

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Revealing Borderland Identities: Diaspora, Memory, Home, and Art

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies

By

Jessica Maria Michel Arana

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The thesis of Jessica Arana is approved:

Christina Ayala-Alcantar, Ph.D.

Date

Kathryn Sorrells, Ph.D.

Date

Yreina Cervantez, MFA, Chair

Date

California State University, Northridge

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ABSTRACT

Revealing Borderland Identities: Diaspora, Memory, Home, and Art

By

Jessica Maria Michel Arana

Master of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies

This thesis aims to critique racial identity literature and challenge normative racial constructs that omit Multiracial identity experiences. It does this by examining monoracial and Multiracial identity development research and by presenting the author's autohistoria/autoethnography and artful actions as counter-narratives. The author's complex experience of being Multiracial in the U.S. is revealed. Informed by Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the Borderlands (2007) and Chicana feminism's resistance to fragmentation, the embodied practices of creating art and self-narratives are used as methods to (re)member and reexamine identity experiences. These acts become strategies for crossing monoracial boundaries and resisting the rigid boxing-in and labeling of racial identities.

Keywords: Autohistoria, Borderlands, Chicana Art, Diaspora, Nepantla, Multiracial Identity, Mixed race

An Autobiographical Prologue

I remember my mama pouring me a *cafecito* (small mug of coffee) in my Mexican *abuela's*¹ (grandmother's) pink kitchen; I was about seven years old and it was our first trip back to Mexico after moving to the United States. In a blend of English and Spanish, she told me it was called *café con leche* (milk, sugar, and just a splash of coffee). She explained that while children shouldn't drink coffee, it was ok for us to have a *cafecito* (small mug of coffee) in Mexico—just a little bit.² “Here in Mexico, they drink just a splash of coffee mixed with a little bit of sugar and milk,” she told me, while I sipped from the chipped ceramic mug. In that old kitchen just off of the patio, with my parents' mix of English and Spanish, the feelings of both familiarity and foreignness felt like ‘home.’ The *café con leche* felt like ‘home’: sweet and warm, comforting, and filled with history and legend. I remember looking down into the blue and white *jarra* (mug), at the swirling coffee, part brown and part white. I thought to myself, it's *just* like me—not one or the other but instead beautifully both.

I was born in Mexico on a fall day in 1980 in the midst of San Miguel de Allende's patron saint celebrations. The streets were filled with indigenous dancers,

¹ The word *abuela* will henceforth appear italicized. This word means "grandmother," but the Spanish word is used and preferred in reference to my paternal Mexican grandmother as it distinguishes a difference between my American maternal grandmother. It also references the Mexican culture and Spanish language of my paternal ancestors.

² Collectively my family taught me about Mexico, about *being* Mexican, our history, customs, attitudes, values, and about why and in which way we did things. I mostly remember being enculturated by my parents, although I also remember many casual kitchen-table-moments with my extended family. I remember these teachings vividly and they are important to my Multiracial identity production and self-identification.

copal (traditional and sacred Mesoamerican incense), fireworks, and parading *Xuchiles*³ from midnight until dawn, and the weekend exploded with *alegría* (happiness), noise, and offerings to Saint Michael. My father is Mexican, my older brother is Mexican, and I am Mexican. We moved from central Mexico when I was nearly three years old to central Pennsylvania. My mother is American, my brother is American, and I am American. But, our life has never been that black and white—or I should say Brown and White. My mother lived in Mexico for over a decade, spending her formative adult years there. Her babies, her husband, and her extended and deeply loved family are Mexican. She is tied in many ways to this place and its people. She often feels Mexican (as I would say), or rather she feels ‘different than other Americans’ (as I am guessing she may say).

My father joined us in the United States, a year after the three of us moved north; he was nearly thirty years old. He has now spent half of his life living in Pennsylvania. He does not identify himself as American, but he does acknowledge a difference between himself and his brothers and sisters in Mexico. We were the only Mexican family members (from my father’s side) living in *El Norte* (the north); we were the only *gringo*⁴-*Aranas*. Before that, we were the only American family (from my mother’s side) living outside of the U.S., the only *Mexicano*-Robinettes. Growing up, I felt like we were the only Mexicans in town. In reality we were one of maybe three Latino families.

³ *Xuchiles* are sacred offerings constructed together by communities. They stand approximately twenty-five feet tall and are made from bamboo-like strips that form a frame structure. These are covered in woven flowers (constructed from the agave and cucharilla plant) and decorated with marigold flowers and juniper branches.

⁴ *Gringo* is a term used by Spanish speakers to describe an American or sometimes any White person. In some contexts the word can be used in a negative or critical sense. But, I am using it here as a common slang word for American.

From preschool through high school, I attended classes with the same group of students from my suburban town. I had typically thought back to this period as a time when I was surrounded by a very small sprinkling of non-White faces and absolutely no Multiracial individuals because the racial make-up of Central Pennsylvania is predominately White. While I can remember a few individuals of other races in our community at that time, *any* form of Latina/o culture was not present in our immediate area and therefore our family was isolated from our Mexican culture. Through this project, I can now see the other four Multiracial faces of the kids I grew up with and our shared unique experiences and positions (from our Multiracial backgrounds). Although this fact confirms that I was not alone per say in my racial “otherness,” I did not know anyone with Mexican and White parents specifically. This phenomenon, coupled with the fact that I did not have Mexican or Latina/o friends, neighbors, or community, isolated me in both my Mexicanness and my Multiracialness within monoracial structures and it accentuated my experience as the “other.” Although my parents held a unique understanding of our Multiracial experience, my older brother was the only person I shared this specific Mexi-Anglo position with.

Identifying with both our racial/ethnic identities, made us *Nepantleras*, individuals who walk on the path between metaphoric worlds (Anzaldúa, 2002b) and *racial atravesados*, the brave ones who cross the boundaries of normative monoracial constructions (Chang, 2014). My brother and I have had discussions, differing opinions, and collective identity negotiations about *what* and *who* we are. He and I experience and assert our racial identities differently and therefore create various spaces of authoring (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) around our identities. However, we agree,

like many other Multiracial individuals, that we can feel like insiders, in-betweeners, and outsiders simultaneously, our position dependent on various cultural landscapes (Chang-Ross, 2010). We mediate and utilize different self-identifications that are meaningful to each of us within different contexts and environments. But, we agree that racial constructions and institutionalized racial identity labels (such as the limited choices of “White”, “Hispanic Non-White,” or “Other”) have never defined us correctly or in our entirety. We remain undefined within traditional monoracial categories (Chang, 2014). I see our racial boundary-crossing identities situated in the Borderland⁵ between two contradicting experiences. Our Multiracial identities are transitional and multiple, and like the Mesoamerican *Quetzalcoatl*, we are “neither eagle nor serpent, but both”⁶ (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 84). Together, our Borderland differentness, our deviation from the norm, although experienced in different ways, is my family’s collective experience.

My narratives within this project allow me to navigate my contested, contradictory Borderland space. Sharing my truth in all of its honesty, difficulty, and vulnerability in order to voice and legitimize my Multiracial experience is grounded in the principals of Chicana feminist epistemology. Anzaldúa (2002a) affirms that the act of self-authorship is not only healing to the self, but also contributes to a collective sense of

⁵ As described by Anzaldúa, the concept of the Borderlands (2007) represents both the geographic space between the American Southwest and Mexico and the metaphorical space inhabited by those who cross the boundaries of normalcy. The Borderland is a place of constant transition, where opposites and contradictions merge, and most significantly it is a place of transformation. Throughout this thesis my use of the term Borderland refers Anzaldúa’s concept.

⁶ Anzaldúa is referring to the indigenous Mesoamerican *Quetzalcoatl*, represented as a feathered-serpent with plumage surrounding his serpent head. I use it here as a symbol of Multiracial identity. And, I actively incorporate symbolism like this in my daily practice as a method of remaining connected to my Indigenous/Mestizo/Mexican heritage.

agency by providing a space for others to do the same— a transformative phenomenon, which can bring someone ‘home’ to their inner self.

By redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir or share with others so they too may be empowered. You ... ask the spirits ... to help you string together a bridge of words. What follows is your attempt to give back ... a gift wrested from the events in your life, a bridge home to the self. (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 540)

The *cafecito* memory, although seemingly simple and sweet, was difficult to write. I am Brown and I am White. I am from Mexico and I will always identify as Mexican, with roots from the indigenous Otomí and Chichimec, and an allegiance to the poor and working class neighborhood of *El Valle de Maiz*⁷ (Valley of the Corn) in San Miguel de Allende. I am (Anglo) American and I will always carry my mother’s Southern culture close to me, and continue our family’s preservation of our English heritage, and our long history throughout the Southern and Eastern United States that my grandfather Jack established long ago. For me, only choosing one racial identification has never been a comfortable decision or an honest depiction of myself. Before I learned about the concepts of fluidity (Alvarado, 1999; Anzaldúa, 2007; Brekhus, 2003; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Harris & Sim, 2002; Harris & Thomas, 2002; Holvino, 2012; Jones &

⁷ The word *El Valle de Maiz* will henceforth appear italicized and may appear shortened as *El Valle*. My strong Mexican self-identification and specific alignment with *El Valle de Maiz* and its customs and people; despite my upbringing in Pennsylvania and my simultaneous Anglo (American) self-identification, is a direct result of my family’s attachment to this neighborhood and our openness to hybrid identities. The affection, pride, and knowledge of *El Valle de Maiz* were transmitted to me by family members and have been critical in the development of my Mexican and indigenous identity. *El Valle de Maiz* is an old neighborhood that still celebrates many indigenous-rooted ceremonies and traditions. It is known by locals to have been inhabited by the Otomí and Chichimeca and even possibly African slaves, all of whom were housed here as slave laborers of Spanish colonizers.

McEwen, 2000; Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004; Root, 1990, Wijeyesinghe, 1992, 2001, 2012), hybridity (Anzaldúa, 2007; Hall, 1990), situational identities (Anzaldúa, 2007; Kich, 1992; Renn, 2000, 2004; Root, 1990, 1992, 1996), Borderland spaces and *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 1993, 2002b, 2007; Chang, 2014), and “both/and” approaches (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Hill Collins, 1990; Taylor & Nanney, 2010; Wijeyesinghe, 2012), I held onto my dual racial identities and identified myself as “both” whether that was expected or an option given to me.⁸ This was an act of defiance on my part because claiming both racial identifications challenged normative racial constructions (Change-Ross, 2010). That is not to say that each time I use the words, Mexican/Latina/Chicana/Brown, or Anglo/American/White to identify myself, they do not come with some adverse reactions (externally and internally). I am proud of what feels like an innate pride for both of my cultures, but I have also carried shame, confusion, embarrassment, alienation, and a tearing of my two-racial selves. Anzaldúa names my paradoxical space the Borderland, and those courageous enough to interrupt and defy these boundaries of ‘normalcy,’ *Los Atrevasados*⁹ (Anzaldúa, 2007). Chicana feminists continue to use Anzaldúa’s term; Broyles-González (2004) aptly applies it to Latina performance artists who use their body, voice, and creativity to cleverly cross over and break ethnic and gender conventions. Chang (2014) uses the term for students of color who defy racial identity borders by asserting and telling stories of their

⁸ This experience is similar to some aspects of Renn’s (2000, 2004) Multiracial identity model. Additionally, this act of defiance is echoed in the actions of the racial *atavesados/as* (boundary crossers), Multiracial students studied by Chang (2014) who assert their Multiracial narratives in Borderland spaces.

⁹ The Spanish language word *atavesar* means to cross over. For Chicana feminists an *atavesada/o* is an individual who boldly crosses over borders and hierarchies. The verb *atavesarme* means to, “cross over myself.”

Multiraciality. This creative thesis project is informed by this concept and it is about having the courage to tell *my* truth, to cross monoracial boundaries, and develop a voice outside of social normativity—to have the “audacity to *atravesarme*” (Chang, 2014, p. 45) with wisdom. It is about a little girl the color of *café con leche* and her Brown and White family, her many homes and homelands, and the *vivencias* (lived experiences) which created her.

I am Always Longing, Digging, Shifting, Creating

As a Multiracial individual the varied parts of my racial identity have been disconnected and omitted living within restrictive monoracial structures and buried by diasporic separations. Art has been a critical method of finding “the scattered, missing parts” of myself and putting “them back together” (Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 546). It is my process of recovering my cultural roots; developing a space to articulate my Multiracial identity, and surviving the journey. The artistic reimagining and authoring of myself with the help of personal iconography (memories, stories, and family artifacts) calls to mind Anzaldúa’s (1993) notion of how much Chicana/o artists are influenced by, reflect upon, and echo back reimaginings of our/their Mexican and indigenous ancestors, and culture.

As people who have been stripped of our history, language, identity, and pride, we attempt again and again to find what we have lost by digging into our cultural roots imaginatively and making art out of our findings. (Anzaldúa, 1993, p. 107)

Longing. We always longed for Mexico. Growing up, our family’s Mexican home was a long journey away. Living in the culturally isolated East Coast (at least from Mexican/Latino culture), access to Mexican culture; food, cooking ingredients, music, *novelas* (Mexican soap operas), books (anything in Spanish really) was cut off. Mexican

holidays, ceremonies, and cultural celebrations could not be created in the same manner because it is difficult to participate and perform culture when you are the only ones. When I tell people this, they do not understand how different one world was from the other (it was the 1980's and 1990's and there were no Spanish language radio stations, satellite TV, internet, or Skype that makes the world a much smaller and accessible place nowadays). But, when I tell them that my father sat at the table with a stack of white bread piled high in place of warm tortillas and that our salsa only came in options of Mild to Medium in Foxes Grocery Store, or that it was common for my mother's coworkers to be weary of the exotic green guacamole or refried beans she would bring in to share, or how our last name was rarely pronounced correctly and never without confusion and always stumbled over, or that the first time I sat in a classroom with any Brown (Mexican and Chicana/o) faces was in graduate school; they understand how much we must have longed for Mexico. My geographical location in Pennsylvania, the U.S.'s Northeast, a place vastly different and far away from Mexico was a factor that influenced my experience with racial identity and a challenge I faced in the development of my Multiracial identity and expression of my Mexican identity.¹⁰

Every few years, my parents, my brother, and I would return to Mexico to visit our family in San Miguel de Allende, the colonial town where my father, his mother, and grandmother were born. From our suburban home in Hershey, Pennsylvania, it took an exhausting two days to get there. Our plane crossed squares of green patches through the Eastern and Southern United States until we reached land that was dry, brown and gray

¹⁰ Root's (2002) Ecological Framework for Understanding Multiracial Identity Development names *geography*, as one contextual factor that influences identity. Additionally Fordham-Hernández (2009) discusses the significance and impact for her Multiracial Chicano family living in a culturally isolated area.

from our sky view. Our arrival would be met with the wild and noisy *DF* (Mexico City, pronounced *de-efe*), alive, bright, and unrestrained, foreign *and* familiar. We would continue on to San Miguel de Allende by way of a long and winding bus ride, or a cramped *rasquache*¹¹ car ride from an uncle; past cactus and white roadway crosses. This was our familiar homeland journey, from one home of pine trees, haystacks, and cul-de-sacs, to another land of *mesquite* (spiny Mexican tree), *burros* (donkeys), and cobblestones. Coffin (2008) echoes my sentiment, "I felt as if my world had been turned inside out.... to my young mind, it just didn't seem possible that two such opposite places could exist in one planet"¹² (pp. 1-2). I negotiated in my mind constantly how two such contradicting places could belong inside of me.

It wasn't just the long distance and the (Mexican) cultural isolation that made me feel like we had to let go of something. I was only a toddler when we immigrated to the U.S. and because of this, my dual language abilities faded away and were replaced with English only speaking. Moreover, I am the baby of the family, so the "Mexican" stories from when *I* lived there are limited. The majority of my childhood and adolescent lived experiences were in the U.S. and, until this thesis project; I let those experiences define how "Mexican" and "American" I was. There were times when I allowed other people's

¹¹ *Rasquache* is a Náhuatl word used by modern day Mexicans adversely to mean cheap or crummy, or of lower status. It has been reclaimed by Chicana/o artists to mean: basic or crude, and to signify a sensibility of resourcefulness by reimagining and making the most with basic and accessible materials. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (1989) and Amalia Mesa-Bains (1999) write about Rasquache artistic sensibility and theory.

¹² Jaed Coffin (2008), a half-Thai American, writes about the same embodied intersection of his two cultures and classes, and simultaneous displacement. Like myself, he describes growing up in dual cultures, in both First and Third worlds, and from both an insider *and* outsider point of view.

judgments to determine my racial identity labels and how I outwardly performed or discussed my racial identity.¹³

My longing also came from my inability to recall distinct long-term memories from the time we lived in San Miguel de Allende, when I was an infant and toddler. I used to identify the period of time I lived in Mexico, as “When I was Mexican”, believing there had been a finite borderline drawn across me when we moved. My perceived split-self was also a consequence of not knowing where my Multiracial self fit into monoracial structures. As a result, my self-perception was sometimes judgmental. I could allow others’ limited notions of me and their ideas of monoracial boundaries to seep into my bones, weighing me down, and cutting through my skin until all the beautiful juxtaposing pieces of me were divided and discounted.

Like the old family photographs I hold onto, my memories of our life in Mexico were faded and soft. I used to believe that I had abandoned my “Mexican-self” that I had lost her by leaving her behind in Mexico because I had lost my heritage language (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), could not speak fluently like my parents and brother,¹⁴ and I failed to remember distinct moments of *being* or *feeling* Mexican (in Mexico). There were times I believed that any part of me that felt Mexican, or that wanted to express or perform my Mexicanness, usually through identity artifacts (speaking Spanish or using Mexican

¹³ This experience is similar to aspects of Poston’s (1990) model of identity development, particularly level two, in which an individual is pushed, feeling forced by society, to choose a single identity.

