herself Nigerian. *Con decirte que ella ama a Nigeria y obtiene todos sus valores de ahí:* “The culture has influenced a lot of my morals and so, that is where I get a lot of my beliefs from, how I practice, and how I treat others.” By the way, she’s going to Nigeria on Christmas break. How exciting, right?!

Anyway, “I am from Louisville Texas. I graduated from Louisville High School in 2010. Then I played volleyball at Alabama A&M.” Yep, that’s when Uche left Texas, the place she “knew as home,” and went to Alabama. Yep, Alabama. And Uche was like, “what have I done?”

Cause I'm like, 'WHAT?! WHAT IS IN ALABAMA?! OH MY GOSH; I CAN'T BELIEVE I DID THAT!

What's in Alabama?!

However, moving to Alabama allowed her to grow in her faith, in herself, and what “God has called [her] to be” today. Uche was like, “I don't think I would have done that If I was nurtured and stayed here in Texas.” So, there are no regrets on that. There at Alabama, Uche applied to graduate school, and let me tell you that after taking a couple GRE/GMAT tests, she learned “how the foundation of those tests is very biased. So, [she] eventually got into the program—not the program that [she] wanted to—a different program.” Anyway, “I graduated with my masters in communication management, and then went to Sam Houston State where here, is where I got my MBA.” Long story short, Uche knew she wanted to get into law school, but she was still struggling to take those damn standardized tests; so, she was like, I can get another masters. At the end of the day, she applied to law school, but didn't get accepted into any of them. Shoot! So now what? I would've felt the same way. I mean wouldn't you agree that those tests are ANNOYING! I completely get her.

FAITH/FE

“So, I am a big believer of my faith” says Uche. It so happened that “[she] reached out to some of [her] mentors, some of [her] past teachers.” They all asked her if she wanted to teach. It's crazy because “I don't know if they saw something in me that I didn't see at the time.” So, guess what?! Uche started teaching at a community college and although she was not making enough to have her own place, Uche was HAPPY AS CAN BE! I'm telling you, she was like

“OH MY GOSH! I AM BROKE AS A JOKE, BUT THIS FEELS GREAT!” Like Uche had finally found her TRUE purpose at a job/career where she felt her calling: “There’s a difference though. If you can be within your work, but that may not be your purpose. For the first time, everything aligned. So, I was doing my work, but it was also my purpose.” I’m telling you, Uche rocks!

Happy As Can Be!

So, Uche began teaching 9th graders and although she knew she wanted to go into academia, she could not pass those damn tests: “I have the credentials. I have two masters. I have 4.0s on everything. The test doesn’t determine anything. It actually only determines your ability to take a test. And when the test has a biased foundation, you’re always losing.” Anyway, Uche applied to every doctoral program at nine schools, and to the master’s program. You might be wondering why at the time she applied to a masters and not a doctoral, right? *Yo también, me hice esa misma pregunta. ¿Sabes que me dijo Uche?* “If it’s one thing about me, I can get a masters. That would have been my third masters.” Love Uche’s enthusiasm.

Those Tests Don’t Mean Anything!

¿Y después que crees que paso? Uche was called for an interview, and the professor who interviewed Uche at the time literally told her to apply for the doctoral program in education. Like for reals! Uche even started crying, and the professor told her that she was capable of much, much more. *Pues si*, like Uche already had two masters and like 4.0s. Imagine how emotional and encouraged she must have felt! Well, the prof asked her if she thought of applying for a doctoral program. And guess what Uche told him? “Little do you know, I have. No one has given

me the chance that I know that I need in order for me to prove myself.” *Que desgarrador, ¿no?*
¡So sad! Well, the prof *le dijo que aplicara*. “No, you don’t understand. I don’t have the scores. I
am not going to subject myself to denial again, when I’m in control right now.”

Let me give you *contexto*: the doctoral program was due in a few days, at the time she
was being interviewed by the prof, back in February, and Uche had to literally work on her
doctoral program application just a few days before the deadline. *¡Hay no, que apresurado y que*
nervios! It’s like her whole world turned 360.

¡A APLICAR SE HA DICHO!

Deja te cuento que paso. So that same day, “I ran home and I remember getting home
and I stayed up all night writing my purpose statement. And I remember like a couple days later,
being in my office on campus, and I got in, and it said it was a full ride. And I thought it was
fake.” TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE! Uche called her mom to tell her *el noticion*, but Uche didn’t
even cry: “I was kind of confused in the moment; I remember I didn’t even cry because all this
time I had been crying. ‘WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME?’ Uche knew that this was her calling,
and “knew [she] was going to do great things.” We both know Uche is RO-CK-ING it!
Lastly, do you know what Uche says now that she’s this far in her journey? “I never question my
faith. It took one person to give me a shot at fulfilling my purpose.” By the way, do you know
she’s graduating SOON? I know! So exciting! “I just cannot tell you about the journey. It’s
crazy.”

IT TOOK ONE PERSON!

You know what Uche told me? In remembering what the prof did for her, Uche believes she has a mission: “So, my mission and my purpose as what I do a professor, as a president of GSA is to make sure that I never miss the opportunity to give someone a chance that deserves way more than what we’re giving them. So, I’m **intentional** in making sure that people understand that oftentimes this place--- **academia as a whole, is very exclusive**. So we like to say things are inclusive because we giving practices to the people that we have subjected.” Yup, Uche believes that these policies and practices may actually be excluding some people. And you know what else she thinks? “Just like graduate students, often times for years, decisions have been made FOR graduate students, NOT WITH THEM.” Yep, just like that. She’s real for reals! And Uche has learned this practice in all the positions she’s been. She will never forget the prof for giving her the opportunity that others denied her. *Que hermosa experiencia, no?!*

Con Ellos, No Para Ellos!

And that day I was like, Uche your story is so inspirational. Now I admire you even more! So now you know that one of Uche’s most impactful/memorable memory in graduate school was with this prof. But there’s more! Growing up, Uche never thought she could ever teach. *Pero*, “I had Black professors growing up. So, it was very common, right. Coming here and being able to teach, I can’t tell you how influential it is because I’m just like baffled at the thought of how many people have me as a professor, and they’re like, ‘you’re the first Black professor I’ve ever had; I would’ve never had this opportunity.’ *Para Uche, ha sido un bendicion. ¡Que orgullo saber que aún hay personas como nosotros representando bien a nuestra gente, ¿no?! Hay se me enchinan los vellos nomas de pensar.*

¡Una Bendición!

But other than feeling blessed to be her students' First Black teacher, Uche realizes that “You cannot just create a policy that DIVERSIFIES people that you bring in.” *Es decir*, the comments Uche receives from her students are what pushes her to research the barriers that exist within the K-12 educative system that deprives many Black children from exceling as future professors/faculty members. Like, imagine Uche with her intentionality and purpose, doing the work to find out what is the reason. *Dejame te cuento que aunque Uche este tired and just wants to nap*, she “turns that switch off” as soon as she walks into the classrooms. *Si, asi nomas*. She sure doesn't take her teaching role for granted! So, Uche doesn't care how others measure her success. She doesn't strive for “success.” *¿Sabes que me dijo Uche al respecto?* “If you are happy in your purpose and you are doing things that fulfill your purpose, it brings a different kind of joy. Like I am happy that I am doing what **I'VE BEEN CALLED TO DO. THERE'S NO BETTER FEELING THAT THAT.**” *Asi merito me dijo. Al final*, Uche believes that the more “successul you are,” the more “successful” you'll want to be. *Asi que para ella*, “success” is subjective and all she cares about is fulfilling *su llamado*. *La admiro aún más. ¿Tu no?*

Turns that Switch Off!

¿Pero, por qué no descansa? Si se supone que está cansada, ¿no? And Uche is like, “One, it's an opportunity and a privilege to be in the class, but two, the day that you can't or will not or this is too much for you, is the day that someone is going to rely on you—and I'm talking about a student.” *Como dice Uche*, “**you have to move with intention**” knowing that people rely on you. And not only is Uche intentional with her students; she believes that “we are here for someone else.”

Moving with Intention

¿Pero, sabes que me mas sorprendió de Uche? That when it comes to her self-rest, she is selfish! And I don't mean like selfish in a negative way; I mean selfish like in; she's not playing with her self-care and rest. *No, la toques*, OK! Uche's "rest looks different in every season." *Si vieras lo que me dijo*: "So there are some seasons in my life where I am going, going, going. I know I have to, because, the rest, I have **intentionally** created time to make sure that I rest." *Asi como lo escuchas*. "So, for instance, this week, I JUST KNOW, LISTEN, I am getting LIKE NO SLEEP, I HAVE TO FINISH GRADING, I HAVE TO PACK, I HAVE TO DO ALL THESE THINGS, RIGHT?! But next week, when I travel, **YOU CAN'T TOUCH ME.**" *Y así fue*, Uche *es mujer de palabra. No hay poder humano que no la deje descansar en sus vacaciones. ¡Hay que aprender de Uche! Si que es un role model.* I mean, when was the last time we actually relaxed in our long breaks? I'm telling you: we need to rest with intention.

Resting with INTENTION

I learn so much from my homegirl Uche. *¿Sabes que me compartió Uche que me dejo con la boca abierta?* "But, also **intentionally having a plan** that makes sense to you because there are times throughout the semester where you're going to be going, going, going because of the just situation that you're in." *¿Y sabes que más me dijo Uche que me dejo impactada?* "Would you rather me take that opportunity and then do what—NOT GIVE MY FULL [Uche]?" Because when you don't give your full self to opportunities, you are stripping someone else away of the opportunity to know what your full self is and who can influence them in that

moment.” *Así como lo escuchas. Así que ella descansa con intención sin preocuparse de la escuela.*

But wait, “This is not to say I don’t take **random breaks**. Like Saturdays or like I go get my nails done before I get back to work. I’m talking about those **LONG PERIODS OF REST TIME**. I have to feed myself before I feed others.” And if Uche is not her full self, others around her will know it. Like “yesterday, I got home, and I was like, ‘I’m going to finish grading.’ Girl, I went to sleep at 8:30. I was knocked out. I was up for the first time this morning. But my body needed a rest, and I didn’t fight it.” *Bien por Uche, verdad?!*

Random Breaks Too!

I’m telling you, when she’s intentional, she’s intentional about her self-care and rest. *Con decirte que* Uche likes to eat and travel. Which reminds me, we need to eat at some bomb ass place. I’ll tell you later about it. Anyways, back to our *platica*: “Like if I could get paid to travel. Y’all would never see my again.” *Asi como lo escuchas*. “And I know God would be like, ‘girl come back here; that is not what I called you to do. But I love traveling, and I love immersing myself in different cultures because there’s no better feeling than learning about others because you ultimately learn more about yourself.” I sure didn’t know this about Uche.

But more importantly, Uche embraces her Nigerian culture and loves being in community with her people. Yes, you already know she loves Nigeria. *Comprueballo tú mismo con este lindo gesto que compartio*: “Nigerians are LIT! We celebrate everything. We celebrate death; we celebrate birth because it brings us back to our ancestry”/ *nuestros ancestros*. For Uche, celebrating with her people is not just a one-day moment, *es una celebracion de vida*. So, her Nigerian blood is present, and I don’t blame her *porque nuestras culturas estan en nuestras*

venas. Asi como nosotros cantamos mariachi, banda, y todo tipo de música regional mexicana cuando salemos de party, Uche “strives to connect to her Afro beats.” Asi como lo escuchas: “I am always striving to be in community with my Nigerian community because it brings me back to my WHY.” And so, when Uche is feeling a little off, she listens to these Afro beats to “GET IT GOING.”

Some Afro Beats!

And there’s more on her appreciation for her Nigerian culture. *Pero, primero, te voy a dar contexto.* Uche believes that racial battle fatigue is real. Uche was like, “I think that I didn’t know what it was until you’re actually in it. So, it’s hard because oftentimes we are past as minoritized people to almost pick up the pieces and figure it out for the things that people have done to us. And what you find, is, if you are passionate and you want to do it, you will just take on the role.”

Racial Battle Fatigue is Real!

And this is where her Nigerian culture appreciation and practice comes to play. Yes, she’ll do the work, *pero no sola. Es mucho trabajo para ella solita.* So, guess what?! Uche believes in collaboration: “I can’t do this work by myself. I also don’t want to do this work by myself. It would drive me crazy. This is too much to eradicate; it’s too much to change. I DON’T WANT TO BE THE MAKER OF ALL PIECING. You know the AFRICAN PROVERB, **‘GROWING FAR, YOU HAVE TO GO TOGETHER.’** I’m telling you, she’s all about working with others because she knows that other people have expertise in areas she may not have. Talking about resources and teamwork. She was like, “Your ideas are just as good as mine,

and you know something that I don't know, and I know something that you don't know." And this all goes back to community/*La RAZA*.

Not Working Alone!

And since Uche is all about being intentional, she is also intentional about taking measures to be sound, and she gives this advice to graduate students. She's like, "this environment erupts racism, discriminatory practices. But if you yourself can say, 'this is why I'm here; this is what I'm going to do; this is who I need to be in community/in collaboration to make sure that this does not affect me, DO IT.'" *Asi como lo escuchas*. If practices such as breathing and slowing down—as measures to be sound—are not given to you by those in the academia, do it! "You got to go in knowing, I got to have this practice as a part of who I am. It's still in your hands." Cause let me tell you that whether or not graduate environment is giving Uche that space to slow down and be present, she is intentionally creating space for it: "So, whether that's a class, whether that's in my office, or whether that's later when we have GSS." *Veze porque me encanta platicar con Uche. ¡Esa chica is ON FIRE! Being Sound!*

Platicando con Catherine: Contexto and Feel of Our Platica

Mi buena amiga Catherine is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of English, specifically in first-year composition, writing program administration, writing center research, and identity. She hopes to change the current, dominant narrative of writing centers; she believes that these spaces need to find value in different types of literacies that are inclusive of different writings and writers whose identities can be represented well. Her *testimonio* is mainly centered in her process of healing as she is learning to slow down and rest after realizing she has been burned out throughout her graduate journey. Her *testimonio* screams Tricia Hersey's homily of rest, self-

care, and slowing down to re-connect with oneself. During our *dialogo*, we laughed and connected as I asked her questions that allowed our conversations to be re-evaluated and re-defined. Although we went off by the general questions, we did go off topic in some moments, especially as I asked her different questions about her experience in reevaluating her self-care and work ethic. Catherine was thoughtful and intentional with her answers as she reflected on her past graduate school experience.

El [Chis]temonio: ¡¡Hay, Deja te Cuento!!

Guess who I talked to last time? Catherine! Yeah, she's doing great! *Bueno, deja te cuento* that Catherine's parents were born and raised in Mexico, and she and her siblings were born in Chicago. Yeah, I didn't know she's from Chicago. Well, anyways, Catherine's parents are working-class immigrants; her dad came to America in the 80s y *su* mom in the 90s. Catherine remembers living vivid and good memories in Chicago up to her first nine years of life. From Chicago, Catherine y *su familia* moved to Houston, where she lived up to her master's in Oklahoma State. She remembers moving to Houston in August of 2003. *Ahora*, she lives in Fort Worth for her Ph.D. And although she's from Chicago, she considers herself Texan.

