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# Balancing Mystery and Identification: Dolores Huerta's Shifting Transcendent Persona

Erin F. Doss & Robin E. Jensen

*The present analysis explores Dolores Huerta's use of a shifting transcendent persona to balance the sense of mystery surrounding her accomplishments with a performance of normalcy and audience identification. We find, first, that Huerta leveraged her borderland experiences and ideology as rhetorical resources that functioned to facilitate the amalgamation of personae exemplifying her advocacy, and, second, that her shifting transcendent persona's balance of mystery and identification hinged as much upon the manner in which she positioned audience members to perceive themselves as it did upon the manner in which she positioned them to perceive her own exceptional normalcy.*

*Keywords:* Chicana Feminist Rhetoric; Dolores Huerta; Intersectionality; Persona; Transcendence

In rhetorical scholarship on the United Farm Workers of America, the rhetoric of César Chávez has received a great deal of attention, but the equally instrumental and arguably more polished rhetoric of union co-founder Dolores Huerta (b. 1930) has been—until very recently—largely overlooked.<sup>1</sup> Although recent rhetorical scholarship has begun to explore how Huerta worked with Chávez, arguing for the rights of farm workers and laboring tirelessly to organize the National Farm Workers of America, later the United Farm Workers (UFW), questions remain about the strategies Huerta used to identify with, inspire, and persuade audiences to join the

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union's cause. Over the course of her long and on-going career, Huerta—known colloquially as “La Pasionaria”—fervently recruited union members, addressed political leaders, negotiated with growers, organized boycotts and marches, and introduced the union's ideals and mission to groups across the country.<sup>2</sup> Former UFW president Eliseo Medina describes Huerta as having “a gift for making you believe in yourself” and the “ability to inspire you and urge you to do things you could not think were possible;” and Barbara Baer and Glenna Matthews contend that Huerta “fought with insult, tears, and individual's testimony, believing so strongly in winning everything the workers told her they needed that she would not compromise.” To this day, Huerta remains a rhetorical virtuoso whose words teach as much about exceptional persuasion in a variety of diverse contexts as they do about the Chicana/o fight for labor reform in US history.<sup>3</sup>

Stacey Sowards maintains that Huerta's rhetorical success has been due, in large part, to her changing public persona, which was derived from a habitus of living among the borders of “social standings related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, and national origin status.” Gloria Anzaldúa delineates this state of physical and conscious liminality undergirding Chicana/o culture, noting that one who lives among the borderlands often contends with an unstable, marginalized sense of identity.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as a college-educated, twice divorced Chicana mother of 11 children who dedicated her life to working with and on behalf of impoverished farm workers, Huerta resided at the unrelenting frontier of multiple, often competing communities. Her experiential ideology derived from living in the borderlands, what Anzaldúa would call her “*mestiza* consciousness,” which denotes an inclusive identity that incorporates more than one language, culture, and value system. Huerta's *mestiza* consciousness fostered her ability to successfully negotiate the interests of farm workers, labor organizers, and governmental leaders and employees. As Richard A. Garcia notes, Huerta lived on and built her rhetorical negotiations in conjunction with the border “between tradition and non-tradition, and between the accepted and the non-acceptable.”<sup>5</sup> Acting from a *mestiza* consciousness, Huerta had the ability not only to remain flexible, but, as Anzaldúa theorizes, to “shift out of habitual formations,” moving from analytical thinking to divergent thinking. These evolving patterns of thought were reflected in her use of diverse rhetorical personae, which allowed her to embrace a “more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” and that could persuade her audiences to embrace such a perspective as well.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, her rhetoric elucidates both the potential consequences and discursive resources inherent in border living and boundary crossing.

In this essay, we build on Sowards' important findings concerning the central role diverse personae played in Huerta's rhetoric. We argue that Huerta used a *shifting* transcendent persona—which involved the construction of interconnected first and second personae, as well as an appeal to distinct transcendent achievements—to build her persuasive efficacy. Huerta's ability to address the concerns and experiences of distinct audiences, in combination with her own subjectivity at the borderlands of established communities, required (and enabled) her to shift her persona to simultaneously incorporate and break through the cultural faces or masks audience

members expected of her.<sup>7</sup> In this way, her rhetoric was replete with opportunities for identification through shared faces and experiences, just as it offered a view of the transcendence she achieved in the process of breaking through or refusing to wear expected masks.

The transcendent persona proper is a discursive strategy used by those who have achieved or experienced something beyond traditional expectations. Rhetors who communicate with a transcendent persona cite their boundary-breaking experiences as a form of symbolic capital that enables them to present a new vision of the world and, ideally, persuade audiences to adopt this vision.<sup>8</sup> The transcendent persona requires that a rhetor balance discursive distance from audiences (which accompanies the successful delineation of having transcended beyond expectations) with discursive identification. Existing research on the transcendent persona (and persona more generally) leaves unexplored the use of identification to temper the mystery inherent in achieving transcendence, as well as the construction of multiple personae working in combination toward an overarching appeal.<sup>9</sup> Huerta's rhetoric provides an excellent case study to further explore these ideas for a number of reasons, most importantly that her position as "literally between worlds" invites careful consideration of what it means to exceed or cross boundaries or borders.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, because Huerta spoke to different audiences and balanced distance with identification in correspondingly unique ways, she not only achieved a single transcendent persona but also achieved multiple and correspondingly shifting personae, the process of which involved the careful orchestration of analogous first and second personae.

In the subsequent pages, we review research on persona and identification, then provide a contextual overview of the conditions leading up to and within which Huerta made her appeals, before offering an analysis of two widely circulated textual fragments from Huerta's rhetorical career. Therein, we demonstrate the complex configurations of personae at work in Huerta's rhetoric and define the fragile discursive equilibrium grounding her vision of collective change.

### **Rhetorical Personae and Identification**

The concept of a rhetorical persona has a long scholarly history. Its title derives from the masks worn in Greek and Roman theatre to distinguish the actors proper from the characters portrayed.<sup>11</sup> Scholars differentiate between the rhetorical persona and the rhetor's true identity, noting that a persona is a carefully constructed character, "the created personality put forth in the act of communicating."<sup>12</sup> Edwin Black refers to the rhetor's voice as a "first persona" and delineates a second persona—that of the implied audience—which is communicated via public discourse.<sup>13</sup> Black's second persona inspired scholars to interrogate texts for clues about not only the author and the intended audience but also the discursive effects of subjectivity, collectivity, and the social realities of context. For example, the identification of a third persona—that of the audience discursively neglected or negated—revealed the manner in which individuals or groups not explicitly accounted for in a message can be "objectified in a way that 'you' or 'I' are not."<sup>14</sup> Dana Cloud adds to this conceptualization by

noting that individuals and groups can negate themselves from a situation via a “null persona” by strategically refusing to respond to issues they deem unspeakable. Relatedly, Charles Morris argues for a fourth persona, which emerges when a rhetor attempts to “pass” as something he or she is not.<sup>15</sup>