¹⁴ Portes and Rumbaut (2001) tell us that “losing a language is also losing part of one’s self that is linked to one’s identity and cultural heritage.” (p. 144). Jiménez (2010) explains the common regret Mexican-origin individuals feel for not being able to speak Spanish “is often self-imposed” and that these individuals are often “vulnerable to criticism about their ethnic authenticity” (pp. 167-169).

cultural gestures; wearing Mexican-indigenous jewelry, *rebozos* (shawls), or *Huipiles*¹⁵) or by attaching specific racial or cultural labels to my identity, was an imposter. I often felt like maybe I was ‘not enough’ of one culture or ‘too much’ of another, and I constantly monitored, negotiated, and adjusted my actions between racial Borderlands in order to perform or express a perceived ‘correct’ racial identity. These feelings of loss, separation, and inadequacy have been heartbreaking.

Digging. Through this thesis project, I discovered and illustrated the importance of sensory memory in child development, and I examined it as data, or snapshots of my sensory experiences. I began to recognize that I have many of these recollections (sounds, tastes, smells, vivid colors, *and* feelings attached to them) that create deep connections to people, places, and time. I also uncovered and illustrate in this project, the agentic ways in which I came to understand and experience the complexity of my identity, and the ways in which I identify myself and find ‘home’ (belonging) through bits and pieces of memories however fractured or primary; ancestral legends; familial and cultural artifacts¹⁶; and imaginations and dreams. These artifacts and reimaginings were particularly important to forging an attachment to my heritage roots and as a tool for healing feelings of a fractured or missing self, especially because I did not know anyone else of my specific Multiracial heritage (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2009). They guided me like a compass through the disorienting choppy waters of Multiracial identity, and

¹⁵ A *Huipil* is a traditional loose fitting rectangular top worn by indigenous women from central Mexico to Central America that is often woven and/or embroidered.

¹⁶ These are for example, my Mexican *abuela's servietas* (grandmother's embroidered napkins); beautiful saved scraps of paper, ribbons, silk scarves, and nick-nacks from my American grandmother; photographs; and old memories and new journeys (physically through three countries and metaphorically). Chabram-Dernersesian (2009) also speaks about the importance Puerto Rican mementos and visits from Puerto Rican family in her California (Mexican) childhood home at a time when she did not know anyone else of her specific mixed heritage.

navigated a path that connected me to *all* the people and places I came from despite distances (physically and metaphorically).

Going ‘home’—remembering ‘home’ meant finding: the exotic *guayaba* (yellow tropical fruit) we called “a soft and juicy Mexican apple”; the blocks of green, white, and red *Banderitas Cocos* (coconut candies formed like Mexican flags) I craved; the *vanilla helado* (vanilla ice cream) in *Chapultepec Park* (Mexico City’s largest park) that always tasted richer than anything back home in the U.S., and the pink funny sounding *mamey* (sweet almond-like tropical fruit) in the familiar rundown teal-colored ice cream shop just off San Miguel’s *jardin* (central plaza and the heart of down town). Remembering ‘home’ and feeling at ‘home,’ was found in the vibrant colors (tangerine, pink, magenta, mustard, turquoise, any color at all) of Mexico, like someone had been busy painting the whole world with a new palette while we were away.

It feels like my whole life I have been digging through drawers and boxes, through family histories and genealogies; looking through letters, objects, through rooms, and photographs to find objects of meaning and stories of my identity. I journeyed back to Pennsylvania and to Mexico repeatedly, investigating and unearthing the pieces that would make up this project and that would help me to define myself. I dug through academic books and journals, through theories and research, art and literature, and my own knowledge (artistic, embodied, and self-taught). This recurrent searching reflects my life-long inquiry of constant journeys to my birthplace, explorations of my family histories, and fascination with family ephemera. This thesis project is a reflection of what I have always done, looking again and again at my identity by digging through my culture, history, and my homes, and creating art from what I find (Anzaldúa, 1993).

Shifting. I was lucky to experience several adolescent and young adult trips through Mexico. These solo travels added important layers to my positive identity development and they created significant shifts in my thinking as a whole. I began to play with identity labels and new ways to express myself. I applied a “both/and” approach (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Hill Collins, 1990; Taylor & Nanney, 2010; Wijeyesinghe, 2012) and I added the labels indigenous, Otomí, and Chichimeca to my self-introduction repertoire that already included American, Mexican, and “both”. I began describing myself as “soy de aquí, y soy de allá” (I am from here and I am from there) and “soy de los dos lados” (I am from both sides, referring to the U.S./Mexico border). I found phrases to better illustrate who I was instead of single labels.

To my surprise, it was my cross-country move as an adult that revealed and added new identity layers and introduced new challenges regarding my Multiraciality. My new home in California and graduate school was a contested space where I met inquiries, misunderstanding, and challenges regarding my racial make-up and chosen self-identifications. I had to process ascribed racial group memberships, monoracial labels applied to me (Wijeyesinghe, 2001), each with their own stereotypes and expectations that weighed heavy on me. Based on my phenotype and my open discussion of my racial background and lived experiences, I was labeled White: called a “White girl,” a “White-washed Mexican,” and a “coconut.” And, based on my Mexican ethnic credentials (DaCosta, 2007), I was labeled Mexican: named a “real Mexican,” due to my birth in Mexico and time spent there throughout my life, deep cultural understandings, ethnic identity artifacts (hair styles, clothing, and food preferences), and phenotype (even though this also classed me as both White and “other” to others). My features, when

classified as Mexican, were sometimes judged as allowing me unfair entry to Mexican group membership, a passport that gave me easy entry to Latina/o culture without question (Renn, 2008).

One light-skinned Chicana woman reflected this attitude, saying to me, “you look more Mexican than you actually are”; openly sharing her resentment to my perceived Mexican features¹⁷ because she herself, a monoracial Chicana, did not have a stereotypical Mexican phenotype. Her judgment was also the conclusion that my behaviors, preferences, and values were more White than Mexican. Perplexingly, I was also classified as the exact opposite, as “not a real Mexican”, due to the fact that I was mostly monolingual;¹⁸ ‘openly out’ as Multiracial and White (DaCosta, 2007); my sometimes “missing” ethnic identity artifacts; my childhood in Pennsylvania; and my phenotype or “lack of indigenous features” as another darker-skinned Chicana woman judged me. I faced ethnic absolutism, the assumption that ethnic minorities share the same norms and values (Gilroy, 1992) and therefore I was seen as “deviant” from Mexican or Chicana/o culture to some individuals.

This was most evident in my new environment, a Southern California suburb (that I also found quietly racially segregated), when I tried to become friends with a tight-knit group of Chicana women who subscribed to a limited monolithic view of what it means

¹⁷ Who is to say that my prominent “Aztec” nose (as it is often referred to), my dark hair and eyes, and my olive skin are traits passed on from my Mexican paternal family? In fact, my mother, and even more so maternal White grandfather share these physical characteristics. Besides, we also have *güeros* (fair-skinned people) in my paternal Mexican family. I always astounded when individuals feel confident identifying parts of my body and locating them on racial and/or geographic maps, which then are suppose to categorize me, box me in, in a way that makes them feel all is right in the world.

¹⁸ Ethnic authenticity is also patrolled by both Mexican immigrants and non-Mexican individuals through the imposed expectation that all Mexican-origin people are and should be Spanish speaking (Jiménez, 2010).

to be Mexican or Chicana/o, and also White. My deviation from their norms (of Chicanos/Mexicans) and their stereotypes and personal experiences (of White Americans) combined with my open expression of my Multiraciality *and* particularly my Whiteness was troublesome and seemed to threaten them. In fact, it is common for Multiracial people to trigger reactions from others, filled with deeply rooted stereotypes, expectations filled with meanings, and projections (Chang-Ross, 2010). My ‘differentness’ was misinterpreted, judged as “too White,” a perceived flaw and also a legitimate point of discomfort for these Chicanas based on negative experiences with White Americans that they shared with me, which reflected California’s unique racial history and the racial social structures navigated daily by Chicana/os. In reality the geography and diversity of my lived experiences caused me to be different, in addition to my Whiteness (my experience in the world as [Anglo] American). These women were not willing to break from established Chicana/o and White cultural biases (Anzaldúa, 1983) or “confront their fear of and resistance to [myself]” (Moraga, 1983b, p. 34) in order to know me beyond their essentialized judgments. Essentialism is the inappropriate generalization about an individual or group based on limited characteristics of their identity and the belief that they must maintain these established qualities (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). Jiménez (2010) describes the popular definition of Mexican in the U.S. and the problematic experience of being assigned (or refused) this identity.

At the heart of this definition are the ability to speak Spanish, dark skin, a taste for Mexican culture (including food and music), the donning of clothing... and speaking with an accent that does not resemble a “white” accent. Mexican Americans who cannot authenticate themselves in relation to these criteria are

often cast aside by those who police the boundaries of ethnic legitimacy. (p. 169)

Perhaps this is because, like Anzaldúa says, “it is easier to repeat the racial patterns and attitudes, especially those of fear and prejudice, that we have inherited than to resist them” (Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 207). And, however misplaced these projections onto me were, I believe they were not only results of small mindedness, but also reactions to the very real history of racism, white supremacy, and injustice that people of Mexican-origin experience in the U.S.

This is not to say that I did not receive inquiries, misunderstandings, and challenges regarding my racial make-up and chosen self-identifications from other races and cultural groups or in relation to my White self-identification, because I did. There were many times growing up in a predominately White and conservative area that I faced ethnic absolutism and essentialized judgments regarding my phenotype, experiences, preferences, beliefs, and values. This is most memorable in the small but painful picking away of microaggressions, a term coined by Pierce (1970) to explain the common everyday “verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007, p. 271). My racial ambiguity resulted in hearing a myriad of racial insults and antagonistic feelings from and about *both* my racial sides (among countless others). Like Anzaldúa affirms “tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 26) and these microaggressions created an unavoidable and all too familiar strain across my body because fear, shame, and confusion would choke my responses, but anger and pride would fill my being with a need to react and defend.

Hearing the words “wet-back”, “dirty Mexican”, and “Spic” to describe “others” was particularly painful and enraging. But so were the aggressive comments about both my Whiteness and my Multiraciality (or my privileged ambiguity and class status as some individuals assumed about me). The commonplace Multiracial microaggressions that scholars (e.g., Chang, 2014; Johnston & Nadal, 2010; and Sue et al., 2007) examine are a familiar part of my experience:

I have been asked to keep my races/ethnicities separate and/or to quiet one or the other.

I have been asked to “just choose one” in regards to my race/ethnicity and self-identification based on the assumption that a choice is easy or even possible. And,

I have been told that this choice is not important.

I have been asked to justify my racial/ethnic self-identifications and to prove my racial/ethnic authenticity.

I have felt the projections of other’s discomfort with my racial/ethnic self-identifications and my ambiguity.

I have been criticized because of the race of the person I choose to be in a relationship with does not “match” my own. And, I have been perceived as assimilationist because the person I choose to love is White.

I have had my racial reality invalidated and disbelieved.

I have been told I “have it easy” because I can pass as White.

I have been told that my desire to be able to identify myself accurately in standardized forms is not important and I have been seen as suspect when I ask if there is a Multiracial option.

I have been made to feel that the discussion of my Multiraciality is tangential or that it is the result of needing attention or being confused.

I have been told “no you are not” and “you are not a real one” in response to my assertion that I am Mexican, White, and/or Multiracial.

I have been told “but you are so pretty, how could you be Mexican?”

I have been told “you are confused” and “your children are going to be really screwed up” in response to my Multiraciality and the many cultures running through my growing family.

I have heard pejorative language about my own races/ethnicities from both people whom are aware and others whom do not know they are speaking about my race/ethnicity.

I have heard “immigrants should go back to where they came from” from people that either do not know they are speaking directly about my experience or do not care.

I have been told people of color and immigrants have working class jobs because they are lazy.

I have been asked “what are you?” over and over again.¹⁹

Dichotomous classifications and ethnic absolutism did not fit my own hybrid self-identifications and I struggled under these constraints. I came to California with wide eyes and a naiveté that my new Cali-Mex world would be a sort of homecoming. I expected the experiences of others to be mirror-like, to see my own narrative reflected back to me like I had never seen before, and I wanted any feelings of homesickness and

¹⁹ This was inspired by Chang’s (2014) list of Multiracial microaggressions that she experienced and Root’s (1994) *Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage*.

non-belonging to dissolve instantly. I found myself once again in *Nepantla*, a struggling in between space where I negotiated my identity and confronted a dislocated self.

Nepantla, a Náhuatl word that means the middle ground between, has been appropriated to characterize the Chicana/o experience. As described by Anzaldúa (2002a), *Nepantla* is a dangerous threshold where the divisions of one's identity push and pull painfully against each other and overlap forcefully—like barbed wire between borders. However, as the second stage of Anzaldúa's model *conocimiento* (a spiritual process of deep awareness), it can be a site where contrary perspectives clash *and* a place of seeing multiple perspectives—a zone of potential change (Anzaldúa, 2002a). Specific to my experience, Anzaldúa uses *Nepantla* to describe a state of liminality, a passage between worlds, and transition (2002b). She maintains some artists use *Nepantla* to describe the experience of “changing from one class, race or gender position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity” (1993, p.110).

My carefully balanced identity performance, the familiar dance *between* two cultures/races (dominant and immigrant/White and Mexican) that I had been use to, ruptured. It was an *arrebato*. *Arrebato* is a Spanish word that means fit or outburst. However, I am applying the word as Anzaldúa (2002a) describes the first stage of her model of *conocimiento*. In this stage, a shock or outburst creates fragmentation or a rupture, which triggers a contentious emotional and spiritual state, and acts as a catalyst for the subsequent stage of *Nepantla*. I felt myself even more split than just two identities. I was a million little pieces, dismembered like *Coyolxauhqui* in a Mesoamerican sky. In indigenous Mesoamerican thought, *Coyolxauhqui* is the moon represented as the dismembered body and severed head of a woman. Her split limbs,

depicted in a fifteenth century, twenty ton round relief stone, are the result of a larger narrative of her rebellion involving her mother *Coatlicue* and brother *Huitzilopochtli*. Modern day Chicana feminist artists, activists, scholars, and others reclaim *Coyolxauhqui* as a symbol. She has represented a resistance to conformity and strength, and the fragmentation, pain, and subsequent creative reconstruction of the new self from her/our dismemberment (Anzaldúa, 1993, 2002a; Moraga 1983c). After knowing who I was and where I came from, how could I be here now as an adult—confused, frustrated, alone and homesick for anything familiar? I entered *Nepantla*'s writhing *Coatlicue State* of vulnerability, confusion, and resistance. As described by Anzaldúa (2002a) the *Coatlicue State*, the third stage of *conocimiento*, is dark and excruciating, occurring after *Arrebato* and *Nepantla* and before crossing over to true transformation (the fourth stage in her model). Through petrifying fear and disorientation the *Coatlicue State* manifests agency from “the weight of oppressed worlds and the hard risky work of resistance” (Lugones, 1992, p. 32).

In order to transform and shift my perceptions, I had to confront myself, my inner tension (Anzaldúa, 2002a) and my internalized oppression, and the ways I oppressed others. I was, as Anzaldúa (2002a) says, in a state between perceptions, the point before transformation where homogeneous labels can be made out of date and ways of knowing can be shifted. I had to allow myself to ‘not fit’ essentialist monoracial constructions in order to find myself again. And, I had to listen to my inner voice and articulate my experience because, as Anzaldúa (2002a) affirms:

Your inner voice reveals your core passion, which will point to your sense of purpose, urging you to seek a vision, devise a plan. Your passion motivates you to

discover resources within yourself and in the world. It prompts you to take responsibility for consciously creating your life and becoming a fully functioning human being, a contributing member of all your communities, one worthy of self-respect and love. (Anzaldúa 2002a, p. 557)

Through this process, I discovered ways to reimagine my ‘home’ and myself. I redefined what it meant for me to be American, Mexican, Chicana/Latina, and Multiracial. My definitions of identity, race, home, and art were significantly expanded. This process, called *conocimiento*, mended *Coyolxauhqui* and my own dismemberment. As described by Anzaldúa (2002a), *conocimiento* means a “consciousness urging you to act on the knowledge gained” (p. 577). *Conocimiento* is a form of spiritual inquiry and a path-like process of deep awareness reached via creative acts (mental and somatic). Anzaldúa (2002a) developed a non-linear seven-stage model around this concept called the seven stages of *conocimiento*. It is through this conscious process that I could reenvision my racial Borderland identity experience that was split between two people, where I had been holding my breath, immobile and trapped. I centered myself and located my identity in a space that now moves freely within racial Borderlands (instead of being silenced and caught *between* two points). Moraga illuminates my position when she discusses her responsibility as a White and Brown woman:

I think: what is my responsibility to my roots—both white and brown, Spanish-speaking and English? I am a woman with a foot in both worlds; and I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue. Sometimes I feel it urgently. (Moraga, 1983b, p. 34)



Figure 1. *Portrait of my family.* Jessica Arana (myself), Janice Arana, Manual Arana, and David Cortés in Concepción Olivares de Arana’s (my paternal *abuela*) home at 161 Salida a Querétaro in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico (1981).