Hey, but let me tell you that her *jornada no termina aquí porque precisamente en su doctorado, es donde se dio cuenta que necesitaba cambiar. Si, cambiar su ritmo de vida*: "This Spring semester of 2022 and Fall semester of 2022 has been the most life changing because I am burned out. When I think back to the spring semester, I was working in athletics, I was taking two classes, I was working on a book project, I was working in Graduate Student Senate—like I had so much on my plate and I WAS MANAGING, and that's not considering the fact that I am a house wife, I cook, and I clean." *Tambien estaba preocupada por su familia* and "what they're

going thru.” *Asi que* Catherine was doing it all. Sounds like a lot. I don’t know how that girl managed it. *Me hubiera vuelto loca. Tu, no?!*

Slow Down! Slow Down! Despacio!

It wasn’t until Catherine began preparing for exams that she realized she had been **burned out** all this time. Yeah, she’s like “That has changed the way that I view myself, that has changed the way I view Academia, and how **IT** almost encourages you to keep going without stopping. And I know that there are conversations about self-care and mental health and whatnot, but I don’t think that the current structures really allow for that—allow for like a **TRUE BREAK** so that **WE** don’t burn out.”

¡Pero todo cambio y seguirá cambiando! ¡No Mas!

Catherine sits down with me and reflects—*como una* metamorphosis: “So that has really changed how I view work ethic, and rest, and mental health, depression, anxiety, and all those types of things. Like how I view therapy; how I view the next couple of years of this degree. I think this has been a really difficult transitioning moment, but **I’m HAPPY that I NOW SEE graduate school and myself in a different light.**” *Fue muy lindo ese momento* because she was telling me how difficult it was for her. I would’ve never guessed she was burned out all this time. *Como dice mi mama:* we never know what others are going through. **And then there’s panic attacks and the setting of fire!**

Si, como te cuento Catherine depicts the sticks ready to be fired up, already present. Catherine has managed so much until this moment. *Y tu y yo lo sabemos.* She is a wife, a daughter, a sister, a scholar, a student, a writer and then a drop of water was enough to create this fire. The sticks were already there in place; it just took one more damn thing to fire it all up.

These series of events triggered Catherine's panic attack. I feel bad for her: "It was just something that managed to light the thing on fire. So, when I realized that, that's when I started looking for a therapist." Well, let me tell you that it's not until Catherine went to therapy that she looked at her internal self and past to realize that OMG, she was really anxious and burned out, and it didn't matter that she was able to manage and do it all in the past! *¡Era como si se ella hubiera visto al espejo de la verdad y se diera cuenta de muchas cosas que estaban terriblemente mal!* By the way, have you experienced anything like Catherine?

¡El Espejo de la Verdad!

Catherine continually reminds herself: "Yes, you had it down, but did you have it down in un-healthy way?" Yes, Catherine's journey of healing has been difficult because she knows that she was able to manage the constant hustle, but she has to continually remind herself that her past lifestyle was unhealthy. Like one day in therapy session, Catherine's therapist lifted a weight from her shoulders. Her therapist pushed her to make some choices for good. *Si recuerdo bien, le dijo algo así como...* Catherine, I need you to essentially let go of some of the daily activities you have been doing until now. Sacrifice and let go. And Catherine was like, "I don't like the way that I feel, and I don't want to keep being burned out, so I will do those things. *Esta bien*, I will sacrifice my job in athletics; I will stop temporarily being part of the Graduate Student Senate until I am done with exams. Those things were easy to let go because the feeling that I was feeling were **NOT FUN.**" Knowing Catherine, I bet it was hard for her at first to let go, but I'm so glad she did!

And then there's the EXPECTATIONS!

Y despues me conto algo que me dejo sin palabras cause I never thought about it that way. “What really is happening? Do I expect myself to produce x, y, and z. If that’s my expectation, where did that expectation come from? Is that from Academia? Is that like Capitalism telling me that I need to produce this number of things to be successful? Like, where am I getting those expectations? And once Catherine began exploring and reflecting where these expectations came from, she began realizing they were unhealthy and unfair. Hence, she began adjusting her expectations based on what she could handle mentally.

Aquí es donde Catherine agarro el toro por los cuernos.... ¡Hay, aquí viene lo bueno!
Déjenme decirte que cuando Catherine tuvo una convseracion con sus maestras sobre sus exámenes, she literally thought she had to read all the books front to back when in reality, that expectation was not the case. Instead, she literally could just read the introduction and a couple of chapters pertaining to her portfolio. *En nuestra* meet-up, Catherine was like, “I somehow came up with this expectation that I needed to read all the books all the way thru. I mean, yeah, that can be part of the HANDBOOK that tells us that we need to read all of these books. And obviously we usually read books front to back. That kind of expectation kind of formed itself. A weight has been lifted off me because I had that conversation. If we have those conversations, our expectations for ourselves and the expectations they have for us are going to change, but we never think about that. We just kind of assume. That’s the biggest thing that I’ve learned throughout this entire thing.” Yeah. I can’t believe she was reading all the books from front to back. I guess it makes sense why we think we need to read front to back but wouldn’t it better if they gave us a heads-up about how to prepare for Comps. I’m telling you; it sure would make our lives easier.

Yeah, and like her teaching expectations have changed too: “I am not the same person.” Catherine said something like, I **reset the expectation button** this time; I teach knowing that I am burned out and am taking exams. When planning for her composition class, Catherine sat down and reevaluated how she could teach in a way she wouldn’t overdo it. She wasn’t going to have enough time; so, she readjusted her course. She kept telling herself, “Because I don’t do this extra one thing, does not mean that I am a bad teacher or that my students aren’t going to learn.” But let me tell you that Catherine teaches her students she will meet the basic requirements of being in class on time and hold office hours.

But beyond being on time and what not, she engages in the things she does as a student and teacher because **she genuinely loves what she’s doing. To her, that is success.**

Like when Catherine is motivated to teach a lesson on remixing and plagiarism, she teaches that lesson with enthusiasm and joy because she wants to do it. I love that Catherine’s teaching about remixing. I mean, remixing is a theme teachers in school don’t even think of teaching. We always get these colonial ways of writing in English classes. I hate that!

And Catherine has thought in the past what if she left the program. *Pero no!* Catherine takes this thought back—**even though she’s tired**—because she loves what she does. She loves teaching her students and talking to them and her colleagues. She will not keep doing things she does not love: “At the end of the day, when my students leave class, I have a smile in my face.” *Hay, así estamos nosotros, lol. Que nos vamos de la escuela y después que mejor no. ¡Pero que bien que le guste ser maestra!*

By the way, Catherine hasn’t heard back from her examiners. Well, Catherine told me she hasn’t heard whether she passed her exams, but she assures she worked hard and loved what she delivered. *Hay, pero estoy segura de que si lo va a pasar.* She already feels successful. She’s

like: “Find moments along the way that keep reminding you that you are successful. Yesterday, I had a lesson that was just so fun for my students, and I left that class so happy because they did such a good job, and it was so much fun—that to me is success. If I didn’t take a step back and looked at that and try to capture the feelings and emotions and everything that my students did in that moment, and I’m waiting for that publication to be published in two years or I’m waiting for the ‘success’ that I’m going to feel when I finish my PhD, you’re not going to make it through the program if you’re waiting on that ‘success.’ You have to find moments in the process that people don’t maybe deem like big moments, but they are **big moments**. Those are the defining factors of success. **Define moments that you define as success** to get you through the program.”

Although we are of that system in the academia, Catherine knows that she has two more years to publish one of her works. But she is not going to wait for that time to feel good because she loves what she wrote. She is not going to wait until the system deems it valuable. *Me encanta su actitud, y la verdad, he aprendido mucho de ella.*

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE HEALTHY EXPECTATIONS!

Anyway, Catherine also told me that she went to therapy on Tuesday, and her therapist told her that besides sacrificing her athletics job, she also needed to change the way she took care of home chores. And Catherine told him, “Well, I just grew up in a house where my mom was a stay-at-home mom, and she did everything at home.” And her therapist told her, “But you’re not a stay-at-home mom; you’re in a Ph.D. program. That means that the expectations you have at home and for you as a ‘housewife’ are different.” Like all the different things Catherine has been learning in therapy, she has learned to view her housewife role differently. I mean it’s hard to let

go off housewife roles. I mean, I help my mom at home, and it's not like I can let go off that easily. *Tu que opinas?*

Nonetheless, Catherine has not been able to find a 'balance' between being a student, teacher, wife, and everything in between. It was interesting to see that during our *dialogo*, Catherine and I figured that maybe 'balance' isn't such a good term because Catherine was like, "Cause I could spend like 10 hours on school and then say now I need to spend 10 hours at home to balance it all out." Guess what; now I know why Catherine has been taking more intentional time to rest and just be. That day, she told me that the reason we haven't met to work on school stuff like we used to was because she needed some time off: "So, remember when we tried to study like in the mornings. So, the reason why I didn't follow thru with that was because I decided that Monday and Wednesday nights, I would not do work. I told myself: I am focusing on rest and not doing work. So, in the mornings, what I would do is I would crunch everything I had to do" (all the schoolwork). *Sabes que, me da mucho gusto que está pensando en el bendito descanso.* Now, Catherine is trying to be more intentional about prioritizing rest when she gets home.

Self-Care Activities Fo Sho...

And then, there are the self-care activities that Catherine engages in. Imagine how much joy Catherine feels when she cooks traditional Mexican food—like the food her *ama* used to cook when she used to live with her *apas*. Like cooking traditional green *Posole* for her friend brings her immense joy and that to Catherine is a form of genuine self-care. You see, her husband isn't Mexican; so, it's difficult to cook Mexican food for him. Instead, she cooks for her friend because she will eat anything (she's very adventurous with food by the way), and

Catherine likes to share. *Como un dia*, Catherine *le pregunto a su amiga*: “And I’m like, would you eat green Posole, and she’s like, YES! And I’m like OH MY GOSH! So, I would start cooking it, and I would find a lot of joy by doing it, and I didn’t feel guilty for USING MY TIME to cook this food/*esta bendita comida*. I was excited.” *¡Pero, tambien ha cocinado frijoles charros!* Cooking food she has grown tasting has genuinely brought her closer to her community/*sus raises/su herencia*. *Yo me siento igual que Catherine. ¿Apoco no te da gusto cocinar y comer comida de nuestra tierra?*

Anyways, Catherine was like “I was thinking of going to this potluck that the university’s Catholic organization was doing for like Thanksgiving, and I was like I really want to go.” And even though she didn’t attend, Catherine was talking to her colleague and was like, “I really want to bring something Mexican—like change it up; do a little something different” (*algo que venga de mi cultura*). And her colleague was like, “I am really happy that you are connecting with your culture.” And you know what, Catherine was like, “I am so glad you mentioned that because with other foods, I don’t feel the same joy.” You see, Catherine feels that by cooking Mexican food, she is “sharing [her] community with [her] friends. And I keeping wanting to add more recipes to that, and I think that’s a form of self-care.” And you know what, Catherine told me she would also make me some *Posole* and like we started talking about going to find places where they make *cueritos*. By the way, I suggested we should go to that ice cream place/*paeteria* close by to see if they have them.

Mexican Food FO SHO!

But wait, there’s more! Catherine also practices self-care by connecting with her community, whether that be her friends or her *ama*—someone she can talk to: “It’s so easy to

feel lonely in grad school. Not see your friends as often.” And, it’s true/*y es verdad*. Like with Catherine and I, it’s been hard to meet because we have different schedules. But essentially, Catherine *atestigua* that being able to text friends, check on friends, and hang out with friends in school, has kept her going in the academy. *Y sabes que*, her *ama* has been really big in Catherine’s self-care and mental health. *Si, que padre que platique con ella*: “I talk to my mom a lot over the phone since she’s not in Fort Worth.” *Hablando de mamas*, I need to vent *con mi ama* about my day. Talking to her is so liberating!

La Fe...

Pero, ahí no termina porque Catherine es muy creyente. Catherine practices her faith by praying and going to church. Catherine is like, “I know that those are things that I like to do to find REST”/*el bendito descanso*. Like an opportunity for her to slow down/*despasio*. But I forgot to mention that she LOVES NAPS! “If you’re tired, take a NAP!” LIKE FOR REALS! “I have noticed that this semester, I have accepted, **OH MY BODY WANTS TO TAKE A NAP, OKAY I’M GOING TO TAKE A NAP.**” Catherine was so confident saying how much naps are important to her self-care ritual. She’s like, “back then I would not take naps because I thought I could be doing so much more, and now I’m like, *NO MAS!* Nap it is!” I almost asked her if she wanted to take a nap with me at school, lol. Maybe we should all take naps together one day. Well, I actually told Catherine about my nap spot at campus, and she loved the idea. **NAP IT IS!**

Back to her *ama*. Catherine calls her *ama*, and it so happens that when Catherine calls her, her *ama* is laying down as their talking on the phone: “*Ma que estás haciendo*, and she’s like, “*no, nada, aquí nomas, me senté*. And I’m like, GOOD, LAY DOWN.” You see,

Catherine's *ama* is a stay-home-mom, and her labor is physical. Catherine's *apa* also does labor work, and when he comes home from work over the weekdays, he eats and watches some T.V. Then, over the weekends, he loves to take naps/*benditos descansos*. But Catherine's *apas* also make it an intention to have fun over the weekends. Heck ya, going out with your *familia los fines de semana es hermoso y necesario*.

*Su apa le dice, "NO quiero que trabajes como burro, como yo; like the image of a donkey carrynig things." Ya tu sabes, like working physically with your body to live. And even though Catherine understands that we, as students, are still laboring, we do a different labor— intellectual labor. NO ES LO MISMO. Nonetheless, going to school makes Catherine's apa happy and proud because she is not laboring/ "slaving away" like he is, and this accomplishment works both ways because she is finally doing something she loves. Catherine acknowledges that as part of a family of immigrants, she has been engrained that to succeed, you must work hard and not give up. So let me tell you that Catherine believes that this engrained philosophy of immigrant family culture/*creencia* has an impact on self-care: "Just like the idea of the American Dream. That has been a big part of my upbringing, and I think it's just part of like the culture." Like, I have a couple of family members who are financially struggling, and I think about how they don't have access to counselors. Even of her family members had the opportunity to attend these counseling services, Catherine wonders if even then, they would attend because they have been conditioned to go with the flow, stop listening to their bodies and emotions, and just keep working to sustain themselves. See why I feel so connected with Catherine. I feel and see things the same way.*

El Sueno Americano/The American Dream

Catherine believes that since she has the time and money to attend therapy, she is privileged. Catherine believes that her immigrant, working class family members do not have this privilege. That's true. Many families don't have this privilege. Anyways, Catherine shares that people of color/*gente de color* have been affected by capitalism and toxic masculinity. She also said that keeping our emotions bottled is what makes us emotionless beings. And then Catherine metaphorically screamed this statement: "Even if capitalism does want us to be these emotionless beings who just produce, and produce, and produce and are constantly working, **THE GEARS THAT ARE PART OF THAT MACHINE—US—ARE NOT FUNCTIONING. LIKE WE'RE NOT GOING TO GIVE YOU THE PRODUCT THAT YOU WANT BECAUSE WE'RE NOT HEALTHY. LIKE THEY CAN'T SELF-CARE; THEY CAN'T REST BECAUSE THEY ARE FINANCIALLY STRUGGLING.**" *Dejanme decirles que* Catherine now realizes that "Prior to [her] burnout, [she] used to know that capitalism is not the best system, but [NOW, she] really sees IT even more in a negative light now."