These theoretical gains have paved the way for continued focus on personae. Most recently, the idea of a transcendent persona involving rhetors’ appeals to their own boundary-breaking accomplishments has been explicated, but research has yet to discern how contradictory elements of this persona might be successfully balanced.<sup>16</sup> The transcendent persona is both performative and grounded in the specific context into which a rhetor seeks to initiate change. Defined according to three key elements, the transcendent persona (a) draws from a rhetor’s boundary-breaking experiences (“this might involve being the ‘first’ or the ‘only’ person to have accomplished something,” or at least the creation of a perception that this is the case), (b) requires the rhetor to both build discursive distance from audience members and maintain identification with them, and (c) is used to introduce an “alternative vision of society” that the rhetor has seen thanks to a transcendent experience.<sup>17</sup> The transcendent persona allows the rhetor to draw from the transcendence of his or her accomplishments and introduce new ideas and modes of communicating to and with audiences. Audiences, in turn, are granted the discursive tools to draw from the rhetor’s vision and reframe themselves as capable of bringing about societal transformation. By delineating and endorsing an alternative vision of society, rhetors drawing from a transcendent persona establish themselves as social agents of change rather than as tokens—those who explain their exceptionalism in the service of the established social order.<sup>18</sup> Although it is clear, first, that the persona draws from a representation of the rhetor’s experiences, and, second, that the persona is used to present an alternate vision of society, it is unclear how the rhetor might create a persuasive balance of discursive distance from and identification with audiences. We find that establishing this discursive balance is both complicated and made possible by the process of speaking from a position of marginalization and intersectional identity, and thereby “constantly [being] asked to choose between groups.”<sup>19</sup> In Huerta’s case, the experience of having lived betwixt and between was reconstituted as a rhetorical resource that enabled the establishment of this complicated balance of personae. The ensuing analysis works to begin addressing these queries, drawing from literature on discursive identification and “remaining attentive to the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, race, class, and sexuality” as it is “embedded in Latina/os’ discourse.”<sup>20</sup>

Scholarship on rhetorical identification often draws from the work of Kenneth Burke, who argues that communication is necessary because individuals are forever divided by their interests, understandings, and ideologies.<sup>21</sup> By identifying points of overlapping experience, individuals work to overcome this division through a mediated rhetorical ground. Frederick Antczak makes a similar argument, positing that identification is the rhetorical merger of thought and character that allows audience members to discover and draw from latent qualities in themselves.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, rhetorical identification can liberate audience members to think and act in new ways. John Hammerback offers an example of this process by highlighting the

manner in which fascist leader José Antonio Primo de Rivera used both a first and second persona to create identification with his audience and constitute audience members into a united fascist body.<sup>23</sup> Primo de Rivera constituted a second persona—the ideal fascist audience—and then revealed his worthiness to lead this audience by discursively embodying the first persona of a model leader. Although not the focus of Hammerback’s analysis, the case he describes is one in which two personae working in combination functioned as a warrant for the rhetor’s call for change and unification.

Similarly, rhetors drawing from a transcendent persona must create identification with audience members by attempting to align with their interests, concepts, and ideas, *and* by encouraging audiences to perceive rhetors’ experiences as those that defied expectation and are thus worthy of veneration. The transcendent persona’s persuasive force depends on the audience’s perception that at least one aspect of the rhetor’s experience is mysterious, something Burke suggests will happen only when there is a strangeness present in the event or experience, although the estranged element “must also be thought of as in some way capable of communion” with audience members’ own experiences. Burke argues that social distinctions create mystery in communication and require rhetors to use “corresponding rhetoric” to court the audience into crossing boundaries and thereby chasing the mystery.<sup>24</sup> To “court” audiences using a transcendent persona, the rhetor creates a powerful first persona—one of normalcy that exists in the midst of, or in spite of, amazing accomplishments—while at the same time creating a second persona in which audience members both identify with the rhetor’s normalcy and yet stand in awe of the rhetor’s mysterious transcendence. Huerta, who was celebrated for being the first Chicana labor organizer and for trading her middle-class, family-oriented life for an impoverished existence working on behalf of farm workers, was well positioned to constitute herself and her distinct audiences in ways that would highlight her vision of a changed society. The challenge before her lay not only in persuasively balancing distance with identification but also in drawing from “a new *mestiza* consciousness”<sup>25</sup> as a resource for negotiating that balance as it shifted from one discursive scenario to the next.

### Huerta as Rhetor-Activist

In a 1995 interview, Huerta explained that she first felt a call to labor activism after she began working as a teacher in the early 1950s. More often than not, her students came to school sick and without proper clothing or shoes. She soon learned that their parents were not making enough money from their farm work to provide for their families, a realization that prompted her to reconsider her life’s work: “I couldn’t stand seeing kids come to class hungry and needing shoes,” she said. “I thought I could do more by organizing farmworkers than by trying to teach hungry children.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the California farm workers’ situation in the mid-twentieth century was grim. Paid between 75 cents and one dollar per hour, they regularly endured scalding temperatures and exposure to pesticides, conditions that contributed to a life

expectancy of only 49 years. Growers were not held accountable for workers' treatment because the legislation that regulated minimum wage, unemployment insurance, and the right to organize pointedly excluded agricultural labor.<sup>27</sup>

Huerta began her advocacy on behalf of farm workers in 1955 by accepting a position with Fred Ross and the Community Service Organization (CSO).<sup>28</sup> There, she met César Chávez. When the CSO voted not to fund a farmworkers' union in 1962, Huerta and Chávez left that organization to start the National Farm Workers of America, later the UFW. Over time, they developed effective strategies for building a statewide membership and integrating media and student groups into their organizing campaign.<sup>29</sup> Although Chávez undoubtedly became the public face of the UFW, Huerta's notorious "verbal arm wrestling" with agribusiness and her ability to persuade diverse audiences to support the union was instrumental in making the union and its mission a reality.<sup>30</sup> By 1970, Huerta was working tirelessly to organize a nationwide grape boycott, which forced growers into signing three-year UFW contracts. Part of these contracts included provisions for a grower-funded, farm-worker-run healthcare program that protected workers from being overcharged by insurance companies and misdiagnosed by corrupt or inept physicians. Yet these contracts were set to begin expiring in 1973.<sup>31</sup> For this reason, contract negotiations and renewal emerged as a topical mainstay in Huerta's public discourses throughout the mid-1970s.