Creating. When I look at this photograph (see Figure 1), a hazy yellowing image that is unclear and faded, I see my efforts to contextualize my lived identity—cloudy and uncertain but also beautiful and meaningful. Kaufman (1992) defines identity as the “essential core of who we are as individuals, the conscious experience of the self inside” (p. 68). At quick glance, you could characterize the photograph as simply an early 80’s family portrait. The young boy and the baby girl are dressed fancily. The father stands proud and sturdy behind his family. The mother is relaxed and smiles brightly. But for me, there is so much more reflected, it is a sketch of who I am inside. Critically examining the image and using it as a lens to consider my Multiracial position, the scene is an embodiment of my experiences surrounding my Borderland identity because it shows the layers of race, class, immigration/migration, and geography that my lived experience is wrapped in. It therefore becomes a space of authoring, where I could begin “to narrate the multiple layers of memory” and identity “through which a coming out as a cultural citizen is possible” (Joseph, 1998, p. 361). It allows me to develop a narrative

that breaks from the typical monoracial storylines (Chang, 2014). The term cultural citizens refers to the right to diverge from what is normative and still belong and participate equally in society, despite the forces that treat individuals inferior based on race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation (Rosaldo, 1994). The lack of clarity in the image and the quickly disintegrating edges that threaten to make the images unrecognizable (like the forces that ignore and/or silenced non-normative²⁰ voices), make no difference to my need to read deeply into the photograph—to see everything possible and to re(member) everything that is visible and not (about my identity). The difficulty in ‘reading’ the image reflects the contested space where Borderland identities are produced. In the past, an image like this would have been the only way I could tell you who (or what) I was because I did not know how to express my experience in their complexity. Today, I have the language to dissect its significance and use the image as a place to (re)member²¹ and create myself.

This image tells the story of being born into a Multiracial family; can you feel the warm sun dancing through the trees onto our Brown and White skin? It shows the humble family we come from; do you smell the flowers my *abuelo* (grandfather) planted in tin cans? It reflects my deeply rooted history in this place; do you see the old *arbol de zapote* (leafy fruit tree) my *abuela* climbed as a little girl? Do you see the *Americana* (American) at home in *El Valle de Maiz*, enchanted with culture and family, showing the daring spirit and curiosity my mother passed on to me? This family portrait reminds me

²⁰ I use the word non-normative throughout this project to describe anything that deviates from our societies imagined norm. In this project I often refer to Multiraciality as non-normative because of the perception that monoraciality is our society’s norm.

²¹ I use the word re(member) to indicate that I have awareness of something in the past and to also indicate that there is a constructing or reconstructing of something.

of our longing for this time—soon after this photograph was taken; Mexico becomes distant and dislocated from our everyday life in Pennsylvania (although still very close in our consciousness). For me, this photograph is testimony that I *do* belong, that I am tied to this place: the courtyard, the neighborhood, the country and culture, and my family. This is our family portrait at home.

Before I carried the power of a *mestiza consciousness*, before I knew something different than the tearing and ripping of *Nepantla* on my dual identities: photographs like these represented a time “When I was Mexican.” Anzaldúa (2007) defines *mestiza consciousness* as a philosophy and consciousness of the Borderlands that allows for the stretching of social boundaries. It nurtures and embraces: a flexible space for identity, ethnic and racial mixtures, and an individual’s contradictions, doublings, and multiple changing selves. My family photographs acted as precious evidence of our family’s collective hybrid identities. Because I did not know otherwise, I allowed the passage of time and our relocation to Pennsylvania to dictate when and how much I could be “Mexican.” I believed these photographs were glimpses of what I *used to* be, cloudy evidence of something I hardly had a hold of. Now I understand the longing, the homesickness, the frantic saving of *things*, and the endless gazing at old photographs—at myself.

This creative thesis project theorizes, illustrates, and synthesizes my identity. The narrative of an East Coast Mexicana/American/Chicana/Multiracial/artist blossoms from these introspective efforts and a unique imaginary is revealed. I have metaphorically and physically sewn my fractured *Coyolxauhqui*-self whole. Inspired by my family photographs and saved objects, I use lovingly soft and colorful thread juxtaposed with

honest truth and a sharp needle weaving writing and artwork, embroidering *vivencias* (lived experiences). My memories, my homes, my identities are entwined joining paper, thread, photography, and drawings in a truthful and inclusive project that intertwines a personal narrative into a thesis—empowering others and myself. I have sewn together what I thought was lost but was only buried. This project has become my way of uncovering and re(membering). It is my bridge ‘home.’ “Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me” (Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 205).

Introduction

Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity

While it is not within the scope of this thesis project to provide a detailed discussion of the concept of race as a social construct or an analysis of the many terms surrounding racial identity and the politics of this terminology, it is important to provide the meanings and rationale for the terminology used in this thesis. Based on historically constructed schema from the colonial period, physical differences are used to classify individuals into groups of “races” in which ascribed and assumed natural characteristics are attached to each race, and a system of hierarchy infers superiority of White (or lighter skinned) people and cultures over darker skinned races and cultures (Sorrells, 2013). Scientifically, there is no biological basis for separating individuals into racial groups in this way or the “association of physical, mental, emotional or attitudinal qualities with these socially constructed groups” (Sorrells, 2013, p. 7). Categorizing individuals in these ways is problematic, resulting in racial and ethnic groupings based on the marking of difference that are steeped in meaning; it creates hierarchies that attach “value-laden qualities” (Sorrells, p. 8, 2013) to these groups, which function to continue severe social inequalities and exploitation (Blauner, 1972; Sorrells, 2013). However, even though race and ethnicity are socially constructed, they remain powerful forces and very real lived experiences in people’s lives that are significant aspects to an individual’s identity and sense of group belonging. Further, race and ethnicity are not only the result of social inequalities but also positive connotations for group members (Renn, 2012; Sorrells, 2013). It is important to note that race is not only a construct conceived within and reliant

upon political, economic and historical contexts (Omi & Winant, 1994; Sorrells, 2013); race and racial identities are lived experiences impacting our everyday lives.

In my review of the literature I found both the use of the term race and the term ethnicity to hold separate meanings to some and used together or interchangeably by others. For Latina/os and even more so, Multiracial Latinos the meaning and usage of these terms are not clear-cut. Some Latina/o individuals blend their racial identity with their Latina/o ethnic identity, while others understand their racial identity to be separate from being Latina/o (Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Supporting this first concept, some researchers argue for conflating the terms as *ethnoracial* (Torres-Saillant, 2003) or as *racial/ethnic* identity (Grosfoguel, 2004). This is because both terms serve as social constructs that lead to exclusion and disempowerment (Grosfoguel, 2004), and because of the variance where Latina/os fit in racial paradigms (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). Twentieth century racism in the U.S. is not confined to phenotype, but also includes accumulated factors from ethnic and global dimensions (Aranda & Rebollo-Gill, 2004). For these reasons and the variance of terminology in the literature, I have used both terms within this project, applying ethnic identity when discussing Chicana/o identity and racial identity when discussing Multiracial identity. When discussing my experiences around my Multiraciality I use the term race and while discussing my experiences around my Mexicanness I often use the term racial/ethnic identity because I discuss my experiences surrounding my place of origin, cultural experiences, language, history, and customs.

Terminology

In an effort to be consistent between racial and ethnic descriptors, I have capitalized all of the names of these categories (e.g., Multiracial, Multiethnic, White,

Chicano, Latino, Mexican). Racial identity is the term applied to the naming of one's racial category based on racial ancestry, physical appearance, early socialization, personal experiences, and shared racial group experiences (Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Monoracial and Multiracial refer to several aspects of identity according to a person's racial ancestry, ascribed or chosen racial group, (Wijeyesinghe, 2012), or self-identification. Monoracial refers to any one of these concepts when referencing an individual from one racial group and Multiracial when referencing an individual who identifies with two or more racial groups. Other terms that are used throughout the literature are Biracial, mixed race, and multiple heritage.

For the purposes of this thesis, I use Multiracial because it is the most widely used term throughout the most recent literature, and as Chang (2014) has astutely suggested, it illustrates "independent racial backgrounds coming together rather than mixing with Whiteness" (p. 28) or suggesting the impureness from Whiteness. The word is not applied in the same way the term Multicultural is sometimes used to signify post-racial color-blindness. I use the term to describe my own experience (as opposed to the linguistically correct "Multiethnic") with the acknowledgement that "Mexican" is not a classified race in the U.S., because my experience surrounding my mixed ancestry fits within the Multiracial experience defined by the literature.

Mexican Diaspora Signifiers

For clarity in this thesis I will explain the meaning and rationale behind terminologies such as *Mexican American*, *Hispanic*, *Latina/o*, and *Chicana/o*. Mexican American indicates an individual born and living in the U.S. of Mexican-origin. This term was originally used with pride to indicate an individual who was both Mexican and

from the U.S. as it expressed the duality of the Mexican American experience (and not just Spanish) (Rinderle, 2005). However, this term is problematic because it obscures the indigenous roots of Mexican Americans (Fairchild & Cozens, 1981), it is homogenizing and overly simplified, and research has shown it is assimilationist and more aligned with Americanness or Whiteness (Melville, 1988).

Hispanic indicates an individual with origins or ancestry from a Spanish-speaking country. Some Mexicans use this identifier to signal membership to a higher class, as in aligning oneself with Spanish origin (e.g., European) instead of Mexican (e.g., *mestizo* or indigenous) because of the lower class significance that is applied to Mexicanness and Multiracial individuals in the U.S. (Rinderle, 2005). Further issue is found with this term because it is externally imposed and because of its homogenizing effect as an umbrella term to classify a large and diverse group of individuals with little basis beyond its politically motivated designation by the U.S. government in the 1970s (Ochoa, 2004). For these reasons I do not use these two terms in this thesis, but they appear in direct quotes throughout.

Latina/o indicates an individual living in the U.S. of Latin American origins or ancestry irrespective of race, language, or culture. This term can be seen as a positive self-identifier (Melville, 1988) and a political response to institutional disadvantages (Padilla, 1984). However, it can be problematic because of its origins in creating a racially distinct group by homogenizing an entire continent and its diaspora rather than classifying individuals by national origin, which in effect supports colonial and dominant ideologies and “others” these individuals collectively as inferior (Rinderle, 2005). I acknowledge the issues surrounding this term, but use it as likely the best term in the

context of this thesis because it is the most used term in the literature regarding the collective experience of this community.

Chicana/o can indicate a Mexican-origin individual born and living in the U.S. (but can deviate from this) and more so, it indicates a dis-assimilationist perspective and a political and ideological consciousness as a member of a historically oppressed group (Rinderle, 2005). It is used as a method of naming one's self defiantly in the spirit of pride for one's ancestral origins and indigenous roots, and signifies an ideology and commitment to social justice. It is reported (Fairchild & Cozens, 1981) however, that the term Chicana/o can also have negative connotations to some White individuals, which could be the dominant group's response to a resistance to colonialism and empowerment from naming themselves (Rinderle, 2005).

Lastly, I use the term White to describe Caucasian individuals because it is the most widely used term throughout the literature, although Caucasian is a preferred term for some. Whiteness, as Sorrells (2013) asserts, is challenging to define because it is often assumed as the dominant norm from which others are categorized and defined. This in effect privileges being White to a category of invisibleness and to the advantaged position to characterize others "based on a dominant White norm or standard" (Sorrells, 2013, p. 22).

Racial Identity of Chicana/os

The difficulty with racial classification and self-identification of Mexicans is not new and it is deeply rooted within the historical and political currents of this community (Rinderle, 2005). Chicana/os are inherently racially mixed as Mexicans, a blend of indigenous, European, and sometimes African, due to Mexico's history of colonialism.

However, the racial makeup is predominantly indigenous and therefore generally speaking, most Mexicans do not carry Caucasian features, although Mexicans can possess a wide range of physical characteristics and heritage backgrounds. The predominantly indigenous features of Mexicans and Chicana/os have caused both groups to be marginalized. The contradiction is that Mexican-origin people are racially classified in the U.S. as Caucasian/White, while they are socially labeled as a separate ethnic group, and as a racial category by the media and popular discourses (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012, Gross, 2003; Ochoa, 2004; Ortiz & Telles, 2012). Even further complicating the discussion is the fusion of racial and ethnic terminology in identity discourses of Latina/os.

The imposed classification process of Mexicans began with the Spanish colonizers of Mexico's *Casta* (caste) system, a complex racial hierarchy that ranked White (e.g., Spanish) racial purity with power and class. The imposed classification of Mexicans continued in 1848 when the U.S. invaded and seized half of Mexico's territory, and Mexican residents (among other immigrants) and later Mexican arrivals were classified as Indians (Hayes-Bautista, 2004). Later, in 1930, for the first and only time the U.S. Census classified "Mexican" as a separate racial category (Rinderle, 2005), in order to support racial ideology that sought to classify Mexicans as non-White, inferior, and foreign, but the Mexican racial label was later returned to Caucasian/White, and "Mexican" deemed an ethnicity due to political pressure (Hayes-Bautista, 2004; Hochschild & Powell, 2008).

My Position and Self-Identification

It is also important for me to mention my position within this conflicting and contextual terminology. I am privileged and have been empowered to choose and use a variety of terms to describe myself. Chicana is a way of signifying my dedication to learning and preserving my familial and ancestral history. It is my method of pulling from my Mexican and indigenous roots for pride, direction, and inspiration in my life and work, while acknowledging my upbringing in the U.S. It is a way of signifying my political and ideological commitment to challenging dominant racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist paradigms. And, it is a way to name my experience of inbetweenness, the straddling of two worlds, the embodiment of a Borderland (Anzaldúa, 2007) between the U.S. and Mexico—of being from neither place completely, yet from both at the same time. I use the term syncretically, empowered by the literature reviewed here to see myself through the lens of “both/and” (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Hill Collins, 1990; Taylor & Nanney, 2010; Wijeyesinghe, 2012). I can be, Chicana, White, and Multiracial because one identity does not have to discount, erase, or minimize the other. Or, as Anzaldúa astutely states in the preface of *This Bridge We Call Home*: “Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include” (2002b, p. 3).

I use the term Multiracial because it is inclusive of all my heritages, my lived experiences, and my identity’s paradoxes and differences. It is flexible enough for me to feel like I am honoring who I really am and where I come from. And, I use this term as part of a collective Multiracial Borderland experience and a community of individuals and activists who are dedicated to dispelling stigma surrounding Multiracial people.

Naming myself as Multiracial has helped me to discuss my experiences without silencing any part of myself, to articulate my identity in new, complete, and holistic ways. I use the term despite its linguistic incorrectness, as some may argue I should really be defined as Multiethnic. For example, many scholars (e.g., Jackson, Wolven, & Aguilera, 2013; Jiménez, 2004) use the term *multiethnic Mexican American* when discussing Mexican/White (non-Latino) individuals such as myself, while others use the term *biethnic* (e.g., González, Umaña-Taylor, & Bámaca, 2006) or *mixed ethnic and racial* (e.g. Padilla, 2006) to describe the same group. Naming myself and using each of the terms (Anglo) American/White, Mexican, Chicana, and Multiracial has been a complicated, unnerving, and contested experience. But it has also given me an incredible amount of personal freedom, joy, empowerment, and a feeling of being truthful and whole.

Rinderle (2005) best encapsulates the significance and the struggles surrounding self-identification that I have experienced in her discussion of Mexican diaspora and identity labels.

Forcing people with multiple, continuous identities to choose and label themselves as one thing or another fragments and partially disables them. It denies part of their identity and humanity. It puts them in a state in which they are constantly negotiating and redefining themselves vis-à-vis the arbitrary, constructed standards and hierarchies they are presented, and vis-à-vis each other as they compete for scarce resources and the dominant ideology's approval and acceptance. (p. 308)

Multiracial Identity in the United States

The United States Census figures show that 31,798,258 individuals from Mexican-origin live in the United States (U.S.), representing 63 percent of this country's total Latina/o population (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Undoubtedly, these numbers are sure to increase, following past trends, as evidenced by the U.S. Census reports which found a 57.9 percent growth in Latinas/os from 1990 to 2000 (Portes, 2009) and a 43 percent growth in Latina/os from 2000 to 2010 (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011), representing more than half of the increase in the U.S.'s total population from 2000 to 2010 (Ennis et al., 2011). This populace is not only increasing but also diversifying where they live in the U.S. They are expanding from "traditional areas of settlement" (Portes, 2009, p. 4) and origin, in the highly concentrated Southwest (three-fourths still live there), to other areas throughout the U.S. The ethnic composition of the U.S. and the everyday lives of Americans (inside or outside Latina/o communities) will assuredly be impacted by individuals of Mexican-origin because of their growing presence across the Nation.

Intermarriages, defined as "the union between persons of different racial-ethnic origins" (Edmonston, Lee, & Passel, 2002, p. 231), in the U.S. have also steadily increased and will continue to rapidly grow. The growth in intermarriage is attributed to the change in socio demographics of the U.S. and political changes, such as the *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court decision in 1967, which repealed laws against race mixing (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008). Since this landmark civil rights decision, Multiracial dating among teenagers and Multiracial marriages has soared. For example, the U.S. Census

reports an increase in Black/White marriages from 65,000 in 1970 to 422,000 in 2005 (Solis, 2007).

First generation Latina/os, like immigrants in general, tend to marry within their racial/ethnic group. However, this is not true of second and third-plus generation Latina/os. According to recent estimates (Edmonston, Lee, & Passel, 2003), only 8 percent of foreign-born Latina/os intermarry, compared to 32 percent of the second-generation and 57 percent of the third-plus generations (Suro & Passel, 2003). What's more, the significant addition of a Multiracial option in the 2000 U.S. Census, influenced by the Multiracial Movement, actualized a choice in racial definition for Multiracial people for the first time in this country's census history (Miville, Constantine, Baysden & So-Lloyd, 2005).

