

Rarely has another woman of color gone before us. Rarely is there another woman of color whom we can watch to try and figure out all the little questions about subtext, about how dress or speech or makeup are interpreted in this particular environment.

Like the braids and the school uniform I wore as a child, I still adopt a mask, a head-to-toe mask, to help me become the person I pretend to be when I am functioning in a white and/or male environment. In different situations I construct my public face through my makeup, my clothes, my vocabulary, my selective identification with my past.

I think of this sometimes as I stand in front of the mirror applying mascara. Our word mascara comes from the anglicized pronunciation for the Spanish word meaning mask. *Mascara* reveals another level of meaning if we separate it into *mas cara* which means "more face".

However functional, adopting a mask inevitably leads to questions about identity. What does it mean to be a real Chicana, a real Latina? Does a real Latina affect a certain style or conversely are certain styles forbidden to a real Latina? How are we perceived by our students who have not yet begun that journey of change or by those in our families and communities who never will?

We risk losing connection with our communities and our families because of our public face. Our advocacy on behalf of our communities can be impeded by the *mascara*. It would help to be Janus-faced, to be able to present one face to the institution and to use another among ourselves.