Emotionless Beings

Sitting down in therapy sessions, *Catherine se da cuenta* that "We're all burned out; we're all depressed, and we're all anxious. And we're using these things to cope because **the system** doesn't give us the healthy ways to go about it. But I also think.... the systems are not going to give us those things anyway. The people in power are not going to give us those things anyway; so, we do have to go look for them in other ways. Maybe not the healthiest ways. It depends on what we have access to. But yeah; I feel like everything that goes into capitalism, and the power and how that impacts us definitely has an impact on self-care and rest." *Asi como lo escuchas!* In my opinion, Catherine is saying **the TRUTH. La pura verdad. Y luego,**

Catherine shared that as a graduate student, she sees capitalism's negative light even more:
“What we're expected to produce; what we're expected to produce for the university. I really would've never seen that until IT impacted me.” *La Pura Verdad*

Platicando con Drift: Contexto and Feel of Our Platica

Mi buen amigo Drift— (Drift is his *barrio* nickname, given to him when he was about 16 by his friend) is a Black male scholar and hip-hop/rap artist and English graduate student who attends a PWI in the South. Black Rhetoric is his passion and field of study; he shares enthusiastically and **most definitely** that this rhetoric is the “most inclusive form of rhetoric & composition” **100%**. *Su energia* is contagious and during our *dialogo*, we couldn't stop exchanging knowledge/*conocimiento*. Chris's energy radiated through a Zoom screen and his Black joy was present at all times. During our *dialogo*, he illuminated our Zoom space and enriched our conversation. At all times, Chris **saw me** and made connections to important topics, that are often overlooked in the *academia* and that unite us—students of color. He taught me so much and our *dialogo* turned into a space of generative knowledge production as we engaged in conversations together, named **a thing a thing**, and reiterated what we talked about. In our *dialogo*, Drift shined a light to these main topics: assimilation or representation, hoopin & freewriting as emblems of self-care, keepin it real, pure violence, and intellectual freedom.

El [Chis]temonio: ¡¡Hay, Deja te Cuento!!

Te cuento que platique con Drift el otro día. Yeah, I miss him a lot! ¿Sabes que me dijo Drift? Well, first we talked about his childhood and familia. Drift's historia begins with memorias from his pops, memorias que lo han formado y forjado hoy. Drift recounts when his pops came from Jamaica to the states where he joined the military at a young age. Si, bien

chiquito. His pops's military role got Drift moving from state to state and ultimately doing most of his growth in the DMV, where he represents well till this day. Vividly, Drift *cuenta* how his pops felt the need to assimilate—*ser como los Americanos*—to the new culture, but always reflexively returned to his identity *en su cultura*, especially when visiting his *ama*: “Every time we walked in the door, my pops would say, ‘*Waapm misses? Me nuh see yuh inna long time enuh!*’ (what’s happenin, ma’am? I haven’t seen you in a while, y’know!)” It was his pops’s returning to his *ama* that created a space and time for his pops to return to his culture, to his *herencia*. *Y lo entiendo. Así como cuando regresamos a nuestro rancho en México.*

Me Identifico!

Yeah, Drift identifies with his pops’s culture every time they walk through **that door** and inhabit **that space**, his *abuelita*’s home and vivid Jamaican presence. *Qué bonito, no. Te cuento que* Drift feels his pops’s culture preserved like a reflex, *sin pensar; asi nomas. Si vieras que me dijo Drift cuando hablamos del tema*. Because guess what, “they’re gonna try and impose themselves on to whatever culture they encounter; American culture, you know, imposes itself on to every other culture.” *Me asombró que hablara de este tema porque es cierto. ¿Tu no opinas lo miso?* In recounting his pops’s immigration to the USA at such a young age, Drift makes connection to how people are kind of pushed to assimilate to the American white culture to fit in and feel *seguro*. However, Drift believes that ultimately, there is a going back to one’s roots in certain spaces, like the homey space of his *abuelita*. Yeah, to Drift, the preservation of his culture is important to him when you are representin well, and representin well is a big responsibility. *A que no sabes que mas me conto?*

Homey Space

Aside from Drift's upbringing that allows him to stay connected with his cultural roots through his pops, Drift's graduate learning begins with *memorias* of his college experience at TCC. *Si, el empezo en un colegio comunitario.* He had gone to TCC. Well, anyways, before Drift began his graduate school experience, he didn't have plans to attend college, but when he got the opportunity to attend, he loved it: "One of the most impactful moments were from one of my English teachers." Yeah, Drift told me that this English teacher allowed him to do Tai Chi as a class performance and writing composition assignment. Sounds pretty cool to me. I mean, it's hard to see teachers give you freedom to be and do what you genuinely enjoy. *A Drift le encanto que su maestra le diera la oportunidad de escribir sobre lo que a el le gustaba;* "that creative license/freedom" is what has motivated me to "pursue that degree so I can care a lot more about people" and be "the cool teacher."

Well, let me tell you that this first English composition class motivated him to continue his education, where his college experience has been mostly positive as faculty and staff have helped him reach his *potential*: "I ended up getting the English Scholar award and the Betsy Colquitt Scholarship my senior year." Drift never imagined receiving these awards, "Especially for a person like me. I am just super grateful that people would even consider me worthy of awards like that." I can't believe he doubted himself; I mean, he deserves those awards.

¿Sabes que me compartio Drift? Ese dia, cuando recibio esos premios, Drift dijo lo siguiente: "When I received the scholarships and stuff, I'm like 'thank you so much; I'm so grateful for everybody that x,y,z. Their responses are always like, 'no, you earned it; you deserve it; we didn't do it, you did it.'" *Sentí que tenía que estar agradecido con las personas por recibir*

estos reconocimientos. Pero las personas me recordaban que yo me las había ganado con esfuerzo y dedicación. They're right about that. Drift deserves that and more.

Hoopin, Rap Freewriting, and Acts of Service as Emblems of Self-Care: Embodied Work

Part of Drift's experience in graduate school has been basketball and writing rap music as embodied activities of his *persona*: "Basketball is everything for me when it comes to self-care." *Tambien te cuento que* Drift plays basketball often, and it allows him to release stress; "basketball is meditative, but it's also a release of stress and aggression; I curse nonstop and I scream at the top of my lungs, NON-STOP!!" as a form of catharsis. *Y luego fijate que sus amigos le llaman pa jugar y no dice que no*/when his friends text him to hoop, he immediately leaves his thesis work to join the crew. *Y no lo culpo*. I also pass on my thesis sometimes. Basketball is not just an emblem of self-care for Drift himself, he shares that he "feels really in tuned with [his] community through activities like basketball." Drift *atestigua* his love for basketball, especially since he gets to interact with people from different *barrios*. Yeah, he meets people from different places around here. Well, did you know he works at a seasonal kids' camp? Yup, he told me that working there with the community is also a form of self-care. He recalls purchasing items for foster kids and filling huge bags for them to take home: "It was such a great feeling to see those kids so happy."

Sabes que mas practica is a form of self-care in addition to basketball and working with kids in his community. Drift relies on writing rap music, a form of freewritin for him: "Writing music is a good way for me to work through what I'm learning. When I write, it's not a super conscious" activity; instead, it's a stream of consciousness that allows Drift to capture his

thoughts in the moment. That's so cool! I mean, I like to journal because it's natural for me. I think that's how he feels about rap writing. *Y aunque Drift práctica estas cosas, la corriente se lo lleva.* Although Drift allows himself to practice these forms of self-care, he realizes that he's sometimes carried off by the stream, "down the thesis process." Yeah, like the thesis is what's in our minds at this point. I know exactly how it feels to know that there is *un pendiente*. El PENDIENTE QUE NOS ESPERA!

La Corriente

I know it's anxiety-provoking sometimes to be thinking about the thesis, but ultimately, the thesis is his passion; *su pasión y el reflejo de ponerse a sí mismo primero*: "Putting myself first is putting the thesis first." Drift also told me that his perception of "balancing" schoolwork with personal life is fuzzy. Sometimes Drift puts the thesis first and other times he puts play first. Drift's **attempts** of balancing school with life ultimately allows him to listen to his needs. *¿Porque si no nos cuidamos, quien lo hará? Pero si vieras que hay un verso que me encanto que dijo porque es muy cierto.* Within the same academy and within his personal life, Drift is disappointed and disgusted:

I literally read something this morning. I saw it in an Instagram post about Zora Neal Hurston. She said something to the effect of, if you remain silent throughout your suffering, they will kill you and say that you enjoyed it.

Do you see how impacting this quote is? I mean, when Drift said that, I had no words. Drift feels this about power dynamics and race; *Es pura violencia*; "it's pure violence. It's disappointing how racial an institution can be; it's disappointing to see how racial this country can be," *asi*

mismo se ve en la academia. La academia es como un ivory tower, and this same issue “powers his research” for him to be his authentic self. Pura Violencia.

His Identity Imprinted in His Work (su huella plasmada en su trabajo)

Hey, let me give you *contexto*. Drift uses the analogy of “**the machine**” to represent his idea of an emotionless hegemonic entity. He goes on to explain how he would use “side hustles” as a means to subvert the machine. *Aqui vamos*: “Growing up, **I have learned in my culture** to make money. Making money has never been an issue for me. When I was a kid in third grade, I used to sell Dragón Ball Z pictures.” Yeah, like Drift told me he printed these anime cartoon pictures to sell them to his third-grade classmates. *Asi como lo escuchas. Era bueno vendiendo.* “I also remember rolling dice and selling CDs in high school.” *Mas contexto*: Drift recounts these “side hustles” as part of his “money maker” or “hustler” identity. Yup, he was a “money maker.”

Money Maker

As an adult and grad student, Drift has (re)defined his idea of success to something that does not center a capitalistic agenda. Yeah, like he highlights the importance of authenticity/*ser tu mismo*. *Y luego me describió lo que es la máquina*. Yeah, the machine. Drift understands that making money through THE MACHINE is not what he defines as “successful.” Drift defines the opposite of success as an imposed praxis of the institution: The machine is allowing yourself, as a student, “to check off a box,” an end-product, in graduate school and then “runn[ing] the risk of

feeding” it. In other words, the machine’s purpose is for us students to follow a timely-straightforward capitalistic agenda so that you complete the thesis that will get you a good paying job and continue a “success” agenda. Rather, Drift told me that part of his identity that is imprinted in his graduate work, deals with authenticity: “I am not in college to make money; I am in college to figure out why I am the way that I am.” *Asi como lo escuchas*. I understand where he’s coming from because, we too, want to learn more about our culture in grad school. But it’s so hard, right? I’m telling you, when he was telling me all this, I was impressed. He thinks being in college to know about one’s identity is a privilege as he acknowledges that his pops “fed the machine.” Yeah, he confessed that he obtained a computer science degree because he wanted to get a good paying job. Yep, he told me his pops is paid well.

La Maquina

Well, let me tell you that before Drift allowed himself to be authentic, he thought he had to behave in a specific manner within the academia to “succeed”: “I always thought that I had to flex, you know, my intellectual chops,” but some of Drift’s teachers have allowed him to reach his authentic self in academic work by providing him a safe space/*un espacio seguro*. I’m telling you, we’re not the only ones looking for a safe space in the program. A safe space, un *espacio seguro* from these professors is part of Drift’s graduate experience within the academy: “They brought my identity into the classroom, just right in front of me.” I feel such as a similar way. In an ivory tower in the academy, Drift gets to communicate and perform **how Drift performs**; “They talk like I talk” and Drift is able to talk the most in those safe spaces. I can’t believe he had to wait all this time in college to be himself. Yeah, he told me it was a shame for him to have entered in these spaces later in his college life, but he did tell me that he realizes his

college experience has allowed him to get a “full view of the racial dynamics, of power dynamics.” Yep, I guess we get to learn the good and the bad.

Drift referred back to **intellectual freedom**; you know when we can learn and do what we’re into to. Drift affirms and testifies, “**It’s giving you life; it’s life giving; it’s life affirming**, and that’s the most important part about **the work that WE do.**” *Ahora/NOW* that Drift has found his intellectual freedom to be and write himself and his identity in the academy, **within these spaces**, he struggles to reach his most REAL self in his work, “Once the chains come off, you ask yourself how should I fly”/ *volar alto, fuera de las cadenas/restricciones de la academia?* **KEEPIN IT REAL IS HIS STRUGGLE.** I didn’t know why it was a struggle for him, but now I get it. You know how it feels when we write those lengthy papers, and we’re asking our profs if we can write in Spanglish. Fingers crossed, lol.

Juxtaposed to his keepin it real praxis in his writing within the academy and in his classrooms, Drift finds this same praxis in his personal life. *En su espacio*, Drift uses opaque, coded language and in the classroom, he uses more direct language, especially if he doesn’t feel *seguro*. Yeah, he said something like If you know me and allow me to be safe, you know me through these riddles: “I love that freedom to communicate like that.” For instance, when hoopin, Drift *cuenta*: “Like I was playing basketball that other day, I saw this video of a rapper, Kodak Black, and he was doing an interview, right and then they ask him to speak some Haitian Creole, and the last thing he said was ‘**KOUPE TET BOULE KAY,**’ which means, chop off the head and burn houses down.” When Drift is able to be REAL, he is REAL enough to say comments like that and not be given problems: “If you say, chop off the head and burn the house down in freakin class, THEY’re going to arrest you” because they don’t understand the historical reference within Haitian Revolution and liberation of getting free no matter what. For Drift, this

motto is a rhetorical strategy because it depends on what you say and where you say it; it's about navigating through it all in the academy.

Keepin It Real

Drift's conversation reminded me of many concepts we learned in class the other day. For Drift, navigating through the academy has also meant learning about rhetorical impatience, kairos, and reclaiming time regarding self-care and rest as a racialized reality. Drift is aware of the legacy of slavery and subjugation endured by his *ancestros, y su gente*. He is well AWARE of how his community has been imposed to work arduously and how others perceive them to endure higher pain threshold. However, he realizes that rest and self-care is more present within the context of power dynamics because he doesn't feel that he has time to practice self-care and rest. Ultimately, Drift knows that race and power dynamics interact and that race is hidden underneath the so-called power dynamics, concepts he sees playing everywhere, globally. An awakening/*un despertar*: "Had I gone in to TCC with a freaking Black rhetoric class, I would have pursued that the whole way thru and this thesis process that I am in now, I would have flown through it. I guess the silver lining about this is that you get a full view of the racial dynamics, of power dynamics." Drift's *despertar* is shown true in all its splendor and is now battling to maintain his true self *en la academia* and do what he loves to pursue. I guess his story was inspirational for me because I feel so identified with him. Don't you? **An Awakening**

CHAPTER FIVE

¿Qué Les Pica? ¿Qué Nos Dicen? Analyzing their Testimonios

Que Les Pica? / What pokes them is a phrase that speaks to each of my friends' messages projected throughout this collaborative project.