This symbolic and politically significant event was eagerly anticipated because it actualized Multiracial individuals as a legitimate group and aids in destigmatizing interracial offspring and racial hybrid identities (DaCosta, 2007). The option to select more than one race was a compromise from what the majority of Multiracial activist requested, a single Multiracial category. As a result of this historical decision, there has been a substantial growth in individuals who are identifying and affirming with all parts of their racial heritages (Jones & Bullock, 2012; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). A total of 7 million individuals chose to report more than one race on the 2000 U.S. Census (Miville et al., 2005). This number increased within a decade to over 9 million individuals in 2010 (Jones & Bullock, 2012). The Multiracial Latina/o population also increased in numbers with "about one in three people (34 percent) who reported multiple races" (Jones & Bullock, 2012, p.20), and Latina/o origin. Although not entirely un-problematic, the

restructuring of the U.S. Census marked a legitimizing of multiple identity labels and an acknowledgement of the Multiracial population by the U.S. government, and it reflects a shift in the perception of Multiracial individuals in the U.S.

Early Multiracial identity researchers (e.g., Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Jiménez, 2004, Miville et al., 2005; Poston, 1990; Root, 2002; Wijeyesinghe, 2001) agreed, Multiracial individuals were largely unexamined. The lack of literature on Multiracial identity development was due to the socio historic context of Multiracial people as a socially marginalized group. Their marginal position is demonstrated by the omission of Multiracial individuals as a social group combined with their already minority status and the compounding experience of being discriminated against interracially *and* intrracially (Brackett, Marcus, McKenzie, Mullins, Tang, & Allen, 2006). Further, early Multiracial researchers (Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, & Harris, 1993; Miville et al., 2005) collectively acknowledged that there was a shortage of empirical data that supported and further developed existing Multiracial identity development models.

However, there has been a proliferation of research on ethnic identity within the last few years (Ong, Fuller-Rowell & Phinney, 2010), with researchers specifically concentrating on Multiraciality (e.g., Chang, 2014; Chang-Ross, 2010; Chen & Hamilton, 2012; Gullickson & Morning, 2011; K. F. Jackson, 2012; Jackson, et al., 2013; Kennedy & Romo, 2013; Romo, 2011; Taylor & Nanney, 2010; Terry & Winston, 2010; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012). Unfortunately, scholars remain largely focused on Multiracial identities outside of Latino/Non-Latino pairings (for example Black and White formations) (Jackson et al., 2013). I did notice as my review of the literature progressed, more and more scholarly work that resonated with my experience and that

was centered on Latina/o Multiraciality related to monoracial structures and monoracism, emerged in the final phase of this project (e.g., Chang, 2014; Jackson et al., 2013). This thesis is part of a growing body of work that is uncovering the experiences, *testimonios* (testimonies), challenges, creative coping mechanisms, and identity production of Multiracial Mexicans and Latina/os.

Multiracial exclusion is demonstrated by the U.S. Census' lack of inclusion of Multiracial individuals until recently in 2000. Although this change was a significant development, the Census categories remain limited. For example, my identity still cannot be accurately reported for federal classification. This is due to the complicated and nuanced categories of race and ethnicity, a new edition to the Census, and their meanings. Further, because current Census categorizations allege Latina/os "can be of any race," classifying oneself is complicated for a Latina/o because some individuals blend his or her racial identity with their ethnic Latina/o identity, while others understand his or her racial identity to be separate from being Latina/o (Wijeyesinghe, 2012), not to mention the conundrum of the Multiracial Latina/o like myself. What's more, Ochoa (2004) explains how the option of only one identity category cannot accurately capture the complexity of Mexican-origin identity because of the "history of conquest, colonization and migration" that "includes people of indigenous, African, Iberian, European and Asian decent" (pp. 111-112).

To illustrate this, "White" or "some other race" (devised for respondents who might identify as Mulatto, Creole, or *Mestizo*) are the only options I can select in the race category. In order to check off a box that describes my ethnicity, "Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin" are my only choices. Checking the boxes of "White" and "Hispanic,

Latino, or Spanish origin” is problematic because this race-ethnicity combination does not specifically account for my Multiraciality because Mexicans are classified as White if they do not have Black/African ancestry (Mexican or Latino is not a race). An individual whose dual parentage is Mexican (like my father for example) could select this exact same race-ethnicity combination. That is where the “some other race” category could be a plausible option for me. While somewhat more inclusive, this label remains problematic because it names my Multiracial identity as non-normative, a deviation from a monoracial norm, and locates me in a purgatory of racial/ethnic “others.”

To return to the point, Multiraciality is further challenged by the academy’s limited appointed terminologies of race, specifically monoraciality (Chang, 2014). However on the other hand, in a positive and significant shift initiated by the changes in the 2000 U.S. Census and the acknowledgement that racial classification is an individual’s right (DaCosta 2007); Multiracial identity is increasingly becoming an evident concept in the U.S. (Brunsma, 2005; Jones & Smith, 2001). Furthermore, Multiraciality and the future and impact of Multiracial individuals is continuing to be at the center of social, political, and academic discussions and examinations as they/we begin to show up as a quantifiable and a better understood community (e.g., Bracket et al., 2006; Brunsma, 2006; DaCosta, 2007; Harris & Sim, 2002; Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson & Harris, 1993; Jiménez, 2004; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2005, 2006; Root, 1992, 1996; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012).

This Nation proudly identifies as a melting pot, despite the reality for many immigrants (Padilla, 2006) who are unjustly forced to assimilate and assign privilege to

dominant White ideals, and the Multiracial identity, with multigenerational roots in this country, which remains marginalized and absent from its narrative (Root, 2002). While Multiracial individuals certainly live with the pressure to choose single racial identities (Root, 2003b), recent findings (e.g., Change, 2014; DaCosta, 2007, Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012) show many Multiracial individuals identify with more than one race and bravely cross the confines of normative racial constructions giving them agency. Root (2002) attributes the silencing of Multiracial narratives to economic motives, class privileges, a history of antimiscegenist laws and beliefs, ideas of supremacy that influence statuses of hypodescent, and internalized oppression of people of color. Scholars (Anzaldúa, 1983; Chang, 2014) affirm, that breaking this silence, by occupying “spaces and language that are meant to be silenced and unarticulated,” (Chang, 2014, p. 27) requires courage and agency that begins with listening to an inner knowing or as Anzaldúa (2007) aptly puts it *la facultad*, a resistance to dominant narratives and a telling of “Multiracial stories in borderland spaces” (Chang, 2014, p. 45).

Similarly, our contemporary culture boasts multiculturalism and color-blind ideology. Claims that we are entering a post-racial America emerged with the landmark and poignant 2009 election and 2012 re-election of President Barack Obama, our first African American *and* Multiracial president. Electing this Nation’s first President of color was undoubtedly a phenomenal event, both nationally and internationally (K. F. Jackson, 2012), that does signal positive and monumental change from pre-civil rights eras. However, categorizing this time as a post-racial period, “where civil rights veterans of the past century are consigned to history and Americans begin to make race-free judgments on who should lead them” as many like Schorr (2008) have stated, is naïve.

However necessary and desired this change may be, institutionalized racial inequalities have not disappeared (Brunsma, 2005).

... claims of a raceless and color-blind society erase or neutralize the centuries of historical injustice, exploitation and asymmetrical relations of power during the colonial era that have produced current conditions of race-based inequity. (Sorrells, 2013, p. 21)

In fact, this rhetoric stands in the way of truly revolutionizing our country's consciousness, acts as a cursory remedy for racism, and aids our collective forgetting of a history of imperialism, slavery, and anti-miscegenation. "Despite the rosy descriptions of nativists and assimilationists, American society is not a uniform dreamland, but a complex entity marked by profound class and race inequalities and featuring very different lifestyles and levels of opportunity" (Portes, 2009, p. 3).

For example, this Nation's difficulty accepting and understanding identities outside of monoracial constructs is illustrated by the labeling and questioning of President Obama's racial identity. He is a man whom proudly and vocally expresses his hybrid identity, and yet he is marginalized repeatedly both interethnically and intraethnically, as he is categorized through the dichotomy of Black *or* White. He has said of this boxing-in and policing of his racial identity, "At various stages in the campaign, some commentators have deemed me either 'too black' or 'not black enough'" (Obama, 2008). Our president has explicitly described himself as Multiracial stating, "I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather... and a white grandmother.... I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents"

(Obama, 2008). President Obama is simultaneously demonized as a Black man and judged as not Black enough. This compounding interracial *and* intraracial discrimination is a common experience of Multiracial individuals (Brackett et al., 2006). The danger with this, as scholars astutely point out, is that being constrained to deny parts of ones heritage is dehumanizing and traumatizing (Root, 2003b); erases components of ones identity that fragments and paralyzes the individual (Rinderle, 2005); and as DaCosta points out, it has the power to erase the experiences of all people from those specific ethnicities (Glenn, 2007).

Social and political changes and the more recent campaign and elections of President Obama, ushered in a much-needed discussion of Multiracial identity in this country (Binning, Unzueta, Huo, & Molina, 2009; Daniel, 2002; Martin, 2008; Rodriguez, 2008). Nevertheless, the multiplicity of backgrounds (Ochoa, 2004) and the unique “social identities, ancestry mixtures and trajectories” (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2009) of Latina/os has not been fully been recognized.

I find it problematic that my Multiracial identity has not been reflected in the media (unless characterized as exotic or mysterious) or considered by social and governmental institutions, standardized forms,²² and Census statistics. To be ignored, unidentified, mislabeled, or categorized as “other,” positions my Multiracial identity as a deviation from monoracial norms. This supports the ideology that Multiracial individuals are abnormal (Anzaldúa, 2007; DaCosta, 2007; Davis, 1991; Miler, 1992; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Reuter, 1918; Rockquemore & Brunnsma 2002; Root, 1992, 1996;

²² Health care and employment forms, surveys, applications for college admissions, financial aid, and standardized tests.

Williams & Nakashima, 2001). In fact, research has shown it is imperative to allow individuals to select multiple racial groups (in standardized forms for example) in order to support identity safety and allow individuals to thrive socially (Townsend, Markus, & Bergsieker, 2009). Moreover, the forceful denial of anyone's ancestry is a violation to "the right to free association" (Davis, 1991, p. 194) defined by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Also problematic, was the disappointing realization that Multiraciality would not be discussed in my graduate program, in either Chicana/o Studies or Gender and Women's Studies. Although, it was discussed in one course and supported by my thesis committee and by individual faculty members. Of this, I am grateful for. Yet, I could not help but feel isolated and misplaced as a Multiracial person. Interacting with student peers was much more shocking as I was indirectly given the message that my Multiracial voice was not something that belonged and therefore I struggled to assert myself. Just as Jiménez (2004) asserts in his depiction of the Multiracial Mexican American²³ experience, the extent to which I could (or should) claim membership as a Chicana, was sometime policed by other Chicana/os. Because of this, I only found the space to authentically assert my Mexicanness, Whiteness, and Multiraciality, and my developing Chicana identity in friendships with fellow Borderland Chicanos and with open-minded professors. It was not until I was through much of the writing and art making process of this thesis, that I developed the bravery to really stand up for my identity and to have courage to create a space for myself.

²³ Jiménez uses the term Mexican American to indicate individuals I refer to as Chicana/o throughout this thesis.

My experience seemed to embody our society's deep racial divides and the difficulty surrounding discussions of race, ethnicity, and identity choices. And, the resistance and questioning I experienced towards my identity ambiguity exemplified our society's fear and misunderstanding of queer identities (any non-normative social identity) and the essentialist perspectives and strict criteria for ethnic group membership that can be a result of ethnic pride movements (DaCosta, 2007). My Whiteness and its attached meanings interrupted my interactions as a Chicana or Multiracial individual. Therefore, much like Saldívar-Hull (2000) contends the need for Chicanas to look outside nontraditional places for our theories, I found Multiracial-Latina and other non-normative voices that spoke to me in the prefaces, footnotes, autobiographies, personal accounts, and in poetry, art, and my own artifacts (stories, art, and memories).

Chabram-Dernersesian (2009), one of very few "Mexi-Rican" individuals in 1950's/60's Southern California, describes her racial/ethnic identity, its mixture, and her regional identity as deeply significant in describing her in her completeness. She explains how generic umbrella labels are troublesome and restrictive because as a "child of mixed ethnic parentage,"²⁴ these [racial/ethnic] distinctions mattered" (p. 383), her unique social identity was synonymous to "life, family, and the social world" (p. 385). She characterizes the Multiracial/Multiethnic experience succinctly by detailing her reality:

Like many children who grow up in a race-conscious minority-making society, I was often asked at school *where I was from* and *what I was*. (The infamous questions that suggest a subtractive difference from a universal norm of

²⁴ Chabram-Dernersesian (2009) uses the term "mixed ethnic parentage" (p. 383) to describe her race/ethnicity, a combination of Mexican (American) culture on her mother's side and Puerto Rican culture on her father's side. Others in this thesis, such as Hall (1990), use the term "cultural identity" In this thesis, my usage of the terms is dependent on the individual author's use.

whiteness.) As a child and a teenager, I didn't have the vocabulary to name the nuances of my complex racial ethnic difference/nuance. And for sure naming it was uncommon in the late 1950s. (p. 384)

Therefore, this thesis project critiques racial discourses and dominant monoracial constructs, which have omitted my story by applying the counterhegemonic strategies of Chicana feminist autohistoria and artful autoethnography. My efforts provide entry to an otherwise invisible experience, filling the gap that traditional sources of identity literature have left and enriching Chicana/Latina and Multiracial identity discourses through self-authorship and aesthetics. As a result, this autohistoria/autoethnography is the process by which cultural identity is put into question; personal and cultural stories reimaged and rewritten (Bartleet, 2013; Anzaldúa, 2009); and new forms of representation for Americans and Mexicans of the Mexican diaspora, that have the Multiracial subject at their center are produced. Like the work of "Mexi-Rican" Chicana, Chabram-Dernersesian's (2009) report-personal narrative, that shines a light on Puerto Rican communities in California previously unobserved by social scientists; my work documents and actualizes the voices of "identities that have largely gone unobserved, both within and outside of 'Latino blocs,' census reports and history books" (p. 1). I have chosen, like Chabram-Dernersesian (2009) and many other Chicana feminists who return to the neighborhoods of their youth, to situate my narrative within the places I call 'home,' because little is known about the *vivencias* (lived experiences) of an East Coast Mexi-Anglo Chicana.

My lived experiences and my immediate family are absent from census figures and scholarly literature, but my narrative, re/imaginings, and memories in this thesis

project “speak loudly about the importance of identities in difference... im/migration, settlement and racialization processes; and the social, cultural and symbolic processes that make it possible for some of us [Multiracial] families to come into representation” (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2009, p. 379). Moreover, this project narrates my experience as an East Coast Mexi-Anglo Chicana in multisensory ways (aesthetically and literary) and employs the Chicana feminists’ epistemology of centering the female testimony.

My personal account pays witness to and illuminates the collective experiences of fluid identities (Multiracial individuals and Chicana/os alike), which are perceived as non-normative. Writing from and inserting a typically “othered” narrative to the academy and into our visual culture realizes and validates the identity and self-identification process of Multiracial/Multiethnic individuals (particularly Anglo-Mexicans)—a growing and significant population in the U.S. today. From this lens, this thesis project combines feminist studies, Chicana feminists studies, and feminist aesthetic and art production as a method of exposing emerging Multiracial-Chicana/Latina identities. My approach of merging identity development research with narratives (from Latina/Chicana literature and my own) enlists the integrative suggestions from Multiracial scholarship (Wijeyesinghe, 2012) and those of Chicana feminists who urged us to develop theory from everyday life (Hurtado, 2003). My work models these paradigm-shifts and presents an example for future research of both Chicana/o ethnic identity and Multiracial identity research, specifically from a narrative and arts-based standpoint. I advocate for further examination of Multiracial identity and look towards Feminism, Autohistoria/Autoethnography, and Feminist art-based methods in order to further the study of Multiracial people, bring these findings to a larger community (as art and

autobiographic work can more easily do than qualitative analysis), and to make visible and expand the vision and voice of the American Multiracial *vivencias* (lived experience). Integrating these disciplines has the potential to contextualize Multiracial identities in new holistic ways.

Overview of Literature

In this literature review I provide a general overview of both the existing Chicana/o ethnic identity and Multiracial identity development theories and models to provide a background of the studies from the two communities I am a part of. The inclusion of both Chicana/o and Multiracial studies in this literature review illustrates the duality of my lived experience. What follows is my conceptual framework; an autohistoria/autoethnography that braids together (a) a theoretical discussion of identity, 'home,' and diaspora, (b) my *vivencias* (lived experiences), and (c) arts based inquiry. The intent of this is first, to expose emerging perspectives of Multiracial-Chicana/Latina identities that were previously overlooked by traditional identity literature. And second, to provide an alternative view of Chicana/o and Multiracial identity from the predominantly psychology-based and linear identity theories and models, by inserting my autohistoria/autoethnography, in order to frame the Multiracial-Chicana/Latina space. In this way I redefined what it means to be American, Mexican, Chicana/Latina, and Multiracial.

Chicana/o Ethnic Identity Development

In this section, I present a summary of the major models framing Chicana/o ethnic identity research. First, I provide a brief explanation of ethnic identity terminology. Next, I review the early research that laid the groundwork for ethnic identity research. Then, I review the groundbreaking work on ethnic identity in Mexican American Children, led by Martha Bernal and George Knight. Next, I review ethnic identity in adolescence guided by Jean S. Phinney (1989, 1990, 1991, 1992) and her three phases of ethnic identity development model (1993). Then, I review ethnic identity in young adults in the

college setting led by Kathleen A. Ethier and Kay Deaux (1990, 1994). Then, I review Latino and Latina ethnoracial identity orientations observed by Ferdman and Gallegos (2001). Finally, I offer my critique of ethnic identity models and the limitations linear approaches have on understanding identity production particularly for Borderland identities.

John A. García (1981, 1982) was one of the first researchers to publish literature using the National Chicano Survey's findings. His work linked self-labeled ethnic identity with social factors of the individual (e.g., age, country of origin, etc.) and he notably concluded that the data and the study's methodology were not adequate for the complexities of the identities studied (1981), requiring him to research further. In his follow up study, García (1982) examined the relationships between ethnic identity, ethnic identification, and ethnic consciousness. He concluded that heightened political consciousness and participation in ethnic practices and knowledge increased association and interaction with Mexicans or Chicana/os. García's (1981, 1982) research is significant because it characterized the obstacles in understanding Chicana/o ethnic identity due to the complexity of studying identity, and his work laid the groundwork for further research on ethnic identity (Pizarro & Vera, 2001).

Ethnic Identity in Mexican American Children

Starting in the 1980's, Martha Bernal and George Knight began to study Chicana/o ethnic identity in children. Their groundbreaking work examined data from the National Chicano Survey by challenging earlier psychological literature that enmeshed race and ethnicity. They believed the conflation of terms lead to an inconsistency in the literature, which may not have been an inconsistency, but instead a result of the cognitive

differences with understanding of race and ethnicity (Bernal, Knight, Garza, Ocampo, & Cota, 1990). This child centered research aimed at separating racial constructs from ethnicity. In fact, their research revealed that children developed racial awareness prior to ethnic awareness because ethnic awareness required higher cognitive levels, which children acquire, as they get older (Bernal et al., 1990). Their research findings indicated that ethnic identity development is a slow process during childhood. For example, preschoolers have a narrow understanding of their ethnic identity with little meaning applied to ethnic labels and child participation in ethnic behaviors simply mirror family practices, rather than resulting from a child's ethnic preference. Early school-age children begin to develop an understanding of their ethnic identity (between the ages 7 and 10). For instance, ethnic labels begin to have meaning, children develop ethnic identity constancy, the understanding that ethnicity is permanent (Ocampo, Bernal, Knight, 1993) (between the ages of 8 and 10), ethnic role behaviors are performed with increased understanding, and ethnic group feelings and preferences develop. Moreover, Bernal et al.'s (1990) research indicates that a child's ethnic and group membership is informed by social learning experiences through family, community, and dominant society. This information grows increasingly as a child gains more freedom and access to diverse experiences.

Based on Bernal et al.'s (1990) model, Knight, Cota, and Bernal (1993) analyzed the correlation among Chicana/o children's ethnic socialization and the child's social orientation in school. Their results found that a parent's increased ethnic knowledge and preference led to an increase in teaching children about Mexican culture. This subsequently led to an increase in a child's ethnic knowledge and preference, and

therefore ethnic identity. Knight, Bernal, Cota, Garza, and Ocampo (1993) continued their research, finding that enculturation and acculturation jointly operate to form the ethnic identity and ethnic behaviors of children, resulting in the multidimensional Socialization Model of Ethnic Identity, the most complex model on Chicana/o ethnic identity development (Knight et al., 1993). In particular, they examined the interaction of the social ecology of the family with the ecology of the child's community, which notably both affect child socialization and therefore affect a child's ethnic identity. Knight et al.'s (1993) research is grounded in the work of social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), cognitive developmental theory (Flavell, 1985), and self-system theory (Harter, 1983).

Ethnic Identity Development in Adolescence

Jean S. Phinney (1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993) developed the most significant and most cited research within adolescent ethnic identity development, resulting in the three-stage Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) model. Phinney's research is grounded in the work of developmental psychologist Erik Erikson's (1964, 1968) work on ego identity formation. In particular, she incorporated Erikson's work on adolescent identity theories, which most notably identified the adolescent's development of continuity between society's perceptions of the adolescent and the self-perception of the adolescent, resulting in identity status. Phinney also used the work of noted psychologist James Marcia (1980). Marcia recognized three youth identity statuses as: *identity diffusion* (no commitment or conflict with a particular identity), *identity foreclosure* (no exploration of identity and a premature commitment made), *moratorium* (period of

exploration and crisis with no commitment made), and *achieved identity* (deep explorations conducted and commitment to a well-grounded self).

Based on Erickson and Marcia's frameworks, Phinney's (1993) model locates adolescents within one of three phases of ethnic identity development. The process begins with an unexamined ethnic identity, characterized by the individual's lack of thought or exploration with ethnic identity. To initiate an individual's passage onto the next stage, an identity crisis must occur. An individual's identity development progression begins with the second phase, ethnic identity search/moratorium, through encounters and explorations that propel movement to the final stage. The culminating stage is ethnic identity achievement in which individuals are satisfied, competent, and confident in their ethnic identity and position in society. The model's final stage is the most flexible and aligns with Phinney's (1989) assertion that achieved identities are seen in adolescents with high self-esteem, ego identity, and strong social relationships. Phinney's (1993) model furthered the study of Chicana/o ethnic identity development by explaining the later stages of identity development not covered by the model of Bernal, Knight, and their colleagues (Pizarro & Vera, 2001).

Ethnic Identity Development in Young Adults

The work of Kathleen A. Ethier and Kay Deaux (1990, 1994) examined Chicana/o ethnic identity development in the collegiate setting. Ethier and Deaux (1990) first discovered that while ethnic identity was expressed by the majority of their study's participants, the degree to which individuals expressed their ethnic identity varied due to the influence of social context and prejudices. Ethier and Deaux (1994) continued their research of interethnic context and found college students went through a process of re-

mooring, shifting previous ethnic identity supports to new supports in context with their new environment. Their findings revealed that individuals with high Latina/o group involvement before college had greater ethnic group participation in college and sought support within their new environments, revealing stronger ethnic identification. Low identifying students were susceptible to threats to their ethnic identities such as racism and consequently low self-esteem. The new environment caused individuals with negative feelings about their ethnic identity to decrease ethnic identification. Therefore, the context of the student's new environment was the catalyst for increasing or decreasing ethnic identity, while considering the identity status of the previous environment. Ethier and Deaux's (1994) contribution was connecting interethnic interaction and a changing context with Chicana/o ethnic identity, and identifying just how significant context can be for a Chicana/o student's wellbeing and performance in the collegiate environment.

Latino and Latina Ethnoracial Orientations

Bernardo M. Ferdman and Plácida V. Gallegos (2001) examined Latina/o ethnoracial identity orientations. Their work, which found six ethnoracial identity orientations, and later expanded upon (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012), was grounded in examining the challenges associated with this complex and multifaceted group. Gallegos and Ferdman focused specifically on the relationship between Latina/o identity and racial categorization, and how these identities relate and do not relate to racial constructs. Because Latina/os have many in-group differences and varied histories (e.g., different countries of origin, cultures, and socioeconomic classes), Gallegos and Ferdman refer to Latina/o identity as distinctly labyrinthine and dynamic. Their divergent model reflects

patterns of identity, which they observed, rather than a stage-based progression of steps like the previously mentioned racial identity models. Gallegos and Ferdman assert, the complex Latina/o ethnoracial identity is only one of many elements that makeup Latina/o identity. This model provides a lens to examine how Latina/os think about themselves, while considering the historical and cultural influences of this group. These aspects are observed in the context of multiple, interrelated, and simultaneous identities of Latina/os (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012, Holvino, 2012). Gallegos and Ferdman also assert; Latina/o identity can be associated with several of these orientations or only one throughout one's lifetime, none of which are valued hierarchal, or better or worse than the other. These patterns are briefly described as:

1. *Latino-integrated.* These individuals view their Latina/o identity as important, but in context with their other social identities in a holistic manner. As the most complex orientation with the widest lens, individuals of this orientation understand that race is contextual and socially constructed, and an individual's experiences combine to inform their social identities. These individuals can accept ambiguity, contradiction, and a fluid sense of their multiple identities. Because they have been exposed to a wide variety of lived experiences from which they draw upon, their view of Latina/o identity can be broad and without stereotypical characteristics. This however, can sometimes cause misunderstanding by other orientated Latina/os who perceive this group as having lost Latina/o identification.
2. *Latino-identified.* These individuals generally view Latina/os in a unified way as a distinct ethnoracial category and they maintain a sense of connection to all

individuals within the Latina/o group. They tend to have a strong sense of knowledge and awareness of Latina/o culture, and they emphasize shared connections among Latina/os.

3. *Subgroup-identified.* These individuals view themselves only through their separate national-origin group (e.g., Mexican, etc.). They often perceive their group more positively than other Latina/o subgroups. They also maintain a more narrow view of their group and a significant attachment to national origin and specific subgroup culture. This orientation can provide a strong foundation for orientating one's self in the world, but it can also be challenging in terms of forming alliances across groups.
4. *Latino as other.* These individuals view themselves as “not White” and as “minorities” or “people of color” but without distinction among Latina/o groups. Therefore, they have an association with or a consciousness of being Latina/o, but with limited knowledge of Latina/o history, traditions, and culture and their specific heritage. This orientation can develop in individuals from diverse communities or whose parents are from varied backgrounds.
5. *Undifferentiated/denial.* These individuals adopt a color-blind ideology and generally do not connect with other Latina/os because of a lack of understanding about their group. They have neither negative nor positive sentiments about Latina/o identity. This orientation may develop in individuals who were not exposed to Latina/o culture.
6. *White-identified.* These individuals are generally assimilated into dominant American culture and ideology, and adopt a White perspective. They may

perceive themselves as superior to other people of color and may also not identify with being Latina/o. These individuals may have developed their identity without positive images of Latina/os, but rather negative ones, and perhaps have been encouraged to value dominant groups. In this case, it is difficult for them to value Latina/o cultural characteristics. These individuals may tend to avoid situations where ethnoracial diversity is pronounced. These avoidances can be protective measures against not fitting in.

(Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012)

Gallegos and Ferdman's observations revealed that identity is in constant movement and always changing depending on the circumstances within one's life. This supported their assertion that racial constructs in the U.S. do not efficiently apply to Latina/os and when they are assigned to this group, Latina/o realities are cut short. Therefore, Gallegos and Ferdman apply three considerations for discerning the Latina/o experiences as it relates to race and racism; race is not a primary distinction for this group although phenotype is a relevant element, Latina/os are from varied and mixed backgrounds and it is impossible to categorize them in specific racial categories, and Latina/os in the U.S. respond differently than other racial groups to racial categories. Gallegos and Ferdman's contribution illuminates the simultaneous, multiple dimensions of social identity that develop in Latina/os as a unique ethnoracial group. They assert that an Intersectional framework provides the depth needed to study the dimensions of this group and honor the diversity of Latina/os.

Critique of Ethnic Identity Literature

As a whole, the literature reviewed provides the foundation for understanding Chicana/o ethnic identity and the experiences that shape development. These findings have played an important role in advancing the understanding and analysis of the identity development of Chicana/os. They have also provided a reference point for further studies on identity development. However, the literature is limited in several ways due to the primarily psychologically based theories and the fact that Chicana/os are not a homogeneous community as suggested by many of the studies' limited sample groups (geographically and racially/ethnically).

First, Chicana/o ethnic identity research is centralized around three developmental stages: childhood (Bernal et al., 1990; Knight, Cota, & Bernal, 1993; Quintana & Vera, 1999), adolescence (Phinney, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993), and young adult populations (Ethier & Deaux, 1990, 1994). This is limiting because ethnic identity cannot be fully understood or defined by pinning down concrete phases of development. Moreover, this research is framed by psychology rather a sociological perspective and therefore it does not address the connection and/or conflict between individual experiences and society. Furthermore, the life-long dynamic and unpredictable identity, one that is constantly being constructed and re-constructed, is not accounted for within these developmental categories. In contrast, the Latino and Latina Ethnoracial Orientation model (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012) provides a non-stage based lens to observe the intricate labyrinthine-like identity of Latina/os that is multifaceted and dynamic.

Second, these studies, and more generally speaking the majority of literature on Chicana/os, focus on individuals in the American Southwest and West. The ethnic identity research reviewed here was based on participants primarily from the Southwest regions of the U.S. While a reported three-fourths of Latina/os in the U.S. reside in the Southwest (Portes, 2009), recent findings demonstrate the expanding reach of U.S. native-born and immigrant Latina/os across the country, to less “traditional” Latina/o regions (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Portes, 2009), such as the East Coast. This is an important factor for researchers to consider because Mexican and Chicana/o individuals in communities outside of the Southwest and West face very different experiences, social ecologies, and self-perceptions than communities in these regions. Yet, these geographic regions have been omitted from the discussion on Chicana/o ethnic identity development (García, 1998) and historical accounts of Latina/os (Solá, 2011). Even literature that discusses Multiracial/Multiethnic-Chicana/o experiences is largely limited to the Southwest or West regions (e.g., Chabram-Dernersesian, 2009; Jackson, Wolven, & Aguilera, 2013; Jiménez, 2004; Romo, 2011). Expanding the geographic regions studied to include the Mexican and Chicana/o experience in less racially and ethnically diverse areas would include and acknowledge the experiences of families like my own and our Mexican and Multiracial East coast identities living in rural-suburban Pennsylvania.

Third, this literature does not address the experience and identity of Multiracial Mexican-Americans (Jiménez, 2004) and even less specifically the White/Mexican experience across the U.S. (Jiménez, 2004; Liles, 2005; Salgado de Snyder, Lopez, & Padilla, 1982; Romo, 2011). Historically, there has been more attention paid toward

Black/White pairings than other racial and ethnic pairings (Jackson et al., 2013; Padilla, 2006; Romo, 2011).

Scholars continue to focus on Multiracial Black and White racial identity while paying considerably less attention to other racial and ethnic formations, in particular persons of Hispanic/non-Hispanic origin and mixed persons of “dual-minority” heritage.... This is particularly troubling considering that the Hispanic population has surpassed African Americans as the largest ethnic minority group in the United States. (Jackson et al., 2013, p. 212)

The identity of Multiracial-Latinos in the U.S. and the ways in which these individuals identify themselves is missing from this earlier work on ethnic identity. This is true despite significant data that shows this demographic as one of the three most common majority-minority interracial couplings (Brunsma, 2005) which is growing at a disproportionately higher rate than other Multiracial groups (Jackson et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, there are signs that this trend is changing with more Multiracial children embracing and affirming their multiple cultural heritages (Alvarado, 1999) and scholars increasingly paying attention to Multiracial/Multiethnic Latina/o experiences, particularly in the last two decades (e.g., Chabram-Dernersesian, 2009; Chang, 2014; Chang-Ross, 2010; DaCosta, 2007; Fordham-Hernández, 2009; Jackson et al., 2013; Jiménez, 2004; Johnson, 1999; Kennedy & Romo, 2013; Padilla, 2006; Romo, 2011) and Chicana/o experiences outside of the Southwest (e.g., Fordham-Hernández, 2009; García, 1998; Smith, 2006; Solá, 2011).

Latina/os are not a monolithic community, and in fact they participate and identify with multiple social positions (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). To this point, the

study of Chicana/o ethnic identity can be enriched by further examining identities which simultaneously inhabit marginality and social privilege. This is because “social positions influence both the experience of a particular aspect of identity (such as gender, class, race/ethnicity) and overall identity” (Wijeyesinghe, 2012, p. 83). The significant increase in Latina/o populations in the U.S. (Ennis et al., 2011; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012) and this population’s increasing diversification, both regionally and racially/ethnically, reflect a more diversified population than the majority of Chicana/o ethnic identity literature accounts for. Also, a growing number of second and third generation Latina/os, whom are intermarrying, diversifies this community. As a result, there are and will continue to be an increase in the number of individuals who identify with both dominant and marginalized identities either because of multiple racial/ethnic identities and/or multiple socioeconomic class experiences.

Therefore, future research on Chicana/o ethnic identity, which seeks to avoid essentialist notions of the Chicana/o experience can benefit from reaching beyond traditional Chicana/o regions, demographics, and classifications. These critiques support my suggestion to deepen the discourse of Chicana/o ethnic identity by further examining and including the voices of the *Nepantleras*, the individuals who command the passage and live between metaphoric and social worlds (Anzaldúa, 2002a, 2002b), and the racial queers, who bravely challenge normative monoracial constructions (Chang-Ross, 2010).

Lastly, I suggest including the identity experiences of neglected backgrounds and social identities, and communities which experience intersectional marginality based on social location and demographic characteristics such as the stories of Multiracial, queer, or undocumented Chicana/os, to name a few. Intersectionality, highlighted first by Hill

Collins (1990), Crenshaw (1989), and Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983), is a feminist theorist approach to studying the relationship between socially constructed groupings of individuals based on difference (race, gender, class, and sexuality). This approach asserts and examines specifically how these categories of differences concurrently interact and intersect, and therefore create multiple systems of oppressions that position individuals within a complicated system of social inequality that provides either oppression or privilege. It is from this perspective that the Latino and Latina Ethnoracial Orientation model (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012) is successful because it provides the framework to analyze Latina/o identity while considering the complexity and simultaneous nature of these identities, the relationship between this group's identity and racial constructs, and the dynamic and contextual nature of this group's identity.

Biracial and Multiracial Identity Development

The previous review of Chicana/o ethnic identity development demonstrated the dominant models framing ethnic identity development as a successive process in which individuals align identity with one permanent ethnic group (Pizarro & Vera, 2001) and, therefore, these models are one-dimensional. In particular, these models focus on monoracial ethnic identities in the U.S., predominantly Chicana/os in the American Southwest and sometimes parts of the West and Midwest. This specific perspective, while effective and critical to a dominant understanding of those monoracial ethnic identities, is not extensively appropriate or constructive in examining *my* lived racial identity or the varied and diverse experiences of Chicana/os and Latina/o throughout the U.S.

Therefore, in this section, I expand the review of ethnic identity theory to include Biracial and Multiracial identity models. First, I present an overview of the literature by summarizing the major contributions of Biracial and Multiracial identity theory and reviewing the significant models of this discipline. Then, I review the foundational Biracial identity development models of W. S. Carlos Poston (1990) and Maria P. P. Root (1990). Next, I review several contemporary and emerging Multiracial identity models thematically which take an ecological, multi-dimensional, and intersectional approach, and consequently account for the diverse, complex, and sometimes fluid Multiracial experience, and cover a range of Multiracial experiences and backgrounds. Finally, I offer my critique of Biracial and Multiracial identity literature.

Overview

Theorists ascertain that people of all races struggle with the need to deemphasize their race in order to avoid distressing emotions in social settings during their early racial identity development (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991). Within a Multiracial context, racial identity development, performance, and self-identification is complex and can result in increased stressors, discriminations, and identity negotiations and hurdles that monoracial individuals do not have to face. Often, the Multiracial individual does not share the same world view as monoracial individuals (or feels pressured to adopt a perspective that does not fully reflect their heritages) and can be positioned between or outside of society's "either/or" racial constructs, and these individuals can feel the need to "choose" an identity and deal with any resulting responsibilities or consequences of that choice (Taylor & Nanney, 2011). These experiences can lead to the feeling of isolation, provoking existential anxiety (Taylor & Nanney, 2011). What is more, DaCosta (2007)

asserts the Multiracial existential dilemma of “who am I” actually “encompasses a variety of conflicts over class, sexuality, education, and family history” (p. 49), but it is expressed through race because of the way we are organized socially in the U.S. Ifekwunigwe (2004) describes this existential situation and the phenomenon of selecting one race over the other (as mandated by the previously reviewed monoracial identity models and monoracial social structures):

The complex social forces that say that one is more one’s black parent than one’s white parent (or one’s Asian or Native American parent) raises a complex question of who one is by virtue of one’s choice and that choice’s relation to one’s social situation. (p. 163)

Furthermore, the ascribed racial labels, categories, and group membership (or refused group membership) that are imposed socially and institutionally onto Multiracial individuals, further complicates the Multiracial experience with identity development. Mestiza, half-breed, mulatto, Eurasian, and mixed are labels for individuals without distinct racial reference groups who are often labeled as “other,” and in fact have been given little authority over how they are regarded socially (Root, 1990). “Because of their ambiguous ethnic identity and society's refusal to view the races as equal, mixed race people begin life as *marginal people*” (Root, 1990, p. 185). Contemporary understandings of racial identity development derive from the intersection of psychology and the sociopolitical movements for civil rights and racial pride of the 1960’s and 1970’s (Padilla, 2006; Root, 2003b; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012). While these movements were significant forces for equality and empowerment for people of color, they reinforced solidarity with only one race and carried sentiments of racial purity (Root,

2003b). Similarly, the foundational stage-based monoracial identity models framed dichotomous “either/or” experiences of racial identity that do not reflect the reported layered, complex, and sometimes-fluid identity of Multiracial individuals (Alvarado, 1999). Again, Multiracial individuals may feel required to select one racial identity within monoracial constructs despite possibly seeing themselves as “both/and” (Taylor & Nanney, 2010; Wijeyesinghe, 2012) as a result of the value placed on identifying with one particular identity, monoracial or Biracial (Root, 2003b). This can lead Multiracial individuals to simultaneously “fit” with one cultural heritage (while denying the other) and/or reluctantly “fit” with another (Taylor, 2004). Therefore, contemporary monoracial identity theories (mostly) fail Multiracial people as they fail to explain how Biracial/Multiracial people come to identity with more than one race (Root, 2003b).

The foundational Biracial identity models and theories, although significant in advancing the study of Multiracial people, focused largely on Black/White experiences exclusively and also did not reflect the variance in experiences and fluid or changing identity of this population. Contemporary Multiracial identity models are more inclusive of Multiracial populations and examine Black, White, Latina/o, Native American, Asian, and Multiracial individuals (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012) and have been groundbreaking additions to racial discourses. While these models and theories are significant in advancing our knowledge of Multiracial identity, it is the more contemporary studies and models that examine the dimensions, fluidity, and intersectionality of identity, that come closer to capturing Multiraciality.

The importance of understanding Multiracial identity for many scholars lies in the fact that racial identity models are “tools for understanding how individuals achieve an

awareness of their sense of self in relation to race with a larger social, cultural, and historical context” (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012, p. 1). Root (1990) explains her position for the critical need of Multiracial identity development models so Multiracial individuals can avoid marginalization and obtain a cohesive intact identity.

The individual is harshly reminded of their ambiguous ethnic/racial status; they are an *other*. They are marginal until they achieve a unique resolution for themselves that accepts both parts of their racial heritage. In order to move out of marginal status they need to place less importance on seeking social approval and even move beyond the dichotomy of thinking about the world and self as white versus non-white, good versus bad, and inferior versus superior. This strategy towards resolution requires the child to do something that in all likelihood they have few models to emulate. (p. 194)

Early Research and Foundational Models of Biracial Identity

Multiracial people born after 1980 came of age in a time when the discussion of Multiraciality was expanding; Multiracial faces were in the public eye and interracial partnerships were increasing. It was not until the 1990’s that racial identity development of individuals with parents from Biracial heritage groups was studied. This research on Biracial individuals was developed from the momentum of an increasing number of Multiracial individuals, a narrowing of developmental studies focused on individual social identity groups (i.e., gender, sexual orientation, or race/ethnicity) (Renn, 2008), and significant efforts by Multiracial activists (DaCosta, 2007). Since 2000, both the Multiracial population and the study of Multiracial people has grown significantly due to increasing diversity and interracial partnerships, and because of the Federal government’s

change allowing individuals to identify two or more races on recording forms and in the U.S. Census' classifications system (DaCosta, 2007; Jones & Smith, 2011). The historic change to federal classification were a critical moment of gaining governmental legitimacy and an advancement in the civil rights for Multiracial people (Miville et al., 2005) that can largely be attributed to the efforts of Multiracial activists (DaCosta, 2007). Since the 1990's, Multiracial research has continued to develop and has diversified significantly since 2000, influencing a broader field of social identity development (Wijeyesinghe, 2012).

Present day Multiracial identity scholarship uses the foundational Biracial (Black/White) identity development models of W.S. Carlos Poston (1990) and Maria P. P. Root (1990) as reference points. These initial studies were used to understand college students of Multiracial-heritage in the 1990's and a significant step in advancing the literature of Biracial people. More importantly, they were the first models to reject deficit models of Multiracial individuals with their framework of healthy Biracial identity development.

Poston's positive model of identity development. Poston's (1990) most notable study examined previous monoracial ethnic identity models and critiqued their usefulness for the identity development for Biracial individuals. He found the following deficiencies with the models: (a) the models suggested individuals select only one group's cultures or values; (b) the models stressed that individuals may first reject minority identity and culture and then reject dominant culture; (c) the models did not account for integrated or multiple ethnic identifications; and (d) all the models mandated some acceptance of the minority culture of origin. Furthermore, Poston asserted that many Biracial individuals

did not experience group acceptance and frequently experienced more victimization than minorities, by both parents and other cultures. As a result, Poston developed a “new and positive model” (p. 151) of identity development that did not focus on the marginal identities of Biracial individuals like earlier models had. Poston’s model mirrored the linear monoracial ethnic identity models, in that he presented five levels of development centered on the unique experiences of Biracial individuals in the U.S. These levels are briefly described as:

1. *Personal Identity*, in which young children hold a somewhat independent identity that is not necessarily linked to an ethnic background and membership to an ethnic group is just becoming salient.
2. *Choice of Group Categorization*, in which an individual is pushed (feeling forced by society) to choose a single identity (because of cognitive capacity) from his or her parent’s heritage background or, a multicultural identity that includes both parents’ heritage group. The decision is influenced by: the group status of parents’ ethnic background, demographics of home neighborhood and peer groups, parental influences, knowledge, participation, and acceptance of various ethnic groups, and other personal factors such as appearance or language. This stage is one of the most difficult for the individual. This is a time of adjustment and confusion, and it can be a time of crisis or alienation.
3. *Enmeshment/Denial* is the other difficult stage, a time of adjustment, in which confusion and guilt are felt from having to select one identity that is not representative of all aspects of his or her heritage. This may lead to anger, shame,

or self-hatred as well as un-acceptance of one or more groups. Resolving the guilt and anger is necessary for the adolescent to move beyond this stage.

4. *Appreciation*, in which individuals appreciate their multiple identities and broaden their racial reference group. They do this by learning about all aspects of their backgrounds; however, they still tend to select one group to identify with, influenced by the same factors from the choice stage.
5. *Integration*, in which individuals experience a whole and integrated identity and value a multicultural existence. Integration is associated with positive indicators of mental health.

(Poston, 1990)

Poston's (1990) linear model mirrored the same monoracial models (Cross, 1971; Erikson, 1963; Morten & Atkinson, 1983) he critiqued. However, Poston's model was adapted and his contribution accounts for the difference between Biracial and Multiracial experiences, reflected in the middle three stages of his model. Furthermore, his model contributed a needed addition, which allowed a more accurate perspective of Biracial experiences and identity than monoracial identity models could provide.

Root's positive identity resolutions. Root (1990) developed an alternative model that presented four positive resolutions for the stresses of Biracial identity due to their ambiguous identity and society's inability to see races as equal. Root's research is also grounded in the work of early monoracial ethnic identity models, specifically the work of Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1979). In particular, she modeled their first two stages, which most notably identifies the *Conformity Stage* (preference for the dominant culture's values) and the following *Dissonance Stage* (increased ethnic knowledge challenges an

idealized perception of dominant culture). Root modified their later stages, observing that many adolescent Biracial individuals with White heritage could not completely deny majority culture and immerse themselves alone in a minority community, as monoracial identity models assert. This was because; “to reject the dominant culture is to reject one parent and subsequently, an integral part of themselves that is unchangeable” (Root, 1990, p. 193).

Based on this framework, Root’s model named racism and internalized oppression for the period of inner turmoil that (partly White) Biracial adolescents experienced. And, she identified the internal conflict between an individual’s racial heritages as the strongest persistent stressor for these individuals. Furthermore, Root observed that these adolescents simultaneously experienced anxiety and feelings of non-belonging (to any social group), while externally appearing to be accepted by their community. Root also found gender to affect the level of racial discrimination, in particular, dating and tokenism were found to be especially painful for Biracial youth. As a result, she developed four positive resolutions for Biracial identity tensions. These resolutions are briefly described as:

1. *Acceptance of the identity society assigns.* Family and a strong alliance with and acceptance by a (usually minority) racial group provide support for identifying with the group into which others assume the Biracial individual most belongs.
2. *Identification with both racial groups.* Depending on societal support and personal ability to maintain this identity in the face of potential resistance from others, the Biracial individual may be able to identify with both (or all) heritage groups.

3. *Identification with a single racial group.* The individual chooses one group, independent of social pressure, to identify him or herself in a particular way (as in resolution one).
4. *Identification as a new racial group.* The individual may move fluidly among racial groups but identifies most strongly with other Biracial people, regardless of specific heritage backgrounds.

(Root, 1990)

Root's (1990) contributions accounted for the consequences racism has on identity and introduced the new identity groups of Biracial and Multiracial in the field of identity development. Her most significant contribution to Biracial identity development was her model, which considered that an individual might self-identify fluidly among multiple identities, opening the door for the development of empirical, nonlinear models for Multiracial individuals (Renn, 2008).

Critique of Biracial Identity Development Literature

The foundational models of Poston (1990) and Root (1990) are significant contributions to the field of Biracial and Multiracial identity and laid the groundwork for the Multiracial identity models that followed. However, these two models do not account for the experiences of Multiracial individuals with more than two racial or ethnic heritages. This is most likely a result of insufficient research and available information about people of color and Multiracial individuals that is accounted for in later studies (Renn, 2008).

In relation to my own identity experience, I found Poston's model (1990) to be too rigid and stage-based or prescriptive to accurately depict my identity fully. Also,

missing from Poston's model was the consideration for the impact racism has on Biracial identity development that was accounted for in Cross's (1971), Morten and Atkinson's (1983), and Root's (1990) models (Renn, 2008). Additionally, Poston leaves out the opportunity of several healthy identity resolutions for Multiracial people that account for the diversity of Biracial people's experiences. This model's linear start and end point do not reflect the ambiguous identification and experiences that are so common for people with Multiracial identities and that I have experienced. The model also does not take into account changing identification, unclear designations or affiliations with racial/ethnic group membership, or the uncertainty of "who am I" that is also common among Multiracial individuals (Brunsma, 2006). My identity is wrapped in race, class, immigration/migration, and geography, which are the complex layers of my life. Progressive models do not help explain my experiences.

However, Poston's inclusion and focus on the inner turmoil that can be experienced by Biracial individuals was a significant addition to the monoracial models and it allowed for a more insightful discussion of the Biracial and Multiracial experience, developing a new racial identity paradigm. Root's (1990) model, that focused on strategies for handling society's imposed "otherness" on Biracial individuals, was a welcomed addition to the stage-based models of monoracial and Biracial development. Her assertion that there could be multiple racial identity resolutions and, that individuals could move freely and fluidly between racial groups were significant additions to the literature at that time because it challenged the premise that individuals needed to align with only one racial identity to be physiologically whole.

I appreciate Root's urgency to help Multiracial people avoid marginalization and the consideration for the uniqueness of the Multiracial experiences that are often marginalized. While I agree that not subscribing to dichotomous notions of race will enhance the psyche of Multiracial individuals as she suggests, this cannot completely eliminate marginalization because it does not account for the outside influences of racism and marginalization that a Multiracial individual may face regularly throughout his or her lifetime, regardless of his or her thought processes or psychological state. An aspect of Root's (1990) model worth challenging is the assumption that her first outcome, *acceptance of ascribed identity*, implies. Individuals in various parts of the country will experience and construct their racial identity differently and the order of hypodescent may not be present (Root, 1999). Additionally, the second and third resolutions of the model, where an individual asserts his or her chosen identity, requires individuals to have the coping mechanisms, skills, and live within an environment (or part of the country) where it is possible to defend and assert one's chosen identity (Root, 1999).

This review of the literature begins to theorize, illustrate, and synthesize my lived experiences and identity production. However, while the literature that I will review next has provided a reference point for further studies on identity development and has played an important role in the awareness and advancement of Biracial and Multiracial identity development, I found some of the models to be too rigid and stage-based to accurately depict my identity experience in its complexity and fluidity. Therefore, I also turned to the flexible, intuitive, practice-led approaches of autoethnographic arts-based research and Chicana feminist autohistoria to capture my identity more fully. It is within understanding *all* of this literature (monoracial ethnic identity and Multiracial identity)

combined with Chicana feminist theories and methodologies, and my own practice-let findings that I have come to understand my experiences and feel represented. That is to say, I share the sentiments aptly expressed by Moraga (also a White/Brown Chicana feminist like myself) did in *This Bridge Called My Back*:

For once in my life every part of me was allowed to be visible and spoken for in one in one room at one time.... Coming *home* [emphasis added]. For once, I didn't have to choose between ... (1983d, pp. xvii-xviii)

Multiracial Models: Ecological and Multi-Dimensional Approaches

It is reported by some that the modest increase in interest of Multiracial student experiences in the mid-1990's, influenced by a reported more visible Multiracial student population, increased the amount of research conducted on individual social identities (such as Black or lesbian identity) (Renn, 2008). While others (DaCosta, 2007) attribute the increase in Multiracial studies to the direct actions of Multiracial activists and the resulting political changes. What is more, the "increase" in Multiracial identities may not be an actual increase, as we know Multiracial people are not new to this country (Williams-Leon & Nakashima, 2001), but instead a result to the changes in federal classification that allows individuals to identify with more than one race, thereby possibly making Multiracials "more visible." Also encouraging the increase in Multiracial identification are the dominant attitude changes about racial mixing (DaCosta, 2007). In particular, theories which developed during this time focused on the identity patterns of Multiracial youth and the ecological, social, and psychological factors of Multiracial development.

The contemporary study of Multiracial identity has expanded to include newly emerging studies (e.g., Chang, 2014; Chang-Ross, 2010; DaCosta, 2007; Jackson et al., 2013; Jiménez, 2004; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Renn, 2000, 2004; Romo, 2011; Root, 2002; Wijeyesinghe, 2001, 2012). No longer are researchers focused on the psychological issues of identity development, but instead they are focusing on the unique identity experiences of various Multiracial backgrounds. For example, findings show that the classification of racial identity and the analysis of racial experiences are dependent on distinct racial group make-ups (e.g., White/Indian, White/Black, or White/Latino) (Jiménez, 2004). Contemporary studies (Jackson et al., 2013; Jiménez, 2004; Romo, 2011) are following this lead and focusing on the specific experiences of mixed Mexicans in the U.S. "The emergence of a visible and growing cohort of people of mixed heritage, identifying as such, mark the emergence of a different type of racial identity model" (Root, 2003a, 115). Multi-dimensional (Wijeyesinghe, 1992, 2001), ecological (Root, 2002), patterned (Renn, 2000, 2004) and holistic and intersectional (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Wijeyesinghe; 2012) approaches to understanding Multiracial identity have replaced stage-based models that cannot capture the vast variation in identity experiences and identification with equally vast influences that has been identified in research (Root, 2002). And yet others (Chang, 2014; Chang-Ross, 2010) are changing the focus from identity models or racial identity choice to consider Multiracial identity as something that is produced within a racial Borderland experience, including testimonials to deepen this understanding.

Multiple factors' influence on racial identity choice and patterns of identity.

To better understand this field of inquiry, a review of this literature is provided. In

particular, I will review three models that recognize that multiple factors influence racial identity choice. These are Charmaine L. Wijeyesinghe's (1992, 2001) Factor Model of Multiracial Identity Development, Maria P. P. Root's (2002) Ecological Framework for Understanding Multiracial Identity Development, and Kristen A. Renn's (2000, 2004) ecologically based, patterns of identity among Multiracial college students.

Factor Model of Multiracial Identity Development. Wijeyesinghe's (1992, 2001) research has been used for two decades to understand the experiences of Multiracial people, resulting in her multidimensional Factor Model of Multiracial Identity Development (FMMI). Wijeyesinghe's model (1992, 2001) frames racial identity for Multiracial people as a choice. In particular, choice of racial identity is based on the experiences through eight life factors and by the "internal meaning-making process" (Wijeyesinghe, 2012, p. 88) of the individual's social and historical context, resulting in her assertion that racial identity is complex, evolving, and unique to each Multiracial individual.

Based on her framework of eight factors, Wijeyesinghe (1992, 2001) locates Multiracial individuals at the center of an adaptive model who are potentially influenced by some but not all interrelated and interacting factors. These factors, experienced differently by each Multiracial individual, are represented in a graphic of inward pointing arrows surrounding *Choice of Racial Identity*. The relationship of these factors is overlapping having effect on each other and ultimately affecting choice of racial identity. The interaction and salience of between factors 'fit' together differently for individual Multiracial people, resulting in few or many intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts based on discrepancies between these individual factors. Of significance, the FMMI

model contends that choice of racial identity is resolved, and possibly changed (a feature of intersectionality), by the Multiracial individual and a set of influencing factors, rather than a correct or appropriate choice of racial identity, as a result of being complex and evolving. The following is a list and explanation of these factors.

Racial Ancestry. Some Multiracial individuals base their racial identity mostly on the racial makeup of their families of origin. Multiracial individuals who choose to identify as Monoracial may or may not rely on all of their racial heritage. The FMMI model does not assume feelings of guilt, embarrassment, or conflict when an individual chooses an identity supported by only part of one's heritage, unlike Poston's model (1992).

Early Experience and Socialization. Early socialization and experiences in childhood provide messages about racial identity and racial group membership. This often influences racial ancestry, racial group membership, and racial identity. For example, parents may assign children an early identity that is related to the social and historical context of the individuals. Community and social institutions are also socializing agents that affect Multiracial individuals' choice. Furthermore, early socialization can include exposure to extended family and cultural aspects of one or more of the individual's background (e.g., food, music, holidays, languages). Assigned racial identities can be held throughout a lifetime or modified with life experiences. Early experiences and socialization is linked to the factor of *Social and Historical Context* that the majority of Multiracial individuals born prior to the 1980's and 1990's could only identify with their "minority" ancestry.

Cultural Attachment. Exposure and attachment to aspects of culture, in past or present settings, can influence choice of racial identity. Choosing a Multiracial identity may come from in part, the amount of exposure and attachment to, and the incorporation of all the parts of one's Multiracial background. This relationship though, between cultural attachment and choice of racial identity, may be affected by some of the other factors in the FMMI model. For example, identifying as Latina/o as a Multiracial individual who appears Black may be challenging.

Physical Appearance. Physical appearance constitutes the greatest context surrounding choice of racial identity for Multiracial individuals. Phenotype and body structure are employed by society to measure and make assumptions regarding an individual's racial ancestry, racial group membership, and racial identity. Physical appearance can support and facilitate some Multiracial people's choice of racial identity and acceptance into racial groups, but it can also impede the choice of certain racial identities.

Social and Historical Context. Social and historical context and issues of race, racism, and interracial relationships, affects Multiracial people's choice of racial identity. Before the 1990's there was little opportunity to identify as Multiracial as explained in the factor of *Early Experiences and Socialization*, but influences like the Multiracial rights movement, increasing number of people identifying as Multiracial, and the election of Barack Obama have increased awareness of Multiracial people and how they identify and open up opportunities to identify as Multiracial, personally, culturally, and institutionally.

Political Awareness and Orientation. Personal political action or commitment can influence choice of racial identity for some Multiracial individuals. Issues of race, racism, and racial identity in a broad historical, political, economic, and social context all can be of influence when choosing a distinct racial identity, whether Monoracial or Multiracial. Multiracial identity as a political act is reflected in Multiracial literature, such as Root's (1994) act of resistance against racial hegemony in the *Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People*, and the use of the term Critical Mixed Race in academic courses, conferences, journals, and organizations.

Other Social Identities. Racial and nonracial identities (such as gender, class, and sexual orientation) may be combined to reflect a Multiracial individual's choice of racial identity. Some social identities may be more salient than race to a Multiracial person's sense of self. Identity depends on the social and political context specific to individual identity and the interaction between the experience of racial identity and the other social identities (intersectional in nature).

Spirituality. Spiritual beliefs and/or practices, defined broadly as a sense of spirit or higher power, can affect choice of racial identity because of the sense of strength and refuge from racism, support through identity development and/or in obtaining greater meaning from racial identity or ancestry that one can find. Furthermore, spirituality can also provide a feeling of connection between people and ancestry that transcends racial labels, differences, and geographic borders. This factor is unique as it provides a factor in combating racism, and no other models account for the effects of spirituality in Multiracial identity.

Wijeyesinghe's (1992, 2001) model unlinks itself from a psychological development process, like the models of Poston (1990) and Root (1990), to one that depicts a range of experiences instead of a linear understanding of identity. More importantly, she considered the various emotional experiences within the Multiracial experience. This is significant because the emotional spectrum for Multiracial individuals, as related to their racial identity, is largely varied. For example, one Multiracial individual may not experience guilt, anxiety, or dissonance and could be emotionally comfortable identifying as monoracial, while another Multiracial individual may encounter negative reactions to their physical features and subsequent tension or discomfort with an assumed racial identity (usually with being labeled as monoracial) (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Most notably, Wijeyesinghe's contributions furthered the study of Multiracial identity development by filling a gap not covered by the models of Poston, Root, Renn, and their colleagues by adding an adaptive model which accounted for the multiple influencing factors attributed to *choice of racial identity* and the diverse experiences of Multiracial individuals.

Ecological Framework for Understanding Multiracial Identity Development.

Root (2002) also developed research around the multiple factors that influence the choice of racial identity, resulting in her comprehensive Ecological Framework for Understanding Multiracial Identity Development. Root's (2002, 2003) research is notable because it examines numerous factors that were both evident, like *physical appearance* and *family socialization*, and more hidden background contextual factors like *generation*, *geography*, *gender*, and *sexual orientation*. Root determined family conditions such as, *family socialization*, *level of function*, and *physical appearance*, as predominant

influences on identity. In particular, *physical appearance* influenced a person's identity choice as well as how others labeled that individual into racial categories. Physical appearance merged with other factors, that predicted the experiences for children based upon his or her community, area of the country he or she is raised, social attractiveness, "and the family socialization to understand others' reactions to their appearance and its congruence or incongruence with their declared identity" (Root, 2003b, p. 40).

Additionally, several background contexts influence identity, such as, region, historical period in which one develops, and social identities (such as gender, class, and sexual orientation).

Root's (2002) Ecological Framework is dynamic because it accounts for the complex issues influencing Multiracial identity and it reflects the interrelationship between racial identity and other social identities. As a result, it can navigate Multiracial individuals through racial environments and interactions outside of their typically chosen-identities. For example, Root found gender affected romantic coupling preferences, socialization, and parenting dynamics while class affects how individuals experience and are experienced by society and the communities Multiracial children are socialized in.

Patterns of identity among Multiracial college students. Renn's (2000, 2004) grounded theory analysis of Multiracial students identifies five patterns of identity. Renn's research is grounded in human ecological methods, sociological and educational psychology frameworks, and the convergence of these studies (Kilson, 2001; Wallace, 2001; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). Renn's model locates Multiracial college student's self-identification within one of five patterns of Multiracial identity. These patterns are briefly described as:

1. *Student holds a monoracial identity.* The individual chooses one of his or her heritage backgrounds with which to identify (Comparable to Root's (1990) third resolution).
2. *Student holds multiple monoracial identities, shifting according to the situation.* Personal and contextual factors affect which of an individual's heritage groups he or she identifies with at a given time and place (Comparable to Root's (1990) second resolution).
3. *Student holds a multiracial identity.* The individual elects an identity that is neither one heritage nor another, but of a distinct Multiracial group on par with other racial categories (Comparable to Root's (1990) fourth resolution).
4. *Student holds an extraracial identity by deconstructing race or opting out of identification with U.S. racial categories.* Not seen among Root's (1990) resolutions, this pattern represents an individual's resistance to what he or she may see as artificial categories that have been socially constructed by the dominant, monoracial White majority.
5. *Student holds a situational identity, identifying differently in different contexts.* Inherent in Root's (1990) resolutions, situational identity describes a fluid identity pattern in which an individual's racial identity is stable, but different elements are more salient in some contexts than in others.

Renn's (2004) findings revealed that nearly half (48 percent) the students studied held monoracial or multiple shifting monoracial identities (each of her first two patterns). The majority of students (89 percent) identified distinctly as Multiracial (pattern number three). Almost one-quarter of students (23 percent) identified with an extraracial identity

(pattern number four), and more than half (61 percent) held situational identities (pattern five).

Renn's (2000, 2004) contribution added the possibility of shifting monoracial or Multiracial identities, filling a gap not covered by the stage-based models of Poston, Root, and their colleagues. Like Wijeyesinghe's (1992, 2001) model, Renn's (2000, 2004) model accounts for the diverse experiences of Multiracial individuals.

Intersectional approaches to Multiracial identity theory. Next, I will review two models that consider the overlapping factors that influence Multiracial identity, ecology, and intersectionality. These are Susan R. Jones and Marylu K. McEwen's (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity and Charmaine L. Wijeyesinghe's (2012) Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity.

Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. Jones and McEwen (2000) developed the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) from a study in which the researchers interacted directly with participants in order to elicit first-hand understanding of the participants' identity development, capturing their "identity stories" (p. 408). This resulted in an understanding of identity having several intersecting dimensions from which Jones and McEwen developed the fluid and dynamic MMDI. This model captures "the ongoing construction of identities and the influence of changing contexts on the experience of identity development" (p. 408). In particular, the model illustrates the opportunity for individuals to identify comfortably with multiple identities and the contextual nature of factors influencing and representing identity. Jones and McEwen's research is grounded in the work of Deaux's (1993) theory of identities defined both internally and externally.

The basis for MMDI is reflected in its circular graphic which communicates the multiple factors that contribute and interplay in an individual's identity at any given point, thereby reinforcing the concept that identity is constantly constructed and fluid. First, at the center point of the MMDI is a core identity or sense of self, described by participants as their private *inner identity* that is complex and more meaningful and less affected by outside influence. Next, are "externally defined dimensions" (p. 409), described by participants as *outside identities* that include race, gender, sexual orientation, and other social identities which are represented as intersecting circles surrounding the core and sometimes connected to it. Encircling the core, these influences differ in their connection to and significant influence on an individual identity at a particular time and context. These dimensions of identity "are both externally defined and internally experienced," (p. 410) that is to say that social and environmental context are connected to one's personal experience with identity. Therefore, identity is understood in relation to the multiple identity dimensions of each individual at a particular time and place.

Notably, the dynamic structure of the MMDI illustrates how an individual can simultaneously experience multiple identity dimensions. Moreover, it communicates the complexities of identity against the backdrop of multiple dimensions and that the salience of identity dimensions will be different for each individual and possibly changing. The MMDI model underscores the significance of understanding identity development, its complexities, and ongoing construction in relation to context and multiple dimensions.

Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity. Wijeyesinghe's (2012) reflection on existing theories of racial identity and the impact of other social identities (such as

gender, class, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity) prompted her to view Multiracial identity through an integrated holistic approach and through the lens of intersectionality, resulting in her Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity (IMMI).

Based on Multiracial identity literature that states Multiracial identities are complex and fluid and intersectionality frameworks, Wijeyesinghe's (2012) model locates Multiracial identity within a set of core assumptions. These premises are briefly described as: (a) Choice of identity for a Multiracial individual is determined by a number of factors, varying in salience and significance at any given point; (b) Choice and experience of racial identity can shift based on the factor(s) that form the basis of that identity; (c) No choice of racial identity is more correct or appropriate or psychologically healthier than another (a Multiracial individual may choose to identify with some or all of his or her racial ancestries without experiencing guilt, anxiety, or dissonance), and; (d) Other social group memberships (such as gender, class, age, or religion) may influence choice of racial identity or how he or she experiences and expresses racial identity. The factors affecting choice of racial identity could be racial ancestry, early experiences and socialization, cultural attachment, physical appearance, social and historical context, political awareness and orientation, other social identities, spirituality, situation, generation, geographic region, and global experiences.

Wijeyesinghe's (2012) IMMI locates Multiracial individuals in a world of these interrelated factors that affect the choice and experience of racial identity (and sometimes each other). The adaptive model is reflected in a galaxy graphic made up of the influences of multiple variables on an individual's choice. In the IMMI, the factors of influence surround a center point identified as *choice of racial identity*. These factors or

group of factors differ based on their salience and influence an individual's choice of racial identity at a particular time and context, and are measured by their proximity to the center point. Change in an individual's choice of racial identity can occur based on the factors that are in closest proximity to the person's galaxy center.

The galaxy image is an appropriate metaphor for the IMMI because: galaxies have many elements that remain unknown, grow larger as time progresses, have continuous movement and interaction, and, some have smaller galaxies within. A Multiracial individual's experience with identity choice is similar. Factors of influence on racial identity choice and experience, what Wijeyesinghe calls a "personal galaxy" (2012, p. 100), expands as he or she has new experiences and, can have additional material added as time progresses. Additionally, few or many factors can appear and influence the Multiracial person's choice, increasing throughout life. These factors and, their interaction and influence reveal an active process. Finally, other social identities' surrounding the core, have an impact on racial identity choice and are illustrated by the hazy galaxy image.

Wijeyesinghe's studies of Multiracial identity reveal a complex, contextual, and fluid choice for Multiracial individuals, and her model depicts a range of experiences. Her contribution with the IMMI (2012) furthered the study of Multiracial identity development by adding a more fluid and holistic model developed through the lens of intersectionality. This is significant because of its acknowledgement of the multiple systems of power and privilege and consideration of overlapping factors that shape identity. Furthermore, her model fills a gap not covered by the models of her colleagues (but mentioned in her earlier FMMI model) by asserting there is no correct, appropriate,

or psychologically healthier choice of racial identity, but rather racial identity is an individual, unique, and possibly evolving or fluid process. This is significant because of its ability to empower Multiracial people, and analyze and celebrate them in all of their uniqueness and varied experiences.

Contributions and Critique of Multiracial Identity Development Literature

One major contribution of Multiracial identity theory is advancements that have been made to these models, from the fundamental stage-based models or the phases of development (Bernal, Knight, and their colleagues, 1990, 1993; Ethier & Deaux, 1990, 1994; Phinney, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993; Poston, 1990; Root, 1990), to ecological and multi-dimensional approaches (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004; Root, 2002; Wijeyesinghe, 1992, 2001), to intersectional approaches (Jones & McEwen, 2000 & Wijeyesinghe, 2012) with imagery that can be envisioned more realistically. These developments also offer dimension and further the interpretations of identity development. In particular, the FMMI (Wijeyesinghe, 1992, 2001) was a radical addition to the way ethnic identity was considered, in that it presented ethnic identity as a choice for the first time. While early skepticism of this concept was replaced with innovative research,²⁵ there is still much education, discussion, research, and exposure needed regarding racial identity and Multiracial people, as evidenced for example by the ongoing dispute and misunderstanding surrounding Barack Obama's ancestry and his choice of racial identity versus the various racial identities ascribed onto him by society (Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Also significant are the studies that indicate that naming oneself as Multiracial creates a

²⁵ For literature that frames racial identity as a choice see McEwen (2003), Renn (2000, 2004), Rockquemore (2002), Root (2002 2003), Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009), and Wijeyesinghe (1992, 2001, 2011).

new identity that is influenced by an integrated and simultaneous expression of one's heritage (Wijeyesinghe, 2012). These studies include: Wijeyesinghe's FMMI (1992, 2001); Renn's patterns of identity among Multiracial college students (2000, 2004); and Chang's (2014) illumination of Multiracial college students' ability to break monoracial structures in Borderland spaces.

Multiracial identity models capture and provide snapshots of identities which have not traditionally been included in monoracial ethnic identity models or Biracial identity models, by providing a fluid and simultaneous racial identity experience that may not be singular (by nature of the individuals multiple heritages), or able to be separated. Holvino (2012) exemplifies this simultaneity of her social identities:

As a Latina, one-dimensional models of identity have not served me well. For example, when I am given the choice to sit with the women's caucus (my gender identity) or with the Hispanic's caucus (my racial-ethnic identity) I am torn as I cannot separate these aspects of my identity that are inseparable. (p. 162)

It should be noted that significant social political changes, such as the end of anti-miscegenation laws and the broadening of federal racial classifications, and significant efforts by Multiracial activists occurred in order to have Multiracial individuals included in the study and debate on race and identity in the U.S (DaCosta, 2007; Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Also critical has been the transformation and ongoing evolution of this discussion, mostly evident in this Nation's repeal of laws against race mixing and the federal abandonment of practices that supported hypodescent (although their legacies remain) such as the one-drop rule, a legal identification system that designates anyone with "one drop" of non-White blood be assigned, the lowest social status or not White (Kelley &

Root 2003). The one-drop rule is similar to the complex classification system developed by Spanish colonizers of the Americas to support their social order, economic and political supremacy, and the concept of racial *blanqueamiento* (whitening). This process of racial mixing to achieve racial purity or at least lighter phenotype, was associated with social status achievement (García Sáiz, 1989) and theoretically helped to erase the stigma of Indian, Black or “mixed blood.”

An important critique on these racial identity models, is that despite the advancements made, the complex experiences of Multiracial individuals are not accurately defined by the either/or “dichotomous or segmented approaches to identity” (Wijeyesinghe, 2012, p. 85) that were reported (Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Wijeyesinghe, 1992) early in the literature. Holistic models of identity development are needed because these identities and the choices made surrounding racial identity are multifaceted and influenced by several contextual factors, and social identities (Wijeyesinghe, 2012).

In fact, McEwen (1996) points out the lack of psychological literature that addresses multiple oppressions and identities. However, she states these themes are common within women’s studies and she refers to Andersen and Collins (1995) and Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983) for examples of this perspective. Wijeyesinghe (2012) also suggests future researchers consider the approach taken by women’s studies that incorporates other social identities (such as gender, class, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity).

The MMDI (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and the IMMI (Wijeyesinghe, 2012) provide the framework for this type of future analysis. In particular, the IMMI (Wijeyesinghe, 2012) provides a framework for future research on both Multiracial

identity *and* other social identities being that this approach allows for: (a) other social identities to be considered; (b) the simultaneity of Multiracial individuals who experience both power and marginalization; (c) a framing of identity as holistic; and (d) social justice and change to be enacted by addressing inequalities (Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Or, as Wijeyesinghe states, intersectional scholarship gives “voice to populations who have been part of the fabric of the United States for centuries, but whose experience had yet to be captured by existing research and theory” (2012, p. 84). Moreover, Wijeyesinghe (2012) suggests examining the Multiracial experience *and* considering existing theories on racial identity through an intersectional lens so new findings are possible.

The strength of the literature on Multiracial identity theory and development models lies within the foundational nature of these studies and the growth this discipline has experienced in a relatively short period of time (the last two decades). However, my critique is that while the history of this research has its strengths, literature from 1990 through the early 2000’s is limited because it largely provides the basis for understanding a narrow sample of traditional student-aged participants (Kilson, 2001; Renn, 2001, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wallace, 2001) and Biracial participants of only one heritage combination (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Wijeyesinghe, 1992, 2001). These studies do not reflect the size (over 9 million people, according to the 2010 U.S. Census) or diversity of Multiracial people throughout the U.S. (Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Therefore, the transferability of these findings, to understand the current diverse population of Multiracial Americans or the ability to understand other social identities is limited. This results in leaving gaps in our understanding of Multiracial experiences and the individual unique aspects of these identities (Renn, 2008).

Finally, the healing and transformational action of self-naming and choosing one's racial identity, included in some of the models reviewed here mirrors the methodology of autohistoria and autoethnography (both self-naming practices), which voice and legitimize the experiences of racial/ethnic and gender/sexual minorities through the authoring of fragmented and painful experiences (Slepoy, 2003).

Chicana/os are not a monolithic community, and researchers like Solá (2011) promote new research like my own, that re-centers scholarship on Latina/os from the conventional confines of studying particular groups in specific regions such as Chicana/os in the Southwest and California and Puerto Ricans in the East Coast, to areas that have been overlooked. Chicana/o academics, activists, artists, and cultural workers should be compelled to explore identities which have not traditionally been included in the Chicana/o sphere or have not been represented in the Chicana/o identity development theories and models.

To this point, this thesis project responds to this need by including the experiences of an East coast Chicana constructing identity outside of the typical Chicana/o regions or racially and ethnically diverse areas; I reveal my journey as a White-Mexican and Multiracial woman who also comes to self-identify as Chicana. My work speaks to the diverse Mexican/Chicano experience across the U.S. I do this by providing a review of the literature in Chicana/o ethnic identity development and Biracial and Multiracial identity development. And, I weave my own autohistoria/autoethnography throughout this project in varied ways (scholarly, artistically, and embodied). In my autohistoria/autoethnography, I share my personal experiences and reflect on them critically as direct narratives and through artistic actions that fall within the

autohistoria/autoethnography repertoire. Doing this allowed me to exhibit the multiple layers and fluidity of my identity experience that is commonly reported among Multiracial people (Alvarado, 1999; Harris & Sim, 2002; Harris & Thomas, 2002; Jones and McEwen, 2000; Root, 1990; Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Therefore I am “connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739), a core characteristic of autoethnography (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). This addition to Chicana/o discourse is especially important because of the gaps in the literature and the linear explanations of identity production, such as positivistic ethnic identity development models that are progression-based. My narratives intertwined in this thesis project in non-traditional ways emulate how individual voices add new perspectives and dimensions to the existing literature.

Personal Narrative

Diaspora

¡Qué lejos estoy del suelo donde he nacido! Inmensa nostalgia invade mi pensamiento; y al verme tan solo y triste cual hoja al viento, quisiera llorar, quisiera morir de sentimiento. (López Alavez, 1915, “Canción Mixteca”)

[Mexican *corrido* (ballad)]

*Abuela Concha*²⁶ and Grandma Dorothy, do you know what an incredible influence you both have had on me? As I explore the experiences that shape my identity, the memories with both of you ground who I am and where I come from. My transnational and Multiracial identity is marked by the strong connection with you both and the place and time you came from. Because, being at home with you, here in the U.S., there in Mexico, and now in my memories, I always felt whole. As a result, I have been able to (re)member myself and reimagine my identity through memories and through the development of these (written and visual art) narratives, centered around your home aesthetic and domestic languages. *Abuela* and Grandma, *you* saw me as complete, not half of anything, not lacking one culture or the other, not deficient in my heritage language, not too light, too dark, not from *aquí* or *alla* (here or there), but simply yours, your granddaughter, *su nieta*.

Abuela Concha. *Abuela*, I can't imagine how difficult it was to have your son, and his family, leave for life in the U.S. My father Manuel, your oldest child, was the only family member to migrate. Concha, there is a word that exemplifies our family's

²⁶ Concha is what we all called my paternal Mexican grandmother, a shortened version of her full name Concepción Olivares de Arana.

experience. Diaspora. It means to scatter, to disperse from your original homeland (Malhotra, 2012). The diaspora are dislocated from their mother/fatherland and culture, either voluntarily or by force (Davalos, 2001; Malhotra, 2012; Rinderle, 2005). And, they are challenged with coming to terms with multiple home spaces and the transmission of culture to future generations (Malhotra, 2012, p.75).

Specifically, people of Mexican-origin in the U.S. are identified as diasporic as a result of experiencing the following:

(a) a history of physical [and cultural] displacement, (b) cultural dislocation and hybridity, (c) a yearning for homeland, (d) structural displacement and a complex structural relationship between nation-state and diaspora, (e) alienation from the hostland, and (f) a collective identity defined by the relationship between homeland and hostland. (Rinderle, 2005, p. 295)

Rinderle asserts that physical and cultural displacement of diasporic peoples leads to a new hybrid culture for those no longer in their homeland. This consequently leads to the yearning of a homeland and alienation from the hostland (Rinderle, 2005), but can also lead to a disconnection with both the host and homeland (Davalos, 2001; Menchaca, 1993).

Abuela, do you remember when my mother walked into your house on Salida a Querétaro and told you that it was time for her to have the baby? It was 1980 and there were no phone lines in those days for her to simply call you. Standing in your patio, you threw a pail of milk in surprise and joy as I was a month early. My mother then took off in a taxi alone down bumpy cobble stoned streets to the doctor's office just off the *mercado* (market) because my father was working away and her own mother was even

further, in living in Pennsylvania. You dutifully headed for *El Oratorio* to pray before joining her, and when you did arrive, you entered the doctor's office asking for your *Americanas*, looking for your daughter in law and newborn granddaughter. *Abuela*, my mother and I are fond of remembering this story. And, she often recounts it on my birthday by lavishly narrating each detail.

I can remember asking her to tell me the story and the feeling of knowing each word already, saying the words along with her in my mind, not from a conscious memory of being there but from hearing her tell our legend over and over. *Abuela*, now that I live in California, on the other side of the U.S., I often spend birthdays without my family. However, I have begun to reimagine the story myself, sharing it orally with my fiancé and writing about it in graduate seminars. The many times my mother remembered and shared this story, signifying its importance, she enculturated me to my Mexican ethnic identity. Even more, she helped me to (re)member, to stitch the fragmented Pennsylvania-girl together with her Mexican-self. *Abuela*, when my mother and I re-tell this story, we engage in re-memory²⁷—a collective act of holding onto Mexico and not allowing the distance and difference of our East coast American life to eliminate our emotional ties to our (other) home (Davalos, 2001)—the people we loved, the language we spoke, the food we ate, the traditions we practiced, and the people we were.²⁸ I grew up listening to this birth story in a quiet, familiar Pennsylvania town, between pink and

²⁷ Davalos (2001) asserts that Mexican diaspora communities feel a deep connection to their homeland, beyond wistful nostalgia. And this leads them to “engage in re-memory: the collective act of not forgetting the other place and time, of not allowing the current place to eliminate feelings, ways of speaking or eating, and relations to the ‘homeland’” (Davalos, 2001, p.24).

²⁸ Yes, I was just a toddler when we left Mexico. However, the task of this autohistoria, in part, is to acknowledge and empower my time in and connection to Mexico, my *abuela* Concha's house, and my Mexican cultural/ethnic identity.

purple girly-girl birthday parties, ‘all-American’ Girl Scout cookie sales, and disciplined ballet rehearsals. But, I also grew up on my father’s stories of sleeping on woven palm *petates* (mats) on dirt floors or with the occasional chicken on his head (a story we like to laugh about together); the shame from wearing hand-made *manta*²⁹ and rope undergarments; playing *canicas* (marbles) and *fútbol* (soccer) in the dirt, hooky from school, and the brutal punishments of the nuns; learning how to make *pulque*³⁰ from the maguey cactus that once grew in his mother’s house in place of the walls that are there now, and watching his father trade the milky beverage for beans and corn on the ranch outside of town; the back breaking work his parents carried out throughout their life just to survive, my *abuela* scrubbing wealthy White women’s floors from the age of thirteen; and listening to the words of his *abuela*, “*Nunca bajas la cabeza en frente de nadie,*” prompting him to never put his head down for anyone, even at the expectation when a “Spaniard” walked passed them in the street.³¹

Remembering, imagining, and telling stories are part of my families’ practice of telling others, and ourselves who we are and where we come from. I imagine it was soothing to us when there was no pot of *frijoles* (beans) on the stove, Spanish words filling the air, or when we could not be near you *abuela*. My family’s stories affirmed our experiences. Even more, re-telling them here sews all of them together in a manner that is transformative and healing to my self-perception.

²⁹ *Manta* is a natural cotton fabric that was historically worn by many indigenous people of Mexico.

³⁰ *Pulque* is a milk-colored alcoholic beverage made from the fermented sap of the maguey plant and dates back to Mesoamerican times when it was considered a sacred drink.

³¹ This, as much of my narrative work in this thesis project, was influenced by “Nostalgia” and “Memory” by Rosario Morales and “Old Countries” by Aurora Levins Morales in *Getting Home Alive* (1986).

The power of reimagining, re-memory, and storytelling, to connect diaspora communities to distant people and places, is the subject of many Multiracial/Multiethnic-Latina writers. Chabram-Dernersesian (2009) speaks about her challenge in forming a close attachment to Puerto Rico while growing up in California. She says the only way to do so was by “fashioning huge imaginative leaps to an island [she] had never seen” (p. 385). Despite the challenge, long-distance kinship is captured vividly in the texts of mother/daughter Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales (1986), radical feminists who write about diaspora, home, and identity from a Multiracial/Multiethnic lens that mirrors my memories of missing and visiting Mexico while growing up. And, their narratives demonstrate how their individual identity is entwined with the dreams, yearnings, and stories of their parents’ homes. In the narrative *Memory*, Rosario Morales remembers, “I was in Naranjito [Puerto Rico], in my father’s dreams, in my mother’s stories” (1986, p. 125). Further, her free-form poem, *Nostalgia*, captures the longing of her motherland, telling her story of growing up in New York City, but longing for a Puerto Rico she only knew in stories.

I grew up with it, felt it even before I first visited there the summer I turned ten....
I grew up on my father’s stories.... I grew up with a nostalgia for a place I did not
grow up in, nostalgia for the family I’d missed, uncles and aunts and cousins—
and grandparents. (Levins Morales & Morales, 1986, p. 87)

Similarly, Aurora Levins Morales’ free-form poem, *Old Countries* (1986) captures the connection she has for her ancestors’ lands no matter how distant or different. Her piece illustrates the complexity of diaspora and Multiracial identity through dreams she has about inherited far away cities that hold great meaning to her.

I am the mountain-born, country-bred, homegrown jíbara child. But I have inherited all the cities through which my people passed, and their dust has sifted and settled onto the black soil of my heart.... *Mine* are the great ports of the immigrants.... The places of arrival are mine.... I didn't yearn for the cities the way my mother did for greenness and quiet and trees. But I dreamt of them.

(Levins Morales, 1986, pp. 90-91)

Grandma Dot.³² Grandma, looking through your black and white photographs, snapshots of your youth in Myrtle Beach and your back yard in South Carolina, I see so much of myself in you. You are a flirt, a jitterbug-dancing college girl, a bombshell on the beach posing with cute boys and giggly girlfriends. You were silly, spunky, warm and so, so sweet. Your thoughtfulness I try to emulate, and my life centered on creativity presumably flows from you (and your artist mother Bessie) through me. Your hair is blond, your skin creamy and pale, and your eyes robin-egg blue. I am flipping through these images, over and over again looking at you, but looking for me. Our physical features are nearly opposites; my skin light olive and my features dark, but I *still* see myself in you as I imagine you did with me.

Displacement. One challenge diaspora communities are faced with is displacement (Rinderle, 2005). Davalos (2001) identifies displacement as a canon of the Mexican Diaspora. She asserts Mexicans and Mexican-origin people have difficulty maintaining “a geographically fixed community” (pp. 195-196). Such displacement is due to industrial and global capitalism, Mexican land annexed after the U.S.-Mexican War, and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe that deemed people of Mexican-origin,

³² Dorothy Julia Robinette, née Wilburn was my maternal grandmother, but I called her grandma or grandma Dot.

White, and thereby framed an ambiguous construction of a fixed identity for Mexican-origin people.

We left Mexico, my mother holding what she could carry in one hand, me in the other, and my brother following: for life with our American family in the great White North.³³ It took my father a year to join us, his task of gaining residency in the U.S. as a Mexican national was painfully complicated and long. I do not have any long-term memory of this time—I was a toddler just about to turn three years old; But, what about my unconscious sensory and embodied memories?

My body certainly must have carried embodied memories of Mexico and felt the fracture when we left, as is common with many diasporic experiences (Levins Morales & Morales, 1986, Rinderle, 2005). In our move to be closer to my mother's family, there was an unintentional pulling away, a distancing from our *cultura Mexicana* (Mexican culture), from home, and from you *abuela*. The world was a much bigger place then and people were not infinitely and easily connected as they are today. In our migration to the American East Coast, we experienced cultural displacement (Gandhi, 1998) in addition to the physical shift. The change of terrain from south to north, the addition of seasons with crisp fall leaves and ivory white snow marked newness in all of our lives that quickly became our constant. Mexico became a place we could only visit occasionally due to economic limitations. As a result my family, like other diasporic communities, was challenged with the transmission of culture to future generations (Malhotra, 2012, p.75).

³³ I use this phrase to reference the U.S. generally, as it is known as *El Norte* (The North) to Mexicans. And, I use it specifically to describe the northeastern part of the U.S. where my American family originates and currently lives. By capitalizing the words, I reference both the mostly-White world we transitioned into and Fordham-Hernández's (2009) use of this word within her discussion of the paradoxes, contested experiences, and simultaneity of her Anglo-Chicano family living in Canada.

However, *abuela*, you stepped in as one of my mother's *cultural partners* (Fordham-Hernández, 2009), teaching her your history and customs, so that she could transmit this culture to me.

Yearning. Diaspora communities are also faced with a yearning for the homeland (Rinderle, 2005). Throughout my East Coast life, I always had an intense longing to be back in Mexico, in the warm flagstone patio of your house. Similar to other Multiracial/Multiethnic Latinas, I have carried homesickness for my birth country, a place I did not grow up in, and for family who was distant in local but close emotionally. As a family, we sustained a consistent yearning to return, even while cherishing the proximity to our American family. There was a longing to be sitting in your patio *abuela* between freshly washed laundry under a leafy canopy; to listen to the *palomas*—the lovebirds cooing and clicking around in their cages above the stone *lavadero* (outdoor wash basin); to be in our family's first home together.³⁴ Indeed, it is believed that Mexicans, who emigrate in the U.S for economic reasons, yearn and plan to return home to Mexico as soon as they can. Similarly, U.S. born Chicana/os sometimes look beyond this Nation to the mythic Aztlán as their primordial point of origin³⁵ (Mesa-Bains,³⁶ 2001; Rinderle, 2005). My homesickness is complicated. In fact, my family, history, and culture

³⁴ My mother was born in Spartanburg, South Carolina, my father in Mexico in the home I am describing, my brother in Celaya, Mexico, and myself in a doctor's office near the center of town in San Miguel de Allende. My *abuela*'s house was not the physical place of all of our births and together we only lived here for a short time. But for me, it is the home in which our four lives come together, acting as an ideological space of belonging (Malhotra, 2012) for my nuclear family.

³⁵ According to Mesa-Bains (2001), Aztlán functioned as a unifying force of cultural origin during the 1960's Chicana/o Movement with political and cultural significance.

³⁶ Mesa-Bains (2001) names these Chicana artists as doing so: Carmen Lomas Garza, Judith (Judy) Baca, Patricia Rodriguez, Yolanda Garfias Woo, Ester Hernandez, Santa C. Barraza, Celia Alvarez Muñoz, Patssi Valdez, and Yolanda M. