

Most of us now occupy an economic niche considerably higher than that of our parents and certainly most of our relatives and frequently that of our students. Our speech, clothes, cars and homes all emphasize this difference.

Since most of our teachers, supervisors, mentors and tormentors have been white men, we have been taught to think, act and sound like them. We are highly adept at putting others at ease with our differences. To get along we have learned to blur the differences, sometimes making them almost disappear. How often have we been told, "You don't seem Chicana." or have we been asked "How Chicana are you?" Implicit in these intended compliments is that we have risen above our group. We are special, better. But lodged within us is the child whom no one would have mistaken for being anything other than what she was. Her masking was yet imperfect, her otherness obvious.

To questions of identity add issues of authenticity. The child in me sometimes stares in wide-eyed wonder at the house in which the adult me lives, she stands in a walk-in closet over-filled with nearly new clothes. She watches as I put on my mascara. For years she has found safety in the mask. She wonders what will happen as the adult becomes observer/critic of the mask?⁶

Who am I really? Do I control the masking or does it control me? When and how do the public and private parts get merged? Is the mask external, entailing makeup and clothing, or is it internal, entailing ideology and personal philosophy?

For me the central dilemma associated with subtext is how to