Self-Care FO SHO: Dale a Tu Cuerpo

Dale a Tu Cuerpo. Give your body. Feed your body. Nourish your body. LISTEN to your body. These are the central messages instilled in this section and in many of my friends' testimonios. *Dale a tu cuerpo* when no one else will, especially in the academy. I mean this institution is an extension of [RACIAL] capitalism; so, how can it?! At the beginning of our *charlas/platicas*, I gave myself and my friends a moment to slow down as we breathed in and out. I then asked my friends something to the effect of “how did you feel, and have you ever been exposed to this type of slowing down in grad school or just in general?” None of my friends had been exposed to this slowing down practice in their graduate school journey; though some of my friends shared about professors who practiced a self-care check-in within their courses.

Leezon, however, shared two instances in college where he was introduced to breathing exercises—a feminist Chicana teacher asked everyone in class to breathe in and out for five minutes and during a graduate class symposium, the presenter asked everyone to take a moment to breathe with her. Leezon's exposure to the breathing exercises introduced by her feminist Chicana teacher earlier in college has opened a new perspective about slowing down in the academy; though Leezon has had graduate professors incorporate self-care methods, he wishes more of his graduate professors could incorporate breathing practices in their classrooms: “Once

I realized the impact it had on me—of the slowing down and breathing and being present in the classroom, was just something I’ve been taken with me to want to incorporate in my teaching practice in the future.”

Many of my friends shared that if the academy isn’t going to give you time to rest, we must find that time ourselves, and Leezon is a living testimony to having a desire to incorporate slowing down practices for his students in the future. Again and again, Maxine Water’s much needed and powerful message of **reclaiming time** ^{xxiv} is present in my friends’ *testimonios* when seeking self-care and joy while in graduate school. Yes, reclaiming time is necessary because the systems at play aren’t going to provide nourishment and care for us—society as a whole, but especially underrepresented and minority groups. Reclaiming time for my friends means taking control of their difficult realities—racism; discrimination; racial battle fatigue; aggressions; educative racial capitalism; lack of academic support—by practicing self-preservation. Though breathing exercises aren’t necessarily practiced and taught at graduate courses, other forms of slowing down as a tool for self-preservation are showcased in each of my friends’ *testimonios*.

In writing this section, I realized that Hope’s testimonio is the epitome of what it means to listen to our bodies. Instead of fighting her anxiety, she has learned to befriend it by learning when her body needs nourishment: “Paying attention to when my body is tensing, my heartbeat is racing—like learning the sensations that let me know—**HEY, SOMETHING IS NOT RIGHT HERE**. And learning to shift that, which a lot is stretching, breathing, moving my body.” Hope is **RECLAIMING HER TIME** by knowing when her body needs a much-needed *descanso*.

Again, the academy isn’t going to attend to her needs, so she takes control of her body. This act of resetting for Hope is revolutionary and an act of self-preservation because this act

requires her to know what **shit to let go of and when to let go of that shit**. This act of letting go to prioritize herself is what I see showcased as “**AIN’T NOBODY GOT TIME FOR THAT**,” a form of rhetorical impatience and political act for Black women as coined by Tamika Carey (273). In resetting, Hope is taking complete control of herself because in setting boundaries, she is allowing herself to “create more time and space for [herself] to **REST OR DO THE THINGS THAT ARE MORE IMPORTANT**”—**RECLAIMING HER TIME**. Hope’s message of listening to the body is vital to reclaiming one’s time in the academy.

Attending to one’s body can also be exemplified via naps, bodily movement, and other activities that allow the body to slow down. For Leezon, breathing and freewriting to reflect on his day is clearly a method he employs as a graduate student. However, Leezon also moves his body; he rides his bike to school because it helps him clear his mind from all the academic production, he knows he will inevitably do. Drift joins the crew to play basketball when he knows he needs a personal break and doesn’t hesitate to do so because it’s a source of catharsis and stress-relief. Like Leezon and Drift, Pablo intentionally engages in exercise because it helps him feel balanced to function not only on his schoolwork but on his health overall; he notices an overall improvement in his sleeping and energy levels. Pablo realizes that moving his body is vital to his overall health. Hence, he intentionally prioritizes his exercise and sports routine before proceeding with his school responsibilities.

What’s visible about my friends’ testimonio is my friends’ intentionality to attend to their bodies first, and Uche’s *testimonio* is an embodiment of resting with intention. Though she takes her role seriously as educator and leader during the semester, she also practices and seeks for intentional rest during long seasonal breaks: “But next week, when I travel, **YOU CAN’T TOUCH ME**.” No one can touch Uche during **her break**; she is not doing homework; she is not

taking scholarly opportunities; she is not emailing. Uche realized that if she can't take care of herself first, how will she intentionally take care of others? But this is not to say she doesn't take **random short breaks** during the semester when she knows she's going, going. Uche's intentional self-preservation isn't just for her but for her community as part of her mission is to propel initiatives on equity and revolutionary transformation.

But like Uche, Catherine makes sure to take naps when she knows her body is asking for it. Before, Catherine would keep on going with school work because she felt it necessary for her success. Today, if she feels like taking a nap, she takes it, and doesn't see it as an impediment to her success. Rather, she sees it as a necessity—a humane action. Catherine's new perspective on rest and naps derives from her experience with grind culture/capitalism.

Coming from a Mexican-American working-class family, she realizes the impact that capitalism and the so-called “American Dream” have on people, especially those who are trying to survive. Though Catherine recognizes that her labor is dissimilar to the physical labor her parents and family members must endure to survive, she nonetheless sees the importance of resting and slowing down in the academy in whatever capacity possible. Catherine realizes that her parents can only do so much to rest, either by coming from work and watching TV to *platicando* and laying down like her mom and dad fervently practice. After all, *platicar* is a form of healing and resistance to all forms of oppression (Morales et al. 1). It's an embodied practice of healing. When Catherine and her mom sit down to *platicar*, they invite their bodies into a ritual of healing by possibly centering their emotions and mother-daughter relationship. They take this time to *descansar* and slowdown from the every-day responsibilities.

Like Leezon, Catherine's concept of taking *benditos descansos* is imperative all people's mental health. Though Catherine and Leezon view capitalism in a new light as Mexican

Americans, the rest of my friends also put forth a message of rest due to the systems at play they must learn to navigate, especially at the academy—let’s remember that the academy isn’t going to provide us with the rest and self-care we need. As Tricia Hersey says, many Black folks have been taught the Black excellence, and like some of my friends, this mantra of keep on going is a clear message tied with their identities (80). However, like Catherine and Leezon, the rest of my friends have opted to rest and attend to their bodies as practices of resistance and healing, praxes taught to us by Black feminist scholars and practitioners like Tricia Hersey. After all, “resting is about getting people back to their truest selves” and “anything that slows you down enough to allow your body and mind to connect in the deepest way”—all ways that my friends have embodied in their *testimonios* (Hersey 83).

Self-Care FO SHO: Immersing in Culture Via *Bendita* Food and Music Literacies

I write this section because I see highlighted in many of my friends’ *testimonios* a longing to (re)connect to their cultural identities. I find rhetorical significance in the practices that my friends carry out to immerse themselves in their cultural roots via food and music literacies that highlight loudly and proudly the joy of returning back to who they are as students of color in this [racial] capitalistic and grind culture environment. In remembering some of my friends’ voices, I always go back to their phrase: THIS SYSTEM ISN’T ALWAYS GOING TO PROVIDE US WHAT WE NEED. I highlight important concepts to showcase the rhetorical significance behind their SELF-CARE praxes—rhetorical *herencia*, racial politics of time, ancestral remembering, cultural resistance, and cultural literacies. I also acknowledge that food and music literacies are part of community self-care and being in community, the focus of the next section.

Catherine and Pablo have testified engaging in food literacies which consequently brings them joy. From the get-go, Catherine and Pablo have most definitely, 100% testified that cooking and being around their cultural food brings them genuine joy. You see, Pablo tries to cook Mexican food and calls his *apas* for advice, like that one-time Pablo called her *ama* to ask her how to cook *lentejas* because he loves how his *ama* cooks them. Similarly, Catherine finds comfort and a sense of familiarity when she cooks food her *ama* used to cook for the *familia*. And although Catherine can't taste her *ama*'s Mexican food, she has the opportunity to share her AUTHENTIC food with her community—Green *Posole*. Catherine calls community friends who are not only willing to try her cultural cuisine, but people who she feels comfortable being herself through her cultural identity. Making food is not just a form of relaxation and mindfulness practice for Pablo and Catherine as they are able to stay focused during food preparation; it's also a form of genuine immense joy/*gozo*. In other words, for Catherine and Pablo, preparing Mexican food is not part of the productivity found in capitalism and grind culture, it is joyous “production.” Because Catherine can't cook food for her husband, she finds joy when sharing it with her friends as it brings her closer to her culture. And then there's Uche, who testifies she enjoys cooking because it brings her **peace**.

Like Pablo, **Catherine doesn't feel bad about reclaiming her time to cook her food: “I didn't feel guilty for USING MY TIME TO cook this food. I was excited.”** Pablo's self-care strategy in the kitchen helps him cope with the fact that he attends a PWI institution. **So, if the PWI institution cannot bring him closer to his identity and culture, he (re)claims his time.** Yes, **reclaiming time** is what Maxine Waters coins when she reclaimed her time—not taking BS—during a Financial Service Hearing. Related to this concept is Brittney Cooper's concept of **Racial Politics of Time** (WUSA9 “Reclaiming My Time”).

When reclaiming time, we—students of color on this occasion—do not allow capitalistic systems to continue oppressing us by taking our time—time to find joy through our cultures, time to share our cultures collectively, time to rest, time to (re)connect with our communities/our loved ones. Overall, students of color like Pablo and Catherine are reclaiming their time **unapologetically**, but by doing so, **they are not assimilating** to the dominant Eurocentric environment found in graduate school, specifically at a PWI institution. Instead, they are representing their cultures and identities well. By reclaiming time, they are **NO LONGER BEING COLONIZED**.

In eating their traditional foods, Pablo and Catherine are preserving and conversing their ancestral food literacies/their *herencia*. Yes, *herencia* is a term that Cristina Ramirez defines as “traits, customs, practices, beliefs, and memories we inherit from our ancestors and connected collective culture **to our present realities**” (167). But *herencia* doesn’t just end there, because **ancestral remembering** refers to the ways we tap into our *ancestros* “through our ways of participating in the world—THE FOOD WE EAT, THE MUSIC WE LISTEN TO, THE LITERATURE WE READ, THE CUSTOMS WE KEEP, THE WAYS WE WORSHIP, THE PLACES WE LIVE AND WORK, AND THE TOPICS WE ENGAGE IN FOR RESEARCH AND WRITING” (Ramirez 167). And yes, ancestral remembering is a praxis that will repeatedly show up throughout this thesis because many of the participants showcase their returning back to their roots. But in this case, Catherine and Pablo are remembering their *ancestros* via authentic Mexican food.

Catherine testifies that she doesn’t find the same joy cooking other foods. As communities of color, we experience institutional suppression and colonial violence, and therefore, by connecting with our ancestors, we are **tapping into memory**—family/cultural

foods we obtain from our ancestors—for self-care. Catherine and Pablo are tapping into ancestral remembering to “ground [them] in the present”—their graduate journey at a PWI institution— "and direct [them] toward a transformational future” (Ramirez 168). Catherine and Pablo may be tapping into food as their *herencia* for self-care as a source of mental, physical, and spiritual nourishment.

Moreover, for Pablo, attending spaces that bring him joy allows him to feel a **sense of belonging** in a community familiar to him because he is connected to **ancestral memory**, beginning with cultural spaces similar to those he was a part of in the past—spaces that he connects with his culture and family/ancestry (Ramirez 167). Pablo enjoys hearing different types of Spanish and also loves to attend Korean restaurants where employees are from that culture because he loves how they communicate with each other freely and authentically while embracing their identities and culture. It is no secret how food taps into our ancestral memory. Steven Alvarez illustrates how food literacies allow us to connect to the visceral element of our human experience since “food that powers the body is a central network of MEANING” and a “visceral teaching tool” (“Taco Literacies”).

The emotions we register through our cultural foods allow us to tap into our historical and ancestral memories that can be defined as ancestral remembering; *es recordar a los tuyos y esos espacios que te hacen vibrar, vivir, respirar, y sonreir porque esto tambien es parte del cuidado personal que nos brinda gozo en un espacio no familiar*—in this occasion, graduate school. In Pablo’s and Catherine’s case, “food [for them] is an emotional element of [their parents’] immigrant experiences” they bring with them to the U.S. (Alvarez, “Taco Literacies”).

Aside from the spaces/communities that surround these foods, music also brings joy to some of my friends, and this too, is a form of **ancestral remembering**. Drift testifies his love for

rap freewriting: “writing music is a good way for me to work through what I’m learning. When I write, it’s not a super conscious” activity; instead it’s a stream of consciousness that allows Drift to capture his thoughts in the moment. Like food literacies, music is an aesthetic—an authentic form of expression for Drift because it connects him to his identity—to his *herencia*. I would argue that Drift’s rap freewriting connects to the rap legacy expressed by Baruti N. Kopano in his article, “Rap Music as an Extension of the Black Rhetorical Tradition: Keepin It Real.” Drift’s ability to easily write in rap allows him to dismantle **hegemony** found in graduate school studies, specifically in writing and learning.

In remembering Hope’s comment about once upon a time being creative as a child, and her mentor/teacher expressing to her that there are **more truer ways that Black communities communicate**, I argue that Drift finds nourishment in rap writing as he is tapping into his cultural identity. This form of self-care practice does not conform to Eurocentric modes of expression, that many times, do not honor joy in learning or the valuable cultural knowledge production of marginalized communities because it limits students’ potential. Drift’s ability to rap-write allows him to navigate through the academy and practice **cultural resistance**, the act of not assimilating to the dominant culture (Kopano, 204).

And yes, Drift expresses a similar sentiment toward assimilation when specifically talking about his pops when he came to the United States from his native home in Jamaica: “They’re gonna try to impose themselves on to whatever culture they encounter: American culture, you know, imposes itself on to every other culture.” But ultimately, there’s a going back to one’s roots even if it means not feeling safe or a part of the dominant group. So, you either assimilate or represent you culture well.

Like Drift, Pablo and Uche also tap into their cultural music as markers of their identity. Pablo listens to *corridos tumbados*, *norteñas*, and *banda*, as a source of relaxation, when he drives long distances. Pablo's selection of Mexican music is also a marker of his identity and ancestral remembering; he is choosing to listen to music that represents him through his culture: "Long drives relax me with music; I think those are some of the things I try in my capacity as" a Ph.D. candidate. In Pablo's capacity as a doctoral student, he chooses to engage in food and music that bring him back to his cultural roots; let us remember that these self-care praxes allow him to navigate in a PWI institution.

Like Drift and Pablo, Uche believes in the power of her Afro Beats to bring her back to her **purpose and energetic spirit**—her why *porque esta musica es un pedacito de su raices*/because this music is a little piece of her Nigerian roots. Uche listens to these Afro Beats to "get it going" and continue with her calling. Thus, her Afro Beats are powerful because not only do they motivate her to "get it going," they are a remembrance of her Nigerian roots and what her community has instilled on her. Uche believes in the good values of her Nigerian community, and it is this calling that propel her with her mission: "I am always striving to be in community with my Nigerian community because it brings me back to my WHY."

Comida: Las Memorias y Nuestra Herencia

Some communities call it Soul Food; I call it *Bendita Comida*.

Bendita Comida de mi Mexico—"Mexico Lindo y Querido"

I call it ancestral food; food straight from our ancestors; our parents; our *abuelitos*.

My grandmother cooked it, and now my mom passes it down to me.

Tortillas, Mole, Posole, Tacos, Birria. Uhhh and there's more!

Yes, the food I see on the streets back in my homeland.

The food I smell in festivities, celebrations—*Día de Los Muertos, Bodas, Quinceaneras*... You name it!

Las Fiestas llegan y también llegan los tacos—the Taco Street Vendors down the plaza are awaiting

Los Tacos dan sus aromadas

¿Ahora si me recuerdas, Paisano del Alama?

Las Bodas llegan, y también llegan las Carnitas.

Si, las carnitas adornadas de Pico de Gallo, ¡y del más picoso! ¡Si Señor!

Cuando la gente se sienta en sus mejores galas, las carnitas dan sus aromadas

¿Ahora si me recuerdas, Paisano del Alama?

The Food back there is brought here by my aunts and mom and is now being passed down to us.

Yes, here in the U.S.

It's being transported to tierras *lejanas*/distant lands.

They cross *fronteras* and checkpoints.

Don't forget me/*no te olvides de mí*.

Don't forget your roots!

As my Jorge Negrete would sing:

México Lindo y Querido

Si muero lejos de ti

Que digan que estoy dormido

Y que me traigan aquí (by Jesús Ramírez Monge)

Platica Time: As you ease into your day **to slow down**, think about what foods tap into your ancestors and your family traditions. What memories do they bring to you? Feel the sensations, and ENJOY YOUR FOOD!

Self-Care FO SHO: Community/Seres Queridos/Mentors

This is no new discovery; students of color are finding ways to be their authentic selves and feel a sense of belonging with their *gente*/their communities as they are navigating through an environment not welcoming and inclusive of their identities. Via cultural literacies/*herencia*—food and music—they are tapping into their cultural communities/loved ones. Hence, being in community, with *seres queridos* like parents and friends, with mentors, who support them, is part of my friends' self-care praxes. *Seres queridos* and the power of the collective found in familia/ancestry and friends is a powerful theme highlighted in my friends' testimonios. ***Que RESUENEN SUS VOCES! Let their voices ECHO!***

During our *platica*, Uche and Hope shared with me their love for their culture/ancestry. Their testimonios are an emblem of their loved ones and ancestry's teachings. As mentioned above, Uche's love for her Nigerian community is a source of nourishment as she navigates the academy. The admiration she has for her community and ancestry is noticeable: "Nigerians are LIT! We celebrate everything. We celebrate death; we celebrate birth because it **brings us back to our ancestry.**"

As reflected in Uche's testimonio, there is no doubt that being in community with her people is a source of joyous rest praxis and calling. But more profoundly, her community is a **source of TEACHING** for students of color like Uche. Her people's teachings are an *herencia* to Uche as ancestors have guided her to practice ancestral remembering through her day-to-day activities that are a source of self-care.

Uche shares, “I can’t do this work by myself. I don’t want to do this work by myself. It would drive me crazy. This is too much to eradicate; it’s too much to change. I don’t want to be the maker of all piecing. You know the African Proverb, ‘**Going far, you have to go together.**’” Uche’s ancestry teaches her to work in collaboration with others to eradicate racial injustice and inequities and this is no different when navigating the academy—because as Uche shares, the academy is a place of exclusion.

Uche urges graduate students to be in community and in collaboration to survive and thrive in this environment where racism and discrimination are present. But a more profound message is communicated in her testimonio and leadership roles. As a Black student, scholar, and educator, Uche knows she cannot work on her own, especially when Black women from all walks of life—including those positioned in the world of academia—have been expected to work exhaustively to prove themselves. As Uche claims, “I think that I didn’t know what [**racial battle fatigue**] was until you’re actually in it. So, it’s hard because oftentimes **WE** pass as minoritized people to almost pick up the pieces and figure out for the things that people have done to **US**.”

In this exhaustion, Black women have no choice but to rest and practice self-care through **self-preservation**, concepts Tricia Hersey, Tamika Carey, and many other Black scholars have discussed extensively and exhaustively in their scholarly work.

Por eso, as a Black woman in the academy, *ella acude a su comunidad, a sus raíces* for self-preservation. That is why Uche returns to her community—her roots—for self-preservation in the academy. I cannot forget scholars like Tamika Carey, whose concept of **rhetorical impatience** speak into Black women’s impatience when navigating through oppressive systems. In Uche’s case, she is intentional about transformative change in the academy, and it is this

intentionality that is emblematic of her impatience about the biases and inequities of the educative system. In other words, she is impatiently waiting for changes to be made, but she is not willing to make these changes on her own. Instead, Uche is hopeful and intentional about making transformative changes in academic spaces with others in community—as her ancestry teaching professes.

‘Ain’t Nobody Got Time for That’ is a phrase that describes Uche’s and Hope’s experience because they are not willing to do all this valuable work on their own. It is collective power that propels Uche and Hope’s self-care praxis. As Angela Davis continually reminds us, it is the collective power from marginalized communities that allows for progressive change (Brown University, “From Angela Davis, a call for both hope and collective action”).

Like Uche, Hope recognizes that care begins collectively, especially when you are considered a minority in this country: “The more intersections you have, the more you are prone to stress; there are more systems at play, oppressing you. IT’S JUST THE TRUTH. That requires a higher level of care, of SELF-CARE, COMMUNITY CARE, but while it does, it is such a tension. Like how you create that [community/self-care] when these systems are against you? We got to do it COLLECTIVELY.” It is pulling resources and finding support with community, those who are in the same collective struggle—like family—that allows Hope and her Black women colleagues/classmates to navigate through graduate school like Hope stresses: “sometimes I have to pass it down to my husband—when talking about pulling in my resources. YOU GOT TO DO IT; I GOT TO FOCUS HERE.” But more importantly, like Uche, Hope finds joy in her grandmother’s hometown homecoming every October, concerts, festivals, art museums, and church—spaces where she can be in community.

Similarly, Leezon finds self-care in community and traces it back to his **ancestral family values** to navigate the academy. After all, “we value rest/family, which is self-care and rest is a major aspect of our culture.” You see, Leezon transfers the meaning of family values he learned from his upbringing to other places, wherever he resides and makes these spaces his family/community. Leezon believes that family doesn’t have to be your bloodline, but rather any group that supports one another for the good of the community. In his hometown, they all helped each other as neighbors, friends, and families.

Now that Leezon resides in the Fort Worth area, he is bringing those family values into the trans group and elementary afterschool program. Like Uche and Hope, Leezon is acting upon principles of **collective power and care** as community self-care praxis. Leezon’s family values are reflected in his community involvement outside academic work production because he sees value in giving back to his community and connecting to his academic/scholar identity via community work “production.”

According to Octavio Pimentel and Nancy Wilson, Latinx students in the academy have strong ties to their families and communities and tend to pay less attention to individualistic achievement goals promoted in the academy (125-136). It is through this ancestry teaching of being in community that Leezon finds joy: “It brings me joy to break away from the studying and reading and going; hanging out with these kids is just amazing.” Uche, Leezon, and Hope tap into community to navigate the academy as a self-preservation praxis. However, more importantly, when they are in community, they are defying the capitalistic productivity syndrome because they are finding joy and true embodiment in their communities. Let their voices be a remembrance of our ancestors and what they teach us about practicing self-care in community and with *seres queridos* while navigating through the academy. Most importantly, when my

friends are in community, they are doing work that brings them joy and a sense of purpose outside capitalism and the production found in graduate schools.

Mentors and OUR JOY FOR LEARNING!

When talking about mentors, I am also referring to finding support in one's community. For Hope, being in community with other Black women at her university—faculty, staff, and peers—has been a blessing, and is part of what she considers a psychological safety-net as she navigates through her academic journey. And yes, context matters because Hope has had bad experiences with white women at her university. More importantly, she highlights the blessing of being mentored by Black women who understand where she's coming from without having to explain much or “perform” based on graduate Eurocentric standards. In sharing her anxiety with writing, Hope found comfort and reassurance by her Black mentor/teacher as she was reassured of TRUER ways that her Black community communicates. Yes, mentoring for underrepresented students at the graduate level is highly shared in many of my friends' testimonios.

Like Hope, who finds comfort and reassurance from a professor who understands her, Pablo, Drift, and Uche also find validation in their professors/mentees in a PWI institution. For instance, Pablo discusses his experience attending a class where he felt validated and safe to ask questions; he felt his identity was represented in the classroom. Drift also speaks of several professors who allow him to be himself in the class. Pablo doesn't have to be cautious about what he says because these professors speak and act like him. Drift expresses that since he cannot be his authentic self in the academy, he finds community outside the academy that allows him to be himself without repercussions.

Drift finds comfort and safety when shooting hoops with friends from different neighborhoods because he can talk in **coded language** with them, whereas, in CERTAIN graduate classrooms, he needs to use **direct Eurocentric “professional and valid” language**. With his friends, he doesn’t have to explain himself and or “perform” a certain way: “I always thought that I had to flex, you know, my intellectual chops” at school. Within HIS community, he feels a sense of belonging and authenticity.

Like Drift, Pablo also finds a sense of belonging and authenticity with his friends outside school grounds because like him, he can share and enjoy Mexican food—Mexican food is a shared cultural gift that Pablo and his friends have. Thus, Pablo does not have to explain himself to them. For example, he planned to invite his friend to eat Mexican breakfast with him over the weekend. For many of my friends, mentorship means being validated without having to prove themselves any longer.

Lastly, Uche shares about the professor who gave her an opportunity to begin her doctoral graduate journey; her situation is significant because other institutions were not giving her the opportunity to excel further in a career. Uche’s experience with her professor was different because this professor encouraged her to apply to the doctoral program knowing she could excel in it. All these mentors/professors believed in my friends and gave them the opportunity to be themselves, allowing them to feel safe and validated.

More importantly, these mentors propelled and supported my friends’ journeys, which consequently allowed my friends to enjoy their graduate experience. Their joy in learning no longer is directed and projected by a grinding and capitalistic system found in graduate programs. During graduate schools, there are a set of qualifications that students must meet or perform as part of their intellectual “laborious contract,” but if mentors support **TRUE**

authenticity and **JOY** in learning, mentees will find an alternative to this capitalistic system—especially when the mandated work is not part of our needs and identities.

Drift affirms and testifies, “**It’s giving you life; it’s life giving; it’s life affirming**, and that’s the most important part about the **WORK THAT WE DO.**” Drift is referring to work that is life giving for students of color because **OUR** work is not **RESPECTFULLY AND OPENLY** represented in the academy. The work Drift is referring to is **life giving** because it allows us to perform in the ways we know best and that allow us to learn more about ourselves and our communities; this work is rhetorically significant because we are performing this work as a resistance against the environment we are surrounded by—a Eurocentric and capitalistic system.

If Hope had to “perform” up to the standards of Eurocentric graduate school writing, her work would not be “good” enough for the approvers of the system. However, Hope’s mentor reassured and validated her experience within the realms of writing production and this advice has now liberated her to continue with her graduate school journey more joyously as she now knows that there are truer ways, she can express herself on all things learned. After speaking to her mentor, Hope testifies feeling “So affirming and so freeing. It’s kind of taking like a weight off my shoulders” because [I] no longer have to fit this “academic box” of writing performance.

QUE RESUENEN SUS VOCES/Let their voices resonate and listen to their testimonios. Rhetorically speaking, my friends have had enough and are finding community that understands and validates their experiences, outside and inside the academy. As you can see, some students are finding communities outside their institutions because it allows them to feel safe since graduate school falls short, and when they find mentors/professors who support them, they find community. However, once they find these mentors, students of color don’t know how to handle that intellectual freedom because they were not given that opportunity in the past to

begin with. They were so used to the educative system's **VIOLENT** structure. Moreover, Hope shares that like her, "people of color feel a different set of expectations and pressure, to like, prove themselves or not break the status quo."

And like Hope, Drift didn't know how to think outside the box before meeting with some of his professors. Now that Drift has found his intellectual freedom to be and write himself and his identity in the academy, within these safe spaces in certain courses, he struggles to reach his most REAL self in his work; "Once the chains come off, you ask yourself how should I fly?" Drift questions how real he can be when writing and how "academic" his written work must be. And just like Drift, Uche didn't know how to react when her professor asked to apply for her doctoral program; she didn't know how to fly graciously. "No, you don't understand. I don't have the scores. I am not going to subject myself to denial again, when I'm in control right now."

Hence, my friends know that being in spaces, with mentors, who allow them to be **authentic**, is what brings them joy and allows them to fly graciously in graduate school, as they should and could. Mentorship from these professors reminds me of the work Sonia Arellano, Jose Manuel Cortez, and Romeo Garcia write about in their discussion on **Shadow Work** in the academy. My friends are having to navigate the academy obtaining all the support they can get from the few professors, some of which are BIPOC, to remind them that they belong: "But it's the work of my mentors and peers that has made me feel like I belong to something" (Arellano et al.). It is within this shadow work that mentors instill on BIPOC students to feel safe and welcomed when the rest of the academy has set off its DEI work *disfrasado de justicia y equidad, cuando en realidad solo es una infraestructura de white supremacy* in the academy (Arellano et al. 44).

And it is this **Shadow Work** that my friends do—some as students and some as both students and faculty. They do this Shadow Work in their communities and with their *seres queridos*. Within this Shadow Work, we find **transformational role models** or “visible members of one’s own racial/ethnic/and or gender group who actively demonstrate a commitment to social justice” and “their own experiences and expertise to help guide the development of others (Solorzano and Bernal 322). My friends’ mentors are doing shadow work as transformational role models or transformational mentors as they actively find justice in their daily teaching professions and use their experiences to guide students who are experiencing similar struggles in graduate school. More importantly, these transformational mentors are providing my friends with the tools to create spaces for self-care and joy as mentors provide them with social consciousness about the systems themselves and how to navigate them.

Hence, the “**nice**” **teacher/mentor** in the academy is not enough as showcased in each of my friends’ *testimonios*. Scholars such as Sonia Nieto remind us that the nice teacher is not enough. When it comes to academic mentors, it’s not enough to be “nice.” Teachers really need to know how to stand up for students genuinely try to understand where they’re coming from and how their cultural identities are valuable and pertinent aspects of students’ work in the academy.

It is hard for Pablo to feel a sense of belonging in classrooms like the one he mentioned in his *testimonio* with his professor because the readings not only excluded his Latinx/Mexican identity, on a personal level, but also defied his and many students’ values of social equity and justice. Hence, being the “nice” teacher is not enough. It was not enough for his professor to be “nice” by asking Pablo if he was fine after class ended because the instructed reading for the week was prejudiced and exclusive of Pablo’s and many students’ values. However, it’s hard for the professors who attend to BIPOC students’ needs to continue with mentorship work as the

structure is already broken to begin with. What's hopeful is that my friends are strategically and intentionally finding alternatives to be their authentic selves.

“Success” in Graduate School: Being or Assimilating

Would it be fair and accurate to say that self-care involves staying true to oneself? If that's the case, I can only imagine how liberating and joyful it is for my graduate friends to be themselves in a space that evidently has its own agenda for students to be “successful”—whatever the academy deems “**successful**.” And indeed, I suppose my graduate friends are joyful and much more liberated as they themselves claimed to find joy and peace in staying true to themselves. Because I didn't have enough time to ask my friends whether they considered this to be part of their self-care, I can only imagine and suppose.

Yes, I am filling in the gaps by accounting to their overall message of what they were claiming/voicing out from the wilderness. *Esto es lo que piden* and so they holler on this concept/praxis over and over throughout their *testimonios*. Within the realm of self-care, the participants revealed that in navigating the academy, they actively choose to stay true to themselves, and this too, was their definition of ‘success.’ Staying true to themselves means upholding their personal values, not losing their essence/passions/callings, and or not following a timely Eurocentric capitalistic agenda imposed by the academy.

Pablo discusses how Eurocentric academic values are “antagonistic of family values” as he notices that Ph.D. students are pushed to find jobs at prestigious institutions away from family. For Pablo, having to leave his family to obtain an education is a source of stress for him. Till this day, he finds ways to connect with his identity. In many cases, **assimilating** to the academy's needs—for students of color—is a source of stress. For instance, Pablo repeatedly

discusses that a ‘successful’ graduate student is able to practice and uphold certain values for themselves throughout their graduate journey. You see, Pablo believes in family values not upheld in academic institutions. Pablo realizes that he has left his family to obtain an education away from home. However, he prioritizes self-care by staying close to his family and ancestral *herencia*. How? As previously described, Pablo is immersed in his Mexican culture by eating at Mexican restaurants—spaces where he can evidently stay true to himself.

Like Pablo, Leezon practices self-care by staying true to his community/family values: “We value rest/family, which is self-care and rest is a major aspect of our culture.” To Leezon, a source of self-care is being in community/family, a concept already touched above in section “Self-Care FO SHO: Community/*Seres Queridos*/Mentors.” Although Leezon realizes that being with family can distract students from focusing on school, he nonetheless sees value in giving back to his scholar/student identity as opposed to merely producing all this academic work.

Even though Leezon is away from family, he still keeps family values by connecting with his community wherever he resides to attend graduate school. Leezon learned “how community/family is not always your blood but making a community-making family” wherever you live. In volunteering at a middle school, he practices self-care as it brings him joy: “Not only am I doing the work in the institution, but I am doing work within the community. It gives me joy to break away from this studying and reading and going; hanging out with these kids is just amazing.”

Most importantly, as graduate students of color, Pablo and Leezon *agarran el toro por los cuernos*; you see, they take opportunities in graduate school that contribute to their learning development as Latinx scholars. Literally, *agarrar el toro por los cuernos* means taking the bull by the horns. **Rhetorically**, I would argue that taking the bull by the horns is reclaiming time and

intervening/taking control of the situation because if the academy—especially a PWI institution—isn't giving you what you need, then you need to do something about it.

There is a distinction here between reclaiming time on activities outside school grounds and reclaiming time within the academy—that is, when they go back to their studies; but in both scenarios, my friends are creating space for self-care and joy, alternatives to the racial capitalistic system found in graduate education. My friends are all learning to **strategically and creatively reclaim time** in their graduate programs. They all grab the bull by the horns and are unapologetic about it. Again, within school grounds, Brittney Cooper's concept on racial politics is vital to understanding the value that these students hold when navigating a PWI institution. **Racial Politics** shines a light on how time is inevitably an element of racism as “historically, it has been stolen from people of color, resulting in lost moments of joy and connection, lost years of healthy quality of life and the delay of progress” (TED talks, “Brittney Cooper: The Racial Politics of Time”).

For Pablo, reclaiming time or taking the bull by the horns meant that he needed to intervene in his education. He reclaimed HIS time by petitioning to take four courses in the fall and one in the spring his second year to avoid faculty that couldn't and wouldn't represent his culture and values. By doing so, he felt more comfortable and at peace with himself. If you recall, Pablo *atestigua* how much easier it was for him to be his authentic self in one of these courses: “The professor was also really great at not only receiving my ideas but then asking me questions or suggesting readings that really helped me develop those ideas even more. And it shortened my writing because I started engaging in specific topics that I hadn't engaged before.” If it hadn't been for Pablo's unapologetic twist to reclaim time, he would have not known about

his true calling/passions for his future career. As a source of self-care, he was resisting/refusing to take courses that wouldn't represent him.

And in staying true to himself, Pablo was also resisting by *rotundamente* not reading specific course readings that did not align with his values and beliefs. Pablo's resistance may also be defined as **transformational resistance**— behaviors that “illustrate both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice” (Solorzano and Bernal 319). More specifically, Pablo demonstrates a consciousness of the oppression and inequities of school systems as he intentionally avoids taking courses offered every semester—limited number of courses that most of the time do not align with our values/identities/callings, but that are offered to fulfill student count— and instead acts on an external resistance behavior. According to Solorzano and Bernal, **external resistance behavior** is “openly visible and overtly operates outside the traditional system” (326). By intentionally and actively enrolling in classes outside the graduate course schedule, Pablo is defying the traditional graduate system and is conscious of the actions he is taking.

Like Pablo, Leezon is actively doing research that connects him to his identity, specifically as a Latinx gay male. Doing so, brings him joy/drive/passion to continue with these studies: “**I need** to research more. **I need** to find that narrative. **I need** to do that **labor** that my professors are not doing. **I need** to find that work and read into it because that gave me that **drive**; that gave me the **passion** to want to continue forward in this study that's not represented in this graduate atmosphere.” Like Pablo, Leezon is actively finding classes and research that represent his identity.

We can't separate Leezon's identity as a Latinx, gay male from his research and community work because these are a reflection of two important elements: 1) what his

people/*gente* need and 2) how he stays true to himself at a PWI institution. Hence, Leezon is emblematic of a **sociopolitical identity/statement** as shown with his repeating statement of “**I need.**” The “**I need**” is emblematic of his identity as a Latinx gay scholar at a PWI. Moreover, when he uses the term “**labor,**” he is not referring to the labor we all experience in racial capitalistic systems, including those in schools. Rather, the labor he is “producing” is a joyful endeavor and part of his purposeful community work and self-care agenda.

In retrospect, the participants all acknowledge following their true purpose and doing the things within the academy **that gives them life—that is life affirming**, as Drift defines. And it’s no surprise that their research interests are intimately connected to their desire to pursue an authentic self within the academy. Their sociopolitical research interests connect them to their people and themselves as they find that the academy is empty—*vacía porque no ofrese todo lo que nosotros necesitamos*.

Rhetorically speaking, many of my graduate friends’ research areas reflect and embody their needs and the needs of their communities—due to their identities in this country—within an institution that will not give them the resources to fuel their research communities. As found in Marcelle M. Haddix’s “Thus is Us: Discourses of Community Within and Beyond Literacy Changes,” community and scholarly work is directly aligned with Haddix’s and many of her Black comrades’ identities as Black Feminists. Powerfully, Haddix’s community work is informed by Harriet Tubman’s and other “Black women’s commitment toward community—fighting for a community of people to be free” (29).

More profoundly, Haddix shares that “the work [she does] and that [she has] been privileged to engage in is deeply **informed** by who [she is]” (29). It is precisely Haddix’s identity as a woman of color that drives her community work. In a similar light, it is my friends’

identities that inform their work and practices in graduate school and outside it. And Like Pablo and Leezon, my other friends are demonstrating resisting behaviors—external and internal—to define their ‘success’ in graduate school. It is evident that my friends uphold differing values from those of this capitalistic system, even they their resistant acts are “subtle or even silent and may go unnamed as transformational resistance” (Solorzano and Bernal 324).

Drift describes capitalism in graduate school as a **MACHINE** ready to impose itself onto students so that they make money by following a timely-straightforward capitalistic agenda. However, Drift is not willing to follow a predetermined path set by graduate school. He is not here to make money, but rather looks for ways to his authentic self and “figure out why [he is] the way [he is].” In other words, he is in graduate school to do work that gives him joy and not buy into this emotionless hegemonic entity—the so-called **MACHINE**. In “producing” work that is joyful to him and allows him to learn more about his identity, he is acting on internal transformational behavior.

Some may argue that since Drift is ultimately carried “down the thesis process,” he is not acting against the traditional system in graduate school—that is against graduate school’s predetermined path for “success.” However, Drift’s thesis is an emblem of his resistance against “laborious” work promoted in graduate school because he is passionate researching about his identity in a PWI.

In a similar light, Catherine describes capitalism in graduate school as a violent, emotionless entity: “What we’re expected to produce; what we’re expected to produce for the university. I really would’ve never seen that until IT impacted me.” And it is this emotionless entity that Catherine attributes to her upbringing as a Mexican American working-class individual in this country, and though she acknowledges that work in graduate school is

intellectual rather than physical work, she nonetheless sees the negative impact labor in graduate school has had on her. Hence, Catherine acts by changing her perception of academia; she continues to engage in things that genuinely bring her joy and cherishing moments she herself defines as ‘success.’ Instead of being happy/joyful about obtaining recognition/merits in graduate school and checking off a box, she is finding joy in the “little” moments—her teaching and scholarly work.

Uche and Hope also find what brings them joy in graduate school. Hope shares, “A successful graduate student is one who can come here and stay true to what they’re eager to learn. Not allow that to be stolen from them—that JOY of learning.” And since Hope is not allowing an institution to steal her JOY in learning, she is creatively looking for courses outside her immediate reach. I conclude with Uche’s statement emblematic of transformational resistance— “If you are happy in your purpose, it brings a different kind of JOY,” one “operating outside the traditional system.”

Interrelated Themes of Self-care amongst Students of Color

In analyzing each *testimonio* thoroughly, there appeared to be three subthemes for self-care amongst my friends. I realized that under self-care, the participants seemed to immerse in culture, connect with community/loved ones/mentors, and attend to their body in several ways. However, in many ways, self-care also seemed to be manifested/portrayed in their intentionality to strategically and creatively stay true to themselves—their identities and passions in graduate school.

Even though the participants did not directly label their intentionality to be strategic and creative about staying true to themselves as part of their self-care repertoire, it is nonetheless part

of their self-care repertoire within a PWI institution. And yes, staying true to themselves and practicing self-care as manifested in each of their testimonios disregards the capitalistic production we all have been indoctrinated to practice. In other words, my friends showcase how their “production” goes against capitalistic production because these genuinely bring them joy and help them navigate their graduate journeys. It's not about the grades, the publications they submit, or the acceptance they receive; it's about being themselves within this academy by engaging in meaningful work.

After all, if we engage in the academy's capitalistic productivity syndrome, we become NUMB and JOYLESS for who/whom? *SI DE POR SI LA ACADEMIA YA PIDE MUCHO DE NOSOTOS!* I repeat this phrase, not once, but hundreds of times when reading my friends' *testimonios*. Their *testimonios* scream an alternative to what the academy “feeds” them. Moreover, in analyzing the participants' responses to how they define ‘success’ in graduate school, I noticed that all, but one, participant responded to the theme of staying true to themselves.

Leezon's response to his definition of success is “taking care of himself first and foremost and staying organized.” However, it is evident Leezon seeks being true to himself in the academy by connecting with community/family and his identity as his purpose/calling, which brings him joy. Thus, for my friends, staying true to themselves is how they define ‘success’ in graduate school: their ‘success’ is reflected in their ability to stay entuned with their values, goals, passions, interests, calling/purpose, and or moments that bring them **JOY** within the academic system.

CHAPTER SIX

In Closing: *Carticas*/Letters

I imagine myself conversing/*platicando* to my friends as if we had more time and space to do so. If I only had more time to tell them how I felt or thought about certain topics spoken during our *platicas*. Here in this space, I recreate that time and space, imagining myself speaking to them, but by way of personal and vulnerable letters/*carticas*. Why by way of letters? Well, I don't want to conclude by "reporting" on "findings." Since testimonios are already personal, I want to create a space where my writing is genuinely personal and special, creating a space where I can be authentic with my feelings and thoughts—an embodied form of writing. I don't want to end this project with a conclusion because the testimonios are enough; my friends' voices are more than enough.

Hi Leezon,

When you mention your family and our Mexican-American essence, I feel recognized because I grew up with a family who also values working hard and lending a hand to *salir adelante*/to somehow advance to the next "step" in this country. Yeah, you know what I mean. I remember my aunts and uncles living with my parents when they first came to Fort Worth; these were hard times, but we made it through because we helped each other through it. I think this concept you mention about working hard is engrained in us; I remember my family members working from 3 pm to 12 midnight in a *fabrica*—*Sara Lee* Corn Dogs. But also, what's real important about what you mention is that we also value family and rest. Rest is truly important and so is community. Like on Sundays, I have vivid memories of my dad sleeping and us getting out to enjoy time or doing cook-outs with our family members. I also know about other Mexican families who get together during the weekends and build community while resting to escape

momentarily the working routine. And they build community via our *bendita comida* or just about anything that reminds us of our culture, where we come from.

When you mention rest/family, what does that look like for you? When I think of family/rest, I think of connecting with our people and sleeping/*tomando siestas* at home because I saw this in my *familia*. I know you mention that family doesn't have to be blood, and you define family/community as finding people like you or that simply need help, and that's wonderful. It's wonderful how being in community and reaching out to community is what brings you joy. It's not just about performing in graduate school and producing this work; I feel that for you, it's about putting into practice what you know, believe in, and have a passion for. In other words, you're intentionally indulging in community work as a form of self-care. And although you mention valuing rest/family as Mexican-Americans/Latinos, I am surprised to hear that it took a while for you to practice being present and slowing down. I guess as Mexican-Americans/Latinos, we practice rest through other means. Like I mentioned before, I can think of sleeping and getting together to DESCANSAR through our gatherings and cultural practices, but when you mention slowing down and winding down through writing reflection, I saw a beautiful remembrance of defying capitalism and grind culture—like a more intimate form of self-care you can do independently, and not necessarily with *familia*. I know you mention that by being away from *familia*, you get to move away from all the drama, and this too, can be stressful, especially when in school, but do you practice anything that connects you to your identity or familia that also allow you to practice self-care while in the academy? I do see an interesting point about first-generation college students, some of which could be students of color, from immigrant parents, who may not have gone to college, to have a harder time navigating the academy, and therefore, may be experiencing more work load just to get adjusted to the college

experience. What are your thoughts on that and how do you think it's connected to students of color and how they practice self-care in the academy?

In our symposium with Dr. Jaqueline Royster, I attended Alexis Pauline Gumbs's session on mediation and slowing down. I know you couldn't make it to her beautiful session, but when you mentioned about actually taking the time to slow down, I connected this practice to Black feminists/educators like her because they teach and reinforce the idea of slowing down and healing our body/mind spirits. I particularly thought of Tricia Hersey. I am so happy you are now practicing slowing down because I believe that when teachers are well, students see that. Do you think if it wasn't for the professors you had, you would have not practiced self-care/slowing down in the academy today? How do you wish to implement this slowing down in your classrooms?

You also mention moving your body, and that too, is vital. Like, not having to spend a cent to go to the gym to me comes to show that can't view self-care and rest as a luxury, but as a human necessity. In other words, we can't allow our economic means to dictate whether or not we can rest and practice self-care.

More importantly, you are intentional about how your graduate work is a reflection of your genuine passion, and that to me sounds like embodied self-care because you find joy when studying Latinx/gay studies. Your passion and joy allow you to find narratives that you don't feel are represented in the academy, and that too me, is a genuine form of self-care because you choose to learn about those studies in your graduate program, even if they are not easily offered. I want to congratulate you for engaging with your passions and going for it. Leezon, it was a pleasure talking with you, sharing our experiences, and not being afraid to ask questions. *Mil*

Gracias, and I hope that we can *platicar* again. I hope to hear from you soon, and maybe we can grab coffee at campus.

Your friend,

Maria

Hola Pablo,

Gracias por estar aquí. I'm happy to have you here talking about your experience in grad school and how you practice self-care. I know it's not easy for you to share your experiences, but I am glad you are in a safe space, *un lugar seguro*. I love that you're practicing self-care through your connection with cultural foods, especially our cultural foods. It's wonderful that you're still pursuing your educational/professional goals even if you feel you've neglected or left behind your *familia*. But I want to let you know that even in the midst of leaving your familia behind, you are still connecting with them by connecting with your cultural roots through our *bendita comida*. And in practicing self-care this way, you are doing wonderful work in our graduate program. And I know you feel an emotional toll for leaving behind *familia* to pursue your dreams, but you are doing wonderful work, and I can't stress that enough. Yeah, like you call your parents for recipes and that is a form of self-care that brings you immense joy. Not only that, you attend restaurants that allow you to remember where you come from and how other people from other cultures also endorse their identities. *Eso es maravilloso!* And no wonder this practice brings you joy and is a form of self-care. Like Dr. Steven Alvarez writes in his scholarly work, it is the food that brings us back to our emotions and the deep meaning these emotions evoke, back to our *herencia*, a term Dr. Cristina Ramirez describes as "traits, customs, practices, beliefs, and memories we inherit from our ancestors and their connected collective culture to our

present realities” (167). And this to me Jose Luis, is a form of self-care, especially at a PWI in the South, away from *familia*.

It’s also beautiful you find your self-care by listening to Mexican music while driving. And then by connecting with friends outside the academy you can be your authentic self, you are finding community, even if far away from *familia*. Like you, I also find a self-care outlet through my cultural *herencia* in graduate school because it’s soothing and it allows me to escape from the hard work we produce in school. All this reminds me of Dr. Cristina Ramirez because the cultural practices or the *herencia* we engage with brings us back to life and our embodied work in the academy. You are doing just that; your embodied work in the academy about Latino rhetorics and border issues are topics you passionately choose to engage with in the academy, even if those discussions aren’t readily available at this institution, and I can see your embodied work as a form of self-care. Yes, like when you were in that course that allowed you to be authentic and learn freely, I could envision you practicing self-care in the academy, but like many others, you have to actively and strategically look for courses that represented you and your values. How would you advise graduate students like you to stand up for their values and look for courses not taught in their institution?

It’s interesting to hear that you don’t view self-care as far as how I view it in connection with the grind culture in the academy and the American Dream. I guess as a student of color and seeing my parents, they always worked hard to achieve this American Dream and it was no exception for me in school. I hear that for you, practicing self-care is vital because it’s more about the emotional toll that students of color feel when they must navigate the academy to be themselves and perform a “certain” way. Your perception and experience of having to mitigate how you perform in the academy is a perspective I never thought about when I first started

thinking about the importance of self-care in the academy for students of color. Thank you for being vulnerable and sharing how stressful and unsafe it has been for you ever since you began college. It's painful, but you are managing well. What advice would you give students of color when they are in a situation where these is power dynamics struggle between them and their professors, and how is this connected to self-care in the academy? What form of self-care would you advise these students to engage with? You also mention the importance of exercise and how these activities allow you to focus and be more productive. I feel confused at times with this notion of staying active to be more productive, but do you think we can view exercise and practicing self-care or rest as activities we do in our daily lives without them having to be anything more than the connection, they have with us getting tasks done? I feel like you're exercise routine is already a divine right that allows you first and foremost to be and feel healthy, and that is beautiful, and that is enough. Thank you, Pablo, for being here with me in this space and time, and I look forward to seeing you again soon.

Tu amiga,

Lolita

Hola Catherine,

Gracias for being here. I truly appreciate our friendship and you making this time and space happen. You know, ever since we have known each other, I have always thought you were a very disciplined graduate student. What I mean to say is that you have always been on top of things, and that seemed very inspiring to me, but now that I hear your *testimonio*, I realize you have actually been experiencing burn out, and it's wonderful that you are recognizing it and changing things up for your mental health and emotional well-being. It takes courage to realize

this and limit the number of things you yourself choose to engage in. You're intentional about prioritizing your mental health. And the fact that you're enjoying the things you do in graduate school is amazing! Like, this is what I call embodied work in graduate school; graduate work that is meaningful to us and that we find passion in. You are right; we as grad students have to find things that motivate us, both in our graduate work and outside it. We can't wait until the system deems whatever we're doing in graduate school as valuable and worthwhile; we can't wait to get published or graduate to feel/be successful and happy. I love your wisdom here; it's not about the system; it's about what we intentionally want to genuinely do.

Now that you've experienced how detrimental being burnout is, what advice would you give a fellow grad student, who may be experiencing it or who is doing it all? Like, what pre-symptoms may they feel? You also mention fervently believing that capitalism and grind culture isn't all great. What would you comment about capitalism in graduate school? How it manifested based on your experience?

And speaking of capitalism, I can relate with your parents; my *apa* comes from work tired but always finds the time/space to decompress and *descansar*, whether that be sleeping, laying down like your *ama*, or walking with my *ama* around the neighborhood after work. I see how important rest is for our American society, but especially for working-class immigrants. And yes, you're right; not all families can attend therapy because it can be expensive. In that respect, they need to find whatever available means they have to *descansar*. That's why I think it's beautiful you mention the joy you feel when connecting with your culture. Like you mention cooking Mexican food for your friends and colleagues, and that's special. You're literally practicing self-care. I love that you're connecting with community, and I think this is especially a genuine form of self-care praxis for working class immigrants like our family relatives, who

can't afford therapy or go to fancy places to find respite. Our people are literally finding rest in the little things/the little moments like you've mentioned.

Connecting with community through cultural food literacies or with loved ones is definitely healing. I also see self-care in the *platicas* you engage with your *ama* when you call her because y'all can share struggles and all kinds of emotions. The *platicas* with your *ama* allows both of y'all a moment to slow down/to rest. I am also intrigued by how you differentiate between intellectual and physical labor. I guess we can't directly compare the intellectual work with the physical work others do, but I can't stop thinking about what your dad has advised you about why should get an education. He's right; it's important to work at something that passions us. Work is work at the end of the day, but you are finding ways to rest and still working on things in grad school that are passionate to you. And speaking of rest, you are no longer declining naps, and that's amazing because I remember a time when you were resistant to taking naps for the sake of getting more things done, but now, you are embracing rest, and that says a lot about your healing journey. Keep it up *amiga*. Keep taking care of yourself and doing the things that you find fulfilling in grad school.

Your friend,

Maria Perez

Hi there, Drift,

Thanks for embracing this time and space with your vibrant energy. I think what's impactful about your testimonio is how you narrate your pops's story when coming to the USA. It's beautiful how y'all, especially your pops, are able to go back to maintain y'all's cultural identity. You show just that through your selection of thesis writing and the content you choose

to learn in graduate school! It's beautiful to feel in a homey space with your grandmother and return to one's essence. And it's sad how you talk about your pops once feeling the need to assimilate to this country and try to adhere to the "American Dream" at a good paying job even if it's not what it seems he doesn't genuinely enjoy. I feel your pops because I think that's what many people think off as the "American Dream;" *salir adelante* or work hard no matter what to be better off than back in our countries. At least that's what I've learned as an immigrant. But by doing so, we might take the risk of not enjoying what we do and engage in lifeless production. I'm proud of you for noticing this and wanting to change the direction of your life. Instead, you're attending grad school to find your identity and why you are who you are today. That's powerful, bro! Like you mention—it's not about feeding the machine; it's not about finishing all the milestones at a timely manner or a certain way.

You mention your passion 100% for Black Rhetoric and rap-writing, even when attending a PWI in the South. And yes, I know how hard and "laborious" thesis writing may feel, but you are clearly engaging in writing that's meaningful, not only as a graduate student of color, but to you. Yes, you are "carried down the thesis process," but you are still engaging in embodied work that brings you to life while finding ways to practice rest and self-care. I don't think you realize that you're actually practicing self-care. Like you're playing basketball with your gang, and it seems to me that playing basketball with your friends is vital to your mental health; I mean you mention how it allows you to be your genuine self without having to perform. And it's sad how you sometimes have felt the need to perform at certain spaces in college, including grad school. But it's also beautiful to know you can be your authentic self in other spaces in school. Do you think that if students of color are not given the freedom to be their authentic selves, this can factor in their need for mental health in grad school? What's beautiful

about your story is that you have been able to connect with professors and mentors, who have given you the freedom to do and write in ways unimaginable, at least in ways not readily encouraged in many graduate school. I know it can be hard to figure out what's a good "balance" between writing "scholarly" or "formal" and authentic. But you got this! Don't doubt yourself because you already know more than you think you do! And you're right; power dynamics can be tricky. Sometimes it becomes a fuzzy topic when also thinking about how race is hidden underneath power dynamics. Why do you think then that not having enough time to practice rest and self-care in the academy is more present within the context of power dynamics?

Thank you, Drift, for continuing to be yourself and for resisting/deviating from this Machine found in graduate school. You are already doing amazing embodied work, and everyone sees it in your ability to rap free-write, an authentic passion and written/composition skillset. Moreover, you show your true essence in your thesis writing and that's your living testimony on how to practice self-care in the academy.

Your *amiga*,

Maria, Maria

Hi Hope,

I love your perspective on learning because you believe in actually enjoying what we learn in school. It's the joy in learning that equates to self-care; so, learning in school shouldn't be violent. In other words, being a successful grad student to you has everything to do with one's passions and that is powerful. You know, like all the rest of our peers included in this *platica*, you are sticking to being your authentic self, which doesn't mean being led to a path not beneficial to your goals in graduate school. I love that you're taking courses specific to your

interests and life goals/career purpose. You are intentional and creative about looking for those courses, even if that means going outside your department. And yes, you're right; school can be traumatic for many students, but you are choosing your mental health by allowing mentors to guide you through grad school. It's beautiful to hear you say that a dear professor of ours confirmed what you already knew; she confirmed to you that there are other truer ways that you can express freely and abundantly, other than writing. I feel like mentors like her allow us to feel a sense of belonging. This idea of community reminds me of the kind of community you've found in grad school. I agree; community is important when it comes to taking care of ourselves.

Pulling resources together, like you mention, is vital to our collective self-care. Collective care is what I hear you voicing, and that's powerful! Like you mention that one example when you and your husband work together to get things done in the midst of busy work.

But I also hear you talk about self-care you do on your own. I love that you're listening to your body. Yeah, girl! Like you know when your body needs to slow down and rest. You listen to the "symptoms" and take charge of the things you can control. Thanks for sharing your life journey on why it's so important to not lose ourselves in a society with unfair/unattainable expectations we don't need to follow. Continue to follow what you genuinely love to learn in grad school. Continue to embrace the creative side of you and the artistic side of life that I think you believe you no longer have, but DO HAVE! Like your mentor said, you don't have to fit into a box.

Your friend,

Maria

Hey Uche,

Girl, I am impressed by your leadership and mission, during and after graduation. Thank you for making time and space for us to be here, even when you're super busy. Hearing you share your testimonio about how you got here and how you decided to continue on with your life's purpose post-graduation is inspiring. I especially found a healing message in how your faith and ancestral teachings have guided you in your calling and identity formation. I love that you mention that although teaching at a community college did not provide you with enough income, you found so much joy in it. Finding joy in what we do as part of our graduate experience/career is a prominent theme that seems to light up in the rest of my friends' testimonios.

But it's also important to point out that through your *testimonio*, we are able to deduce that many students of color undergo various struggles/barriers that may contribute to their need to practice self-care in the academy. What else would you add on this subject? Like you mention, the biased standardized tests don't measure students' capabilities and hunger to go through a graduate program. I feel you because I am pretty bad on those standardized tests. I get super anxious, and I don't think the tests I've taken have accurately measured my ability to go through school. I mean, here we are!

I also hear you share the positive experience you encountered with the professor as he saw in you the potential to complete your graduate program, when no one else believed in you. People in the academy, like him, make a big difference. I would call these acts of difference vital to students of color. These people are part of community within the academy—a safety net. It's inspiring how you're following the same mission as your professor through your teaching because you are intentional about being there for your students. I know you mention the

inequities that students of color face in the K-12 system, but if these students don't receive the necessary guidance and support in their beginning stages of their education, then at least we can hope that they will receive that guidance from at least one person in college. I believe it takes at least one person, like you share, to make a transformation in someone's life.

I love your intentionality statement, especially when it comes to our calling in grad school. So, I guess for you, it's important that you find joy in whatever you do in grad school, but what I hear you voicing is that it's also about making sure you do what's part of your calling—to help make change in someone's life.

Girl, but you're also intentional about resting and taking breaks! Like, you mention not working at all during long seasonal breaks, and that takes a lot of courage given that in today's age, we're pushing ourselves to do more or shoot for more. But you make it a priority to take care of yourself during those school breaks, and that's admirable. And I know you also mention taking shorter breaks during the semester, when you're super busy, but besides getting your nails done and indulging in delicious food, what other shorter break hobbies do you engage in? You mention your love in immersing in different cultures; so, how do you immerse into different cultures as part of your self-care praxis? More specifically, how do you use your breaks to immerse into your Nigerian culture? I know you immerse into your culture and community during those long breaks, if you get to visit, but in the meantime, how else do you immerse into your culture—besides connecting to your Afro beats—as part of your self-care ritual?

One last thing, I like the point you make about racial battle fatigue because I think that sometimes navigating through systems at play is challenging and tiring. But like you say, it's about working with others collectively that we can make things work and not feel beat down by racism and discriminatory practices. Ultimately, you are suggesting that we are in control of how

we engage in self-care in the academy because we won't always find those practices readily, so we must make the decision to take care of ourselves and in community with others.

More importantly, you also believe that as long as we know **our why** embodied in the studies and roles we choose to engage in the academy, we will make it, and that to me, sounds like your definition of self-care.

Thank you Uche for sharing with me your wisdom reflected through your leadership roles. I can't wait to hear more about your mission as educator.

Your friend,

Maria

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Appendix A: Reflective Notes to Slow Down/Rest

I observed the following for **Catherine** (summary): observations made on 1/30/23-1/31/23

Current essence/diagnosis/assessment (what's bothering them or what they're mainly going through) *Que Les Pica?* What are they urgently voicing?

Overall theme: she is in her beginning stages to healing and reevaluating her academic journey

Subthemes:

- 1) Re-evaluating and reflecting on expectations (as housewife+ student+ teacher)
- 2) What she deems as 'success' (she enjoys the things she does in graduate school, and isn't waiting to feel successful based on what others in the academy deem success)
- 3) Self-care through human connection/naps/traditional Mexican food/church
- 4) The American Dream/capitalism/identity was working class-immigrant family/physical vs. intellectual labor

I observed the following for **Pablo** (summary):

Overall theme: Pablo is strategically navigating through the academy, especially at a predominately white institution, while he lives through conflicting/juxtaposing messages about family and academic values.

Subthemes:

- 1) Self-care through basketball, weightlifting, Mexican music, calling his parents, traditional Mexican food, visiting restaurants emblematic of cultural richness, and meeting with friends outside school settings.
- 2) Students of color must navigate through factors in the academy that contribute to their need for self-care in the academy, especially in a white institution (lack of faculty representation, campus policies, aggressions, choosing between Eurocentric graduate values and other personal/identity values)
- 3) Resisting, refusing, and being strategic about being and doing what he needed
- 4) Finding 'balance' via exercise to be focused in graduate school, but understanding that placing school as one's center can deteriorate one's mental health.

I observed the following for **Hope** (summary):

Overall theme: Hope is continuing to practice self-preservation and self-care while she's learning to creatively navigate through the academy by staying true to herself and connecting with people/community that allow her to feel safe.

Subthemes:

- 1) She has learned to prioritize herself/setting up boundaries

- 2) Reflecting on her body needs and attending it.
- 3) She indulges in self-care by attending creative spaces, reading, eating good food, setting boundaries/prioritizing herself, pulling resources/support, and reflecting on her body needs and attending to it, and community/her people.
- 4) Finding safety through her community/her people (both Black faculty/staff at TCU, who could also be considered mentors and church)
- 5) Getting creative and strategic in the academy to stay true to herself ad goals/interests (making learning joyous and true to herself)
- 6) An understanding that the more intersections there are, the more you are prone to stress and require more collective self-care through community
- 7) No such thing as balance, instead pulling resources and support (collaboration)
- 8) Immense appreciation for her ancestry, especially her grandmother

I observed the following from **Uche** (summary):

Overall theme: Uche is intentional with herself and others and is never forgetting of her journey and calling to create academic spaces for more inclusion and equity, which all revolves around her faith and ancestry/cultural Nigerian roots.

Subthemes:

- 1) Uche's calling and purpose that brings her joy (what she considers 'success')
- 2) What's wrong with school/academia (exclusive/limited and biased things like standardized exams)
- 3) Having mentors that believe in you when others have denied you opportunity
- 4) Intentionally responding to her calling and others, even if she's tired during academic seasons (doesn't take her role for granted)
- 5) Intentional with her self-care and rest during long academic season breaks and random breaks during the semester (enjoys good food, traveling, and celebrating with her Nigerian community)
- 6) Connecting to her ancestral/cultural roots that allow her to stay true to herself and purpose (one of the values learned in her culture is collaboration)
- 7) RBF and her lived experience of trying to prove herself, which connects to # 2 a # 3 (navigating through the educative system)
- 8) Being in community for self-care due to unhealthy environment we're in—the academy for students of color

I observed the following from **Drift** (summary):

Overall theme: Drift is navigating in the academy by maintaining his authenticity and doing what he loves instead of following the machine. However, he is cautious of what he says in the academy.

Subthemes:

- 1) Hooping and rap writing as emblems of self-care. He also practices self-care in community (playing basketball with others and working at a kids' seasonal job)

- 2) Assimilating or representing well- going back to his pops' s cultural Jamaican roots
- 3) No balance per say, but sometimes is carried down the stream to the thesis
- 4) Capitalistic machine and negating that mindset by doing what he loves and ultimately wants to pursue (tries to be authentic in the academy)
- 5) Pure violence/being cautious of what you say in the academy

I observed the following from **Leezon** (summary):

Overall theme: Leezon is well aware of his positionality and his identity—a Latino/gay male of Mexican-American decent and the differences with non-POC. Being in community and connecting with his identity is important to him, while in the academy.

Subthemes:

- 1) Navigating in the academy is for POC (struggles)
- 2) Clarity and slowing down through freewriting/journaling, exercising, breathing/slowing down, and intentionally connecting with community (self-care for Leezon to combat capitalism)
- 3) Intentionally seeking his identity and purpose in the academy
- 4) Value of family and community

Appendix B: Human Subjects Protocol

Date: October 11, 2022

Study #: IRB#2022-302

Study Title: Perspectives on rest and self-care in graduate school

Principal Investigator: Brad Lucas

Co-Principal Investigator: Maria Perez

Primary Contact: Brad Lucas

Determination: Exempt

Determination Date: October 10, 2022

The above-referenced human subjects research study was reviewed by the TCU Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair and/or IRB Chair's designee(s). It was determined that the study meets the criteria for exemption described in 45 CFR 46.104 and/or the TCU Policy on Exempt Human Subject Research. The study was determined to meet the criteria for exemption under:

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

This determination is limited to the activities described in the Cayuse Human Ethics study and extends to the performance of these activities at each respective site identified in the study. The research must be conducted in accordance with the exempt certified study.

This determination does not constitute funding or other institutional required approvals. Should this study involve other review committees such as the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC), it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to ensure that all required approvals are in place prior to conducting research involving human subjects or their related specimens.

Please note the following Principal Investigator responsibilities:

- It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit any proposed changes to the study activities, via a Modification Submission in Cayuse Human Ethics, to ORC prior to implementation so that ORC may determine whether the study continues to meet the criteria for exemption from IRB review.
- It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to promptly notify the IRB of any reportable events (adverse events/protocol deviations/[unanticipated problems](#)/subject complaints/other) that occur during the research, including any breach in confidentiality or data security that places participants or others at a greater risk of harm. Notify the IRB via an Incident Submission

in Cayuse Human Ethics.

Cayuse Human Ethics studies must be closed when all activities involving human subjects are completed, including interaction/intervention with participants or analysis of identifiable data. If the principal investigator leaves the University prior to expiration of the study, the study must be closed or transferred to another eligible TCU PI. Student-led studies must be closed before graduation. Closure of student-led studies which remain open after graduation are the responsibility of the faculty PI.

The TCU Institutional Review Board operates under a Federal Wide Assurance approved by the DHHS Office for Human Research Protections, FWA000022286. Our DHHS IRB Registration Number is IRB000002653.

Please note that the ORC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of research and the consent process, if applicable. We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please contact Research Compliance at IRBSubmit@tcu.edu or (817) 257-5070, if you need any additional information.

Best regards,

Office of Research Compliance (ORC)
Texas Christian University

IRBSubmit@tcu.edu | [TCU ORC](#)



**Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas**

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research: Perspectives on rest and self-care in graduate school

Principal Investigator: Brad E. Lucas, Texas Christian University

Co-investigator: Maria D. Perez, Texas Christian University

Overview: You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must have been enrolled or currently enrolled in graduate school and be comfortable talking about your school experience.

Study Details: The purpose of the study is to learn about graduate student experiences in two areas. One area is how graduate students balance schoolwork and “success” with rest and self-care. This study is being conducted through in-person and video-conference interviews lasting no more than 60 minutes.

Participants: You are being asked to take part in this study because you are a current or former graduate student willing to talk about your graduate school experiences at TCU and elsewhere. A total of 15 participants will be interviewed.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will not be any loss of benefits or opportunities if you decide to stop participation after you have started.

Confidentiality: You will have the option to be named in the study as a participant or have your identity kept anonymous. If you choose to be named, we will cite your name directly.

Should you choose to remain anonymous, we will keep your information private and confidential and assign you a pseudonym. Anyone with authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

What is the purpose of the research? The purpose of this study is to understand how students have prioritized their mental health through rest and self-care while attending graduate school. The interviews will inform the writing of an autoethnography: a form of research that allows for the researcher to write a detailed story about her experiences within one or more cultures. The co-investigator for this study (Maria Perez) is writing an autoethnography that will include the stories of other graduate students as she explores her own experiences in graduate school.

What is my involvement for participating in this study? If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Work with the investigators to schedule an interview, which will last no more than one hour, at your convenience. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom or in-person and will be recorded.
- Prior to the interview, participants will be invited to ask questions about the study and will be asked to confirm that they have read this consent document in full. Interviews will begin with participants being asked to give verbal consent prior to recording and then after the recording has started.
- Participants will be asked if they want to remain anonymous (and be given a pseudonym) or be named in the study.
- Interviews will be informal and conversational, prompted by open-ended questions. Questions will focus on participants' experiences as graduate students regarding rest and self-care. If you feel uncomfortable with any question, you may ask to move to the next question.

We expect your participation in an initial interview to take about 60 minutes. No follow up interview will be required.

Are there any alternatives and can I withdraw?

You do not have to participate in this research study. There are no alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time.

What are the risks for participating in this study and how will they be minimized?

We don't believe there are any risks from participating in this research that are different from risks that you encounter in everyday life as a graduate student. You will be asked questions about your graduate student experience that any faculty, staff, or fellow graduate student might ask about the role of rest and self-care in your graduate student experience. Some participants may not be fully comfortable with the question-and-answer dynamic of the interview or may not want to discuss issues that will be shared with the primary investigator who is a faculty member. If you prefer not to answer certain questions, you may simply inform the interviewer to proceed to the next question. If you experience discomfort of any level or manner, you can immediately stop the interview. You retain the right to withdraw from the study at any point.

What are the benefits for participating in this study? There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. Results from the study could contribute to scholarship, mentoring, and teaching regarding self-care and rest during graduate study.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study? You will not receive compensation for participation in this interview project.

What are my costs to participate in the study? Other than your time, there will be no additional costs to you because of being in this study.

How will my confidentiality be protected? All digital files, including audio recordings of interviews and interview transcriptions, will be stored on a password-protected TCU computer, TCU server space, or in a password protected encrypted cloud storage service (e.g., TCU box). Any printed interview notes, consent documents, or teaching materials will be destroyed after being digitized as PDFs.

You may choose to remain anonymous for the purposes of publications that may result from this research. However, your participation will not be fully anonymous for the co-investigator conducting the interview (a graduate student) or the investigator (a faculty member). If you choose to remain anonymous, every effort will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information.

- If you choose to remain anonymous, you will be asked to not disclose any personally identifying information, and if you participate in an online Zoom interview, your video recording will not be kept for the research (i.e., only the mp3 audio recording will be kept for the study).
- If you choose to remain anonymous, you will be assigned a pseudonym for all interview recordings and related notes. A list of participant names (actual) with their assigned pseudonyms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the PI's TCU faculty office.
- We may publish what we learn from this study. If you choose to remain anonymous, we will not include your name, nor will we publish anything that would let people know who you are.

We cannot promise complete secrecy. Your records may be reviewed by authorized University personnel or other individuals who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality.

What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over? We will keep your research data to use for our own future research or other purposes. If you choose to remain anonymous, your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from the research data collected as part of the project. We may share your research data with other investigators without asking for your consent again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study or concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

You can contact either Dr. Brad E. Lucas at (817) 257-6981 or b.e.lucas2@tcu.edu or Maria Perez at maria.d.perez@tcu.edu with any questions that you have about the study. You can

contact Dr. Brie Diamond, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6152, b.diamond@tcu.edu, or Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research@tcu.edu with any questions about your rights as a study participant.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. A copy also will be kept with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

Printed Participant Name

Signature

Date

Printed Name of the person obtaining consent

Signature

Date

Choice to be named or anonymous

I choose to be named and understand that my interview information will be openly attributed to me.

Signature

Date

OR

I choose to remain anonymous and understand that my interview information will be de-identified and the data gathered from it anonymized.

Signature

Date

Consent to be audio/video recorded

I agree to be audio recorded. Yes _____ No _____

I agree to be video recorded. Yes _____ No _____

Signature

Date

Consent to Use Data for Future Research

I agree that my information may be shared with other researchers for future research studies that may be similar to this study or may be completely different. The information shared with other researchers will not include any information that can directly identify me. Researchers will not contact me for additional permission to use this information.

Yes _____ No _____

Signature

Date

NOTES

ⁱ Parents

ⁱⁱ A term I define, not alone, but with others, on the capitalistic or grinding of scholarly work expected in grad school. A friend of mine calls it the productivity scholar.

ⁱⁱⁱ My nickname. Back in Mexico, people whose name is Dolores are called Lolitas.

^{iv} My surroundings

^v A method of writing I coined to describe testimonios narrated by someone gossiping.

Chismosear is gossiping.

^{vi} Describing my aunt as someone who gossips

^{vii} Tricia Hersey's continuous message throughout *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*

^{viii} With no shame at all

^{ix} that white baby is beautiful and I grew up dark or brown-skinned

^x Term to define someone who originated from the same country, country, or region. In this context, someone whose born in Mexico.

^{xi} <https://cssh.northeastern.edu/landmark-essays-rhetorics-of-difference-ellen-cushman/>

^{xii} Hasty

^{xiii} Dad, let's go out. Come on, before all the stores close, or we go to the park for a walk. Let's eat. Let's go to the buffet or eat birria tacos.

^{xiv} Do you want to go? We are going to eat. Do not you want to go? Before your dad goes back to sleep; you know how he snores.

^{xv} How are we doing, and what do we need to change to be better off?

^{xvi} A traditional snack from Mexico

^{xvii} So, cheer up because you can do it!

^{xviii} Slang for beer

^{xix} On page 104 of *Rest as Resistance: A Manifesto*, Hersey defines paper mentor as people who she reads and studies in writing

^{xx} It's great he can call his parents.

^{xxi} Hearing this already pissed me off! I'm pretty sure it made you mad too. Didn't it to you?

^{xxii} It's beautiful/awesome to...

^{xxiii} His generation of friends; people around his same age.

^{xxiv} <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBHV09fH17k>