Thresholds and Borderlands: Using Chicana Feminist Theory to Navigate Changing Identities

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Instruction librarians embedded in the first-year experience of first-generation college students are uniquely positioned to shepherd novice researchers across a threshold that demarcates their past experience as consumers of knowledge to their future roles as creators of knowledge. Beginning from my own *testimonio* — a discursive practice reliant on the narration of personal experience — my research applies a critical ethnic studies lens to explore the in-between space occupied by Latinx first-generation students as they navigate the threshold of an academic identity that can feel hostile and alien. Concepts and critical practices that emerge from the scholarship of Chicana theorists like Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) offer new tools to introduce Latinx first-generation students to frameworks for thinking about the ways they have learned to exist in multiple worlds, and to knowledge practices and experiences that originate within their communities. While not explicitly named as Chicana feminist theory, Mexican-American education scholar Laura Rendón’s validation theory (1994) involves affirming the value of student voice and experience, while also creating in the classroom a *familia* atmosphere built on trust and familiarity. By using validation theory to create culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogies in my information literacy instruction, I center the experiences of Latinx scholars and professionals to introduce students to academic culture and research. By applying theories that have come out of Ethnic Studies rather than LIS, I am proposing a new way for academic librarians to see and support the often-painful experience of transformation from student/outsider to scholar. Engaging with these theories to cultivate the next generation of Latinx student scholars is a continual passing-on of *una herencia*, an inheritance of a unique way of understanding the world from multiple perspectives.

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza.* San Francisco: Aunt Lute.

Rendón, L. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development*. Innovative Higher Education* *19*(1): 33-51.