Huerta's rhetorical agency has been framed as "the product of many social forces," including her socialization and evolving experiences with race, class, and sex discrimination, particularly in combination with her awareness of the emerging "social movements of the 1960s and 1970s."<sup>32</sup> Born Dolores Fernández on April 10, 1930, Huerta's farmworker/miner father—a child of Mexican immigrants—and mother—a descendent of "several generations of Hispanos in New Mexico"—divorced when Huerta was not yet in school, and Huerta, her mother, and her two brothers moved from Dawson, New Mexico, to Stockton, California.<sup>33</sup> Huerta attributes both her dedication to social justice and her malleable sense of gender roles to her mother, who worked a number of different jobs while also offering what help she could to other working-class Mexicans and Mexican Americans in their community. That Huerta's maternal grandfather took over childcare for her mother while she was working offered the young Huerta a nuanced perspective on gender performance within a working-class (cum-middle-class as Huerta's mother became a successful business owner and re-married) Mexican-American family, a perspective that she later drew from to balance raising her own children with her public activism.<sup>34</sup>

Huerta's socialization seems to have situated her so that her experiences with discrimination functioned as powerful catalysts to her activism. In a *La Voz* article, Huerta wrote with still-lingering vexation of a teacher's unwillingness to recognize her writing as her own because of her class and ethnicity.<sup>35</sup> Years later, Huerta traveled back to the sites where she spent her first years, and where her father worked the fields. At that point, she realized that the tarpaper shacks in which she had lived were squalid, and that racial and ethnic discrimination on the part of bosses and



legislators left farm workers and their families without recourse for the horrible living and working conditions they endured.<sup>36</sup> This realization, along with her experiences teaching farm workers' children and her more general experiences with bias against Mexicans and Mexican Americans, formed the foundation of her dedication to farm worker rights—a dedication that was ultimately sustained in collusion with the human rights movements of the 1960s and early 1970s.

It was in the 1960s that Huerta dedicated herself to the farm worker's rights movement, a movement that overlapped with the Chicana/o movement more generally and garnered increased attention and support from those sympathetic to the civil rights/black liberation movement.<sup>37</sup> Yet, despite the multiple groups dedicated to achieving social justice in the 1960s, the decade has nonetheless been classified as "the sexist dark ages."<sup>38</sup> For Huerta, this meant that she encountered resistance to her leadership from both UFW insiders and the farmworkers she was working to organize, as well as from the growers and legislators with whom she negotiated. Her refusal to adopt traditional and/or religiously ordained gender roles made her the subject of ridicule. Much approbation emerged with respect to Huerta's history of divorce and her tendency to leave her kids in the care of others. As Ana Castillo notes, Huerta had no wife with whom to leave her children, as did the male union leaders, and therefore she was forced to juggle both work and childcare.<sup>39</sup>

Despite her dissatisfaction with the sex discrimination she encountered within and outside the UFW, Huerta did not align herself with the era's women's liberation movement. She and many other women of color at the time saw mainstream second-wave feminists as dedicated to middle-class, Anglo concerns, and as either unaware of or unwilling to recognize the unique forms of intersectional discrimination faced by women of color and the working classes. By aligning themselves with Anglo feminists, Chicanas worried that they would be framed as acculturated to mainstream, Anglo society and therefore as less dedicated to Chicana/o causes.<sup>40</sup> Not until the 1990s did Huerta begin identifying as a feminist, but long before that her rhetoric was punctuated by references to her own nuanced struggles as a female leader in a male-dominated movement, as well as by references to the unique hardships facing Chicanas throughout the twentieth century.

### Persona, Shifts, and Amalgamations

We analyze two textual fragments from Huerta's rhetorical career: a 1973 article published in *La Voz Del Pueblo* and a 1974 invited speech delivered to the American Public Health Association (APHA) at its annual conference. These fragments were selected based on criteria related to circulation, diversity of form, and similarity of content. First, not only did both fragments garner significant attention and discussion at the time of their original publication/delivery, but they have since been quoted extensively and anthologized and thereby deemed at least somewhat representative of Huerta's rhetorical oeuvre.<sup>41</sup> Second, these fragments represent diverse modes of delivery and offer a lens into if/how Huerta's appeals depend upon textual or oral presentation. Third, they communicate the same basic thesis, feature



direct appeals for aid, generate argumentative topoi from Huerta's intersectional identity, and include content and stylistic features attributed to Huerta's rhetoric as a whole.<sup>42</sup>

The first fragment was originally published in a Californian newspaper dedicated to *El Movimiento* or the Chicana/o movement.<sup>43</sup> *La Voz* was one of numerous publications that were "instrumental in creating spaces" for Chicana/o identity construction and that targeted readers who were politically active, Spanish-speaking Chicana/os.<sup>44</sup> Many such readers had experienced racial discrimination, knew about the hardships of seasonal farm work, and were sympathetic to the UFW's work. Huerta's central argument for these readers was that they must join the union's cause and become active in organizing. Doing so, according to Huerta, would be the surest way to achieve social equality and better working conditions for Chicana/os in general. The second fragment analyzed is a speech Huerta delivered to a conference for public health professionals. Members of Huerta's immediate audience were largely not Chicana/o, nor were they overly familiar with the hardships and public health risks associated with farm work. Huerta repeatedly recognized in this speech the distance between her audience members and the farm workers she was hoping to aid, while, at the same time, carefully constructing a message urging APHA members to support the UFW.

In both artifacts, Huerta's major argument was essentially the same, but the transcendent persona constituted therein involved major shifts in the balance of distance from and identification with audiences. Although her empirical audiences were unique for each discourse, it could be argued that members of both audiences were primarily middle-class. *La Voz* was a bi-monthly newspaper written in both English and Spanish for and by Chicana/os associated with the University of California at Berkeley. Although some readers had first-hand experiences with farmworkers and/or poverty, Huerta argued that their educational experiences set them apart from the working classes. She maintained that many *La Voz* readers viewed the world differently than did farmworkers, arguing for instance that college-educated Chicana/os had the most trouble adjusting to life among farmworkers because they had "tried so hard to get away from that scene and they don't want to go back to it."<sup>45</sup> Although individual readers certainly had the potential to retain working-class identifications regardless of socio-economic status, Huerta drew from her own experiences to conclude that, at least in an embodied sense, this sort of ideological retention was rare. In terms of the APHA address, those attending the annual meeting of the world's oldest public health organization experienced the economic opportunities and resources garnered from their professional careers. From a Marxist perspective, conference attendees may have harbored what Georg Lukács describes as a false class consciousness,<sup>46</sup> meaning that they had a limited understanding of the totality of history and focused on their own specific moment in time as if it were universal (a condition that forms and reinforces ideology). Such a focus would have limited audience members' ability to understand the position of farm workers (the proletariat). Therefore, Huerta worked to expand their understanding of history and their role in the historical process, a rhetorical move that mirrors other

Chicana/o social reform discourse delineating “an alternate history, reality, and cultural memory” to Chicana/os and Anglos alike.<sup>47</sup> Huerta urged audiences to be conscious of farm workers’ situations and to sympathize with their experiences.

In the following analysis, we identify, first, the divergent transcendent experiences Huerta highlighted for her audiences before delineating how she balanced the mystery of transcendence with audience identification. Our analysis accounts for the empirical audience Huerta likely addressed, as well as for the implied audience she created in her discourse via the second persona. We argue that Huerta’s transcendent first persona, which projected distance from and similarity to potential audiences, garnered additional persuasive force from its reflection in a corresponding second persona, as well as from Huerta’s ability to reconstitute her borderland experiences as a tool for negotiating diverse perspectives.

### *La Voz Del Pueblo*

*The first persona: Balancing distance from and identification with Chicana/os.* Speaking to the readers of *La Voz*, Huerta constituted herself as having transcended what was believed to be possible by identifying as the creator and facilitator of the first union for farmworkers, as well as the only female in the UFW’s leadership and the first and only woman through the 1970s to lobby for the union or negotiate labor contracts.<sup>48</sup> In her article, she created a persona that drew attention to her leadership in the union—thereby communicating that she was set apart—and demonstrated normalcy by discussing her own traditional Chicana/o upbringing and experiences with racial discrimination. Once Huerta established herself as representing a transcendent subject position, she garnered persuasive force for her appeals by balancing discursive distance with a sense that she was not unlike her readers.

Huerta worked to create a balance of distinction and normalcy in discussions about her work with the union. By delineating her role as union co-founder, Huerta generated a degree of rhetorical mystery or strangeness which belied cultural expectations for Mexican-American women.<sup>49</sup> In the 1970s, women identifying with Chicana/o culture were generally expected to tend the home, raise a family, and avoid the public sphere.<sup>50</sup> Trapped by what Francisca Flores terms “our cultural hell,” women who strayed from the duties ascribed to them were perceived as cultural *venditas* or traitors.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Chicana feminists were forced to struggle for equality both within the Chicana/o movement itself and within mainstream American society, a feat that required a great deal of resolve.<sup>52</sup> In Huerta’s case, even when she was confronted by fellow organizers who informed her that “farm labor organizing was no place for a woman” and that she should instead “take care of her family,” she was not dissuaded from her work.<sup>53</sup> She went on to become the first person to advocate for a farm workers’ union, and she served as “the UFW’s first vice president, its chief negotiator, lobbyist, boycott strategist, and public spokeswoman.”<sup>54</sup>

Huerta’s professional success was due, in large part, to her oratorical skill. In her article for *La Voz*, she explained, “Because I am articulate, I came to the forefront.”<sup>55</sup> By highlighting her emergence in the spotlight, Huerta reminded audience members

that she was an unprecedented leader in the union and had achieved success in organizing and lobbying beyond what was believed possible, particularly because she resided at the borderlands and for this reason was considered *atravesado*—outside the confines of acceptability and normalcy.<sup>56</sup> Yet, to avoid distancing herself too much from her audience and other union leaders, she gave herself no credit for her public renown, writing, “that’s what I consider myself—just a person working at what I’m supposed to be doing.”<sup>57</sup> This statement functioned as a reminder of her normalcy: Huerta may have accomplished seemingly impossible tasks, but she constituted herself as just one of many who had dedicated themselves to their life’s work. By representing herself as “just a person,” Huerta suggested that anyone in her position would have achieved as much, an appeal that highlighted the level of solidarity among diverse union members and functioned to offset the direct glare of her extraordinary feats.<sup>58</sup> This argument also aligned with emerging Chicana feminist conceptions of community as inclusive, as Huerta argued that other workers, many of them Chicanas, had labored tirelessly for the union without any recognition.<sup>59</sup> In this light, Huerta’s accomplishments became less individually significant and more representative of Chicana/os as a whole.

Although Huerta implied that members of the Chicana/o community—and *La Voz* readers in particular—*could* follow her exceptional path, she did not try to convince them to dedicate their lives to union leadership. She leveraged discussion of her own accomplishments against appeals that others take smaller but still significant steps to support the union. Looking to the future, she claimed that although the union currently had a large number of workers, more were needed “because we have a whole country to organize.”<sup>60</sup> This vision of what was required for managing the days ahead functioned to compel readers to see themselves as potential union members and organizers. Huerta’s “we” marked the union as both inclusive and as a point of identification with a collectivity of diverse people united in common cause.<sup>61</sup> She recognized that individuals would need to sacrifice much to adopt this identity and fulfill her vision of society. Thus, her subsequent appeals worked to offset the difficult nature of these sacrifices by maintaining that readers need not spend their lives organizing in unfamiliar territory. She assured them that, “if the people can learn to organize within the union, they can go back to their own communities and organize.”<sup>62</sup> Individuals in her audience—those whom she constituted as “the people”—could contribute to her larger vision of social change without making the extreme and mysterious sacrifices she embodied. And because Huerta’s readers were likely interested in Chicana/o rights beyond those of the farm worker, she assured them that farm worker organization was just the first step, explaining that “in the future, we would very much like to organize around an issue that isn’t a farm worker issue. But we just can’t because we just don’t have the time.”<sup>63</sup> Huerta suggested that if readers joined the organizing effort, they would pave the way for continued activism.

Beyond discourse about the union, Huerta also balanced appeals that set her apart from readers with appeals to normalcy in discourse about her personal life. She repeatedly worked to identify with audience members by recalling times when she

herself had experienced racial discrimination. Although raised in an integrated, middle-class neighborhood, Huerta explained that she attended a segregated high school where a teacher refused to give her the “A” she had earned because “she knew that somebody was writing my papers for me.”<sup>64</sup> Such an experience may have resonated with Huerta’s readers because it illustrated the racial discrimination so common at the time. Yet, despite her encounters with others who treated her as inadequate, Huerta differentiated herself by explaining that, in the midst of each of these experiences, she never stopped believing that “there was nothing wrong with Chicanos. I felt inside that everybody was wrong and I was right.”<sup>65</sup> She distinguished herself as unwilling to accept prevalent derogatory depictions of Chicana/os individually or as a community by drawing from what Lisa Flores describes as a Chicana feminist “rhetoric of difference.” And “through this rejection of the external and creation of the internal” sense of self-worth, Huerta both articulated herself as distinct for her unwavering self-possession and assured audience members that they, too, were different and—in their difference—valuable.<sup>66</sup>

Huerta explained that her feeling of “rightness” is what led her to organize the UFW, even though her decision to do so required great personal sacrifice. As she told *La Voz* readers, work for the union meant trading in a teaching position with adequate pay and benefits for a job that would not feed her growing family. As a union organizer, Huerta received only ten dollars per week for household expenses and five dollars per person for food. She explained, “I had this problem worrying about whether my kids were going to eat or not, because at the time I started working for the union I was making pretty good money, and I knew I was going to start working without *any* money, and I wondered how I could do it.”<sup>67</sup> By highlighting her extreme sacrifices for the union, Huerta stressed both her difference from and similarity with readers. Her willingness to sacrifice not only her own livelihood but also the security of her children would have been difficult for many middle-class Chicana/o readers to understand. Huerta noted that, while the farm workers generally understood her sacrifices, she often received criticism from those representing the middle classes, including her father and other relatives, who were “hung-up” about making money.<sup>68</sup> However, Huerta filled some of the space she created between herself and readers with confessions about how she continually worried about her financial situation. Readers could understand concerns about providing for one’s family and could therefore identify with how difficult it must have been for Huerta to make the decisions she did.

Huerta provided another point of identification for audience members by framing the union as familial. Cloud argues that identification via metaphors of familialism can be problematic if they encourage “domesticating” cross-class identification between workers and the employers who profit from their labor.<sup>69</sup> Such identification can reify a paternalist and racist mentality. In this case, however, Huerta drew from the Chicana/o idea of *la familia* as a cultural collective, not so much to encourage readers to join the union (although that was a goal) but to help readers understand and identify with her as one of their own. As Anzaldúa explains, Chicana/o culture tends to highlight “the welfare of the family, the community, and the tribe” as “more

important than the welfare of the individual. The individual exists first as kin—as sister, as father, as *padrino*—and last as self.”<sup>70</sup> Huerta compared her interactions with union members to a traditional Mexican-American family to help readers see her as acting from within a familiar and even conventional frame of reference. She explained that “the idea of a communal family is not new and progressive. It’s really kind of old fashioned. Remember when you were little you always had your uncles, your aunts, your grandmother, and your *comadres* around. As a child in the Mexican culture you identified with a lot of people, not just your mother and father like they do in middle-class homes.”<sup>71</sup> Huerta’s use of the second person, in combination with her references to the many familial relationships and identifications children might have—particularly within working-class Mexican-American families, made for a message rife with nostalgic resonance. Such resonance would have contributed persuasive force to Huerta’s suggestion that, regardless of readers’ current social and ideological positioning, their Mexican-American heritage and borderland experiences allowed them to identify with her personally and the union more generally via extended-family social structures and working-class struggles.

Yet, at the same time that Huerta’s appeals to *la familia* seemed to invoke tradition and thereby mark her as familiar, such appeals also worked to “simultaneously disrupt” conventional notions of the Mexican-American family and thereby contribute to Huerta’s progressive vision of the future.<sup>72</sup> If, as Huerta argued, a Chicana mother could successfully lead male members of the union (which she framed as engendering a familial social structure), then women’s roles in Mexican-American families should allow for and even facilitate leadership and agency. Thus, her appeals to *la familia* functioned in two divergent yet mutually supportive ways by communicating both distance from *and* similarity with audiences. This particular appeal operated in Huerta’s discourse as a synecdoche for the conflicting motivations driving the transcendent persona as a whole. Throughout the *La Voz* article, Huerta represented herself as both exceptional and as someone with whom readers could identify, thereby persuasively constructing a transcendent first persona. But it was Huerta’s creation of a corresponding second persona reflecting the expectations of the first that solidified the article’s persuasive force.

*The reflective second persona.* Throughout her *La Voz* article, Huerta discursively constituted a desired audience for her message, one called into being through her discourse.<sup>73</sup> By creating a second persona, Huerta set up the ideal target for her message—a group of people who would adopt her ideology and therefore admire her transcendent accomplishments while also recognizing that they too could adopt, and fight for, her vision for the future.<sup>74</sup> In this case, members of Huerta’s second persona—her created audience—were willing to become politically active in the fight for Chicana/o rights and the rights of farm workers.

In constituting an audience that was, like herself, critical of its ties to the middle-class and the false consciousness in which such a consciousness is bound, Huerta joked about her own background and her request to have organizer Fred Ross investigated by the FBI. She reflected, “See how middle-class I was? In fact, I was a

registered Republican at the time.”<sup>75</sup> Therein, Huerta recognized her own history as similar to that of many others who had been less-than-exemplary activists and, at the same time, criticized her middle-class ties by connecting that class to the political party least invested in the farm workers’ cause. By revealing her own struggle with false class consciousness, Huerta demonstrated her class consciousness as an achievement earned through diligent effort to understand the totality of the historical process and the farm workers’ place in that process.<sup>76</sup> She framed her created audience as, like her, willing to accept the challenge of looking beyond false class consciousness and as opposed to the attitude of some Chicana/os who “tried so hard to get away from [the farm worker] scene and they don’t want to go back to it.”<sup>77</sup> These Chicana/os, according to Huerta, tended to be college-educated and had a difficult time relating to or interacting with farm workers given their divergent experiences. By contrast, Huerta constructed an audience that respected not only her own self-sacrificing example and normative defiance but also the intense struggle of the farm workers themselves, whom Huerta described as having an “incredible strength.”<sup>78</sup> Members of the audience Huerta constituted were happy to interact with farm workers and thereby separate themselves from the middle-class tendency to critique or look down upon the working classes. Such an audience was ready to question its comfortable existence and become part of Huerta’s larger vision: that of a politically active Chicana/o population dedicated to working for social change.

More specifically, Huerta constituted her audience as one that was politically knowledgeable and active. She often referred to politicians and events without offering explanations or clarifications. For example, Huerta referred to AB 964 (which would have outlawed consumer boycotts).<sup>79</sup> She did not explain the terms she was using or the context in which said lawmaking or lobbying took place. Instead, she provided a brief explanation of the union’s actions, noting that “we mobilized and were able to stop it,”<sup>80</sup> before moving on to her next topic—how the Nixon administration tried to use federal courts to remove the right to boycott. By offering only limited explanation for and context surrounding these issues, Huerta revealed her expectation that her ideal audience already knew this information or, if they did not, that they would follow up on their own. Likewise, she referred casually to political parties and individual politicians with whom she had interacted, including Senator George McGovern, whose campaign the union supported; Henry Ramirez (Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for the Spanish Speaking), with whom the union refused to interact; Philip Sanchez (National Director of the Office of Opportunity), whose home Huerta visited to ask for help in a labor dispute; and Arizona Governor Jack Williams, who once signed anti-farm worker legislation at 9 a.m. to avoid a union rally. Via these off-handed references (which sometimes featured only the last names of the individuals in question), Huerta performed her own familiarity with the political scene and constituted her audience members as similarly imbued.

Most importantly, Huerta framed her model audience as dedicated specifically to furthering the Chicana/o rights movement, positioning audience members as if they were movement insiders. For instance, she openly discussed—rather than hid or

glamorized—the union’s intra-organizational problems. She admitted that the movement faced many challenges, but she also positioned readers as capable of meeting those challenges. One such challenge was the lack of a common vision among movement members. Huerta explained, “Understanding that Chicanos have to come from all walks of life from different experiences and different communities, you’re not always going to get everybody to think the same.”<sup>81</sup> She recognized that even her ideal audience was not single-mindedly devoted to the farm worker cause. Instead, the audience Huerta constituted consisted of individuals who were devoted to the collective *la raza* and the many diverse issues represented therein. They were capable of assessing the union’s challenges from multiple perspectives and would inevitably work together to find appropriate solutions. In this respect, Huerta’s second persona corresponded not only with the values of her first persona (respecting her boundary-breaking accomplishments and identifying with her experiences), but also with the likely values of her empirical audiences (those college-educated, urban-based Chicana/os who were interested in multiple Chicana/o-related issues and capable of bringing unique perspectives and solutions to the union’s battles). Huerta’s framing of this implied audience strengthened the persuasive force of her argument via the combination of personae at work in her written appeals. Her oratory—though different in terms of specific personae and medium—offered a similarly compelling blend of transcendent identification. Speaking before audiences over a year after publishing her *La Voz* article, Huerta was able to integrate into her message a sense of extemporaneous passion and embodied communication that was largely absent from her written discourse.

#### *APHA Keynote Address*

*The first persona: Balancing distance from and identification with health professionals.* Speaking to an entirely different audience at the APHA national convention, Huerta framed herself as both transcendent and normal in distinct ways and for different reasons. She constituted herself as having transcended her audience’s expectations by delineating her embodied approach to organizing, which involved living the life of those she was aiding and providing them with the ability to begin taking over the system in which they had been oppressed. As Huerta was a former teacher, members of her audience would have identified with her professional commitment to helping those in need. However, they would not necessarily have identified with Huerta’s dedication to “collaborative egalitarianism,” which guided her decision to live as and among farm workers and to position farm workers as healthcare insurers and facilitators in their own right.<sup>82</sup> Thus, throughout her speech, Huerta drew from her experiences as one at the borders of middle-class life (as well as at the borders of impoverished farm work) to balance the perceived mystery in her organizational practices with the recognition that her audience shared her desire for social change. She demonstrated this balance in her discussion of the union’s health clinic and organizational processes, and in her discussion of self-sacrifice as necessary in public health work.



In her discussions about the union's successful health clinics and insurance program, Huerta initially set herself apart from APHA members by describing herself as the champion of a ground-up organizing scheme that put farm workers themselves in charge of their own health care. Instead of promoting a hierarchical, top-down system, she transcended her audience members' expectations for what was possible of her individually and of a successful healthcare program more generally by promoting a system in which the lowest-level participant was equal to an organization leader. Huerta's inspiration for forming a worker-run system emerged from experiences in which male UFW activists silenced her because of what they perceived as her inferiority as a woman. These experiences of marginalization awakened a budding Chicana feminist sensibility (and accompanying aesthetic) that encouraged her to develop a "keen eye for opportunities to use bottom-up, grassroots tactics: recruiting people through publicity, harnessing consumer power, teaching people how to stand up for themselves."<sup>83</sup> Huerta's UFW healthcare plan benefited from her ability to envision a world in which the oppressed emerged as agents of their own liberation. The plan included an insurance system funded by growers and a network of health clinics staffed and run by farm workers; physicians were hired from outside the union, but nurses and technicians were generally former farm workers.<sup>84</sup> Huerta emphasized that this health plan was created inductively in response to workers' testimonials and oral histories. She told stories about specific workers, including a man whose hand was broken on the job and remained untreated for some time, and a woman who was told she was pregnant when she really had tuberculosis. Narratives such as these, Huerta said, convinced union leaders that a health plan controlled by the workers themselves would best meet workers' needs.

For the APHA members in her audience, this move to create a health plan based primarily on the testimony of low-income workers without any government or funding agency involvement would have seemed, at best, bizarre and, at worst, financially irresponsible. As employees of corporate and government-funded organizations, they would have been familiar with health programs designed in response to funding opportunities and then, subsequently, fitted to specific targeted populations. Huerta's healthcare plan, by contrast, emerged in direct response to individual farm workers' needs and abilities, which were assessed according to their own oral histories. Huerta's passion for this type of organizing and her intimate, day-to-day knowledge of farm workers' culture would have been foreign to her professional, largely non-Chicana/o audience and fostered a sense of strangeness or separation between them.

Yet Huerta's rhetoric suggests that she was almost hyper-aware of the sense of unfamiliarity her APHA audiences were likely to experience upon hearing of her healthcare work. Her awareness might be attributed to *la facultad* or "a deeper sensing." Anzaldúa explains, "when we have all sorts of oppressions coming at us, we are forced to develop this faculty so that we'll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away." Huerta capitalized on her experientially sharpened aptitude for "seeing" acutely others' viewpoints by using the resulting information to illustrate her transcendent vision of a changed society.<sup>85</sup> She helped her audience members

connect themselves to the farm workers' plight by appealing to overarching public health goals. For instance, she spoke about the unsanitary conditions in the fields where hundreds toiled without toilets or washing facilities. To make this scenario directly relevant for those in the audience, Huerta described the implications of such conditions for them personally, noting, "The way you see the grapes in your market, the way you see the lettuce in that market, it comes directly from the field. It doesn't go through any cleansing process. It's direct."<sup>86</sup> Making this connection between the fields and the grocery store would have contributed to audience members' sense of outrage because it suggests a direct threat to their own health and the health of the communities they served. Huerta expertly connected the horrific conditions of farm workers' employment to the very personal space of APHA members' dinner tables.<sup>87</sup> Her ability to seamlessly link these ostensibly distinct scenarios is coterminous with the *mestiza* consciousness, which emerges from the realization that "she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries." Rather, "the consciousness of the borderlands" fosters a constant search for associations and an ecological understanding of individuals as interrelated.<sup>88</sup> Once Huerta alerted audience members to the lack of government oversight and regulative action to improve the situation (a situation in which they now understood themselves to be both affected and implicated), they were positioned to see her organizational plan as a potentially fitting response to the farm workers' health concerns.

Huerta also created identification with APHA members by drawing from their common educational goals. She assured them that, under this plan, farm workers were not only receiving excellent healthcare—"Our healthcare was so good that we changed the statistics of Tulare County"<sup>89</sup>—but also learning and passing on valuable health information. She described a waiting room she had visited where farm workers discussed the reasons for their visit and one told another he should not get a certain shot because he could develop immunity to penicillin. Huerta emphasized the novelty of this scenario by exclaiming, "These are farm workers teaching each other, you know, about health."<sup>90</sup> The farm workers in this narrative were emerging as self-sufficient, knowledgeable patients, thereby meeting goals shared by both the union and the APHA. The narrative's persuasive delivery depended upon Huerta's ability to perceive and represent farmworkers from APHA members' perspectives, an ability she honed through the "struggle of identities" inherent to border living.<sup>91</sup>

In an attempt to further situate herself as in collusion with audience members, Huerta explained that "we got into the business of organizing farm workers for mainly health reasons,"<sup>92</sup> a statement that also justified her appearance before the APHA. Huerta underscored the similarities between APHA professionals and union members such as herself, maintaining that those in her audience "have dedicated your lives to making life better for the world, for America. I think that your goals are very much like the goals of our union."<sup>93</sup> By comparing the APHA members' goals with her own, Huerta revealed herself as a leader whose vision public health officials could celebrate. Regardless of the different procedures and organizational strategies used by distinct public health organizations, audience members could appreciate

Huerta's success via the UFW because they, like Huerta, were working to improve public health throughout the country. Huerta's argument for shared goals would have allowed audience members to recognize the importance of supporting a program that worked, whether or not they practiced the same methods.

Beyond appeals to her unprecedented (yet relatable) organizational methods, Huerta balanced narratives of self-sacrifice with her understanding that most audience members would not, and maybe even should not, follow her extreme example. She initially separated herself from audiences by arguing that she felt it was essential for public health workers to live as members of target communities, thus in this case becoming a part of the collective *la raza* and giving up the privileges associated with middle-class living. She explained that "the people in that minority community or in that community are not going to have any faith in the medical program that is in there if you can't take their side. They're going to suspect you."<sup>94</sup> To avoid suspicion and express intense solidarity, Huerta explained that all union workers, including those such as herself who were formally entrenched within middle-class jobs and expectations, sacrificed financially because "you can't help poor people and be comfortable. You know, the two things are just not compatible. If you want to really give good health care to poor people you've got to be prepared to be a little uncomfortable and to put a little bit of sacrifice behind it."<sup>95</sup> For Huerta, this sacrifice required giving up a regular salary, living off of donated food, and wearing second-hand clothes. The reward for this lifestyle, Huerta said, was the close relationship she developed with farm workers, which allowed her to organize them effectively and create successful programs.

In the midst of her discussions about the importance of extreme sacrifice, however, Huerta recognized the more comfortable—yet still valuable—work being done by the mainstream public health community. Her apparent willingness to pardon the very incompatibility that she had just denounced might be attributed to the "tolerance for contradictions" and "massive uprooting of dualistic thinking" inherent in *mestiza* consciousness.<sup>96</sup> In the wake of her previous claims about the necessity of extreme sacrifice for effective social justice work, Huerta nevertheless spoke with passion and confidence about the challenges public health workers faced when they attempted to "make real changes or when you try to get into those controversial areas where you have conflicts, you know, of power."<sup>97</sup> The challenges public health workers faced would have been different from those Huerta encountered, but she drew from her borderland-honed dedication to inclusivity, multiplicity, and collective values to acknowledge that their challenges were no less real than those faced by the union. Knowing that many public health workers would have had some connection to government agencies, Huerta described a situation in which the Food and Drug Administration seemed to be ignoring cases of food contamination. She recognized that a public health professional who drew attention to such an offense would likely face censure, explaining that "if any public health person brings this up there are going to be repercussions because they bring it up."<sup>98</sup> These repercussions might include a reprimand, a missed job promotion, or even a job loss. For both Huerta and members of her audience, opposition came not when they were following the status

quo but when they attempted to call attention to injustice or neglect. By highlighting this shared concern, Huerta invited her auditors to see themselves as her compatriots, even if their contribution consisted only of agreeing to participate in the union's boycott. Most importantly, she positioned audience members, via a second persona, as people who were already joining her in the fight for Chicana/o public health.

*The reflective second persona.* Black theorizes that the audience implied in discourse is a "model of what the rhetor would have his real auditor become."<sup>99</sup> That model includes the ideology the rhetor would have auditors adopt: "the network of interconnected convictions that functions in a man [sic] epistemically and that shapes his identity by determining how he views the world."<sup>100</sup> As in the *La Voz* article, in Huerta's APHA address she discursively created an ideal audience for her message—one that would accept her call to join the union via respect for her transcendent achievements *and* adopt her view of the world and vision for the future. However, instead of framing audience members as willing to confront their middle-class backgrounds and leave their comfortable lives to work for the union, as she did in the *La Voz* article, Huerta framed this audience as composed of compassionate—even if bourgeois—public servants who would happily contribute to union actions if they had more information about the cause. It is possible that Huerta's *la facultad* led her to perceive in her empirical audience an unwillingness or inability to take on the ideological and informational burden that she imposed on her *La Voz* readers.<sup>101</sup> Thusly informed, Huerta constituted an implied audience via her APHA address composed of individuals who, above all, valued the public good and supported a range of diverse public health initiatives. Although her empirical audience was, on the whole, disconnected from the plight of farm workers and more likely to work with and for less transient (and non-Chicana/o) populations, Huerta framed them as individuals who would nevertheless adopt the basic tenets underlying her vision of a changed world. This framing of the audience corresponded with and supported the balance of mystery and identification she communicated in her transcendent first persona.

In contrast to her implied expectations for *La Voz* readers, Huerta did not expect this audience to be familiar with the farm workers' situation. Instead, she readily provided background information about the farm workers' plight, the union's mission, and union members' personal narratives. She also equipped her ideal audience with farm workers' personal testimonies. In this way, Huerta framed audience members as those who were willing to look past class and educational differences to see farm workers as valuable members of society, those whose words could be taken seriously and used to inform the creation of a viable healthcare plan. She noted that many members of her audience came from rural communities, and—given their personal experiences with regional subjectivities—she assumed that they might better understand and sympathize with the barriers farmworkers faced in terms of maintaining a level of health and wellbeing. She explained that farmworkers "are poisoned with pesticides" and "told they have sun stroke. And it's always the same thing, you have no money, the doctor can't see you."<sup>102</sup> Huerta offered this

anecdote to an audience of healthcare professionals whom she framed as, above all, compassionate. She appealed to and thereby constituted their compassion by arguing that “you know you would be sad to know that many farm workers before we had our clinics had never been to a doctor in their lives.”<sup>103</sup> Therein, she worked from the assumption that once her ideal audience members had been informed about the farm workers’ lack of access to healthcare, their compassion would lead them to recognize the need for a better system designed to provide treatment to all and to minimize misdiagnosis by staffing qualified, attentive medical professionals.

Because they were constituted as compassionate, members of Huerta’s created second persona were willing to consider radical solutions for quelling existing healthcare problems and thereby resist the staid ideological outlook they had long accepted. Huerta framed her audience as inclined to celebrate how lucky the union was “that César Chávez is a grammar school dropout,”<sup>104</sup> thereby avowing that the information he learned outside of formal educational institutions ultimately facilitated his vision of a completely new kind of insurance system. At this point, Huerta aligned herself with Chávez’s experiential training and distanced herself from the ideas of many middle-class APHA members. At the same time, however, she continued to communicate a degree of faith in her listeners that, despite the lack of familiarity they had with the ideas she was putting forth, they would recognize success in whatever form it took. She explained that, instead of hiring an insurance company, the union chose to use the medical plan funds from growers to pay for medical expenses directly, thereby cutting out third party insurers and positioning farm workers to administer the plan themselves. She assured her listeners that, throughout every healthcare audit, the plan was deemed “perfect.”<sup>105</sup> In this way, Huerta composed her second persona as consisting of individuals who were open to new ideas, respectful of actions that addressed problems, and self-possessed enough to break with expectations others might have for them by, for example, helping directly with the union’s healthcare program or otherwise supporting the union via grape, lettuce, and wine boycotts.

Finally, Huerta ended her speech with a rousing attempt to engage her constructed and empirical audiences in what Alberto González labels an “ideology of participation” by creating opportunities for them to contribute to her call for action.<sup>106</sup> She began her conclusion by inviting those in the audience to “say a few Vivas, now, okay?” and then explained that *viva* means “long life,” while *abajo* means “down with.”<sup>107</sup> In translating these phrases, Huerta adopted the role of translator or cultural shape-shifter often demanded of those living in the borderlands,<sup>108</sup> and she was in this way able to guide her empirical audience into a decidedly unfamiliar discursive space:

Okay, let’s try it now. All together, huh. I’ll say Viva La Causa and everybody yells, Viva, really loud, okay? Viva La Causa! Viva! Ugh, that was very weak. This is very important. This is like kind of praying together in unison, you know, so it’s really important. Let’s try it again. Viva La Causa! Viva! Viva La Justicia! Viva! Now so César can hear us in the hospital—where he’s at and the growers can hear us where

they're at. Viva, Chávez! Viva! Okay, now we'll try Abajo. Down with fear! Abajo! Down with lettuce and grapes! Abajo! Down with Gallo! Abajo!<sup>109</sup>

By working to translate both the Spanish words in her call-and-response and the “very important” role audience members played therein as vocal participants, Huerta performed (and invited audience members to perform) a specific type of vernacular or cultural form associated with living at the borders.<sup>110</sup> In that process, she celebrated the uniqueness of her position among non-Spanish speakers by turning the use of Spanglish, something that had long been used to denigrate Chicana/os, into an opportunity for celebration and an important means for communicating the need for social change.<sup>111</sup> As Sowards argues, Huerta’s calls for audience participation seemed to foster a sense of collaboration and dedication to egalitarianism. Members of Huerta’s ideal audience were positioned to raise their voices with her during her keynote address and then to leave the conference with a newfound sense of connection to and interest in the UFW. By asking her empirical audience members to participate in this energetic—and un-conference-like—bilingual chant, Huerta demanded that they step into the second persona and thereby become constituted as those who understood the importance of “praying together in unison.”<sup>112</sup> Such audience participation would allow empirical audience members to rehearse the ideology Huerta laid out in this speech and embody the ideal audience she addressed.

## Discussion

Dolores Huerta’s rhetoric provides scholars of rhetoric and social change with an unparalleled opportunity for understanding the persuasive appeals of an understudied and long overlooked social activist, as well as the negotiation of borderland identity in the context of a shifting transcendent persona. Our analysis demonstrates not only that Huerta used both a transcendent first persona and a second persona to advance her persuasive argument, but also that the combination of these two helped her to achieve the fragile balance of mystery and normalcy that is at the core of the transcendent persona. The question of how balance is created in the transcendent persona is difficult to answer for rhetors using (or theorizing about) a first persona alone. Because of their boundary-breaking accomplishments, rhetors best positioned to draw from a transcendent persona may be more likely to focus on the mystery of their position and to lose sight of their audiences. For a rhetor such as Huerta, the discursive delineation of a second persona can function as protection from this breakdown in audience identification. Instead of trying to identify with the unknowable quantity of an empirical audience, Huerta incorporated elements of that audience into the constitution of her idealized audience, which she communicated via a second persona. She then used her discourse to identify with this created audience, which reflected the values communicated in her own transcendent persona. Correspondingly, the members of Huerta’s empirical audience were positioned by her discourse to see themselves as she saw them: as people ready to take action.

Huerta’s use of a shifting transcendent persona demonstrates that a rhetor’s material reality or “rhetorical situation”<sup>113</sup> is not necessarily the agent which calls a

transcendent persona into being or shapes such a persona. Instead of drawing from a single source of experience to create a single transcendent persona for all audiences, Huerta constructed two diverse transcendent personae that drew from unique points of transcendence and distinct performances of normalcy. Such a finding suggests that the transcendent persona is created through a framing and constituting of the self and the other instead of through empirical observations, although such observations can be helpful in the framing process. When used in concert with a reflective second persona, the transcendent persona can frame both audience members and the situation itself in light of a rhetor's persuasive goals. Whether circumstances called for a brief biography or an address to a conference of public health professionals, Huerta framed each situation as a recruitment opportunity and each audience as one willing to join her cause. This finding reiterates Jensen et al.'s claim that all rhetors have the potential to draw from a transcendent persona as long as they possess the rhetorical skill and/or opportunity to convince audiences that they have transcended a long-accepted boundary or expectation.<sup>114</sup>

That Huerta created a shifting transcendent persona over the course of two distinct moments, conditions, and modes of address invites questions about what specific conditions or circumstances enable or require this rhetorical strategy. In Huerta's case, we found that her ability to draw from a *mestiza* consciousness generated from living at the borderlands of established communities facilitated her ability to balance distance with identification in the context of corresponding first and second personae *and* her ability to recalibrate that balance so that it integrated distinct points of distance and identification according to changing rhetorical circumstances. In the same breath, it seemed, Huerta could argue that one must be poor in order to aid the impoverished and, then, that middle-class efforts to aid the poor were vital to the union's success. These contrasting, seemingly illogical appeals functioned as discursive representations of the experience of liminality and difference she experienced as a Chicana, formerly middle-class, social reformer. In this way, her rhetoric accounted for the interests of distinct ideologies and yet still managed to focus those constituted therein toward aid for the UFW. Her border living—in conversation with illustrations of her boundary crossing—emerged as a discursive resource for identification across, between, and among contexts. Huerta's subjectivity as multiple and marginalized was certainly a condition of her persona in these cases and, as future research may find, a necessary condition for the successful orchestration of amalgamated personae at work in the shifting transcendent persona more generally.

In the most abstract of senses, Huerta's rhetoric demonstrates the value of studying different personae orchestrated in combination. Just as this study determined the ways a transcendent persona functions in concert with a corresponding second persona to create a persuasive balance of mystery and identification, future research may reveal how other conceptualizations of personae function in combination with each other. Examples of such research include analyses concerning the constitution of a first persona that coalesces with the emergence of a third persona to objectify unnamed audience members, the delineation of a first persona that might function to



wink at a fourth persona,<sup>115</sup> or the explication of how different audiences may be implied using the second and fourth personae and how such personae interact. Additionally, scholarship should explore the ways that other identified personae<sup>116</sup> incorporate both the first and second personae to determine if and how they may intermingle with a reflective second persona and potentially augment persuasive resonance.

Overall, Huerta's shifting transcendent persona demonstrates, at the very least, that scholarship on personae continues to wield helpful theoretical, methodological, and applied tools for contemporary rhetorical research. Whether speakers combine diverse personae, balance two distinct motivations (e.g., mystery and identification) within one first persona, or speak to audiences constituted by a second persona, the persona as a construct and its diverse corollaries continues to offer critics, scholars of social change, and advocates for social justice the vocabulary to address symbolic interaction in compelling and even revolutionary ways.

## Notes

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- [3] Quoted in James Rainey, "The Eternal Soldadera," *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1999; Barbara L. Baer and Glenna Matthews, "The Women of the Boycott," *The Nation*, 1974, 232; Dolores Huerta, interview by Ray Suarez, "Still an Activist at 82, Dolores Huerta Calls Herself 'a Born-Again Feminist,'" *PBS Newshour*, May 30, 2012. We use the term Chicana/o as it reflects Huerta's time frame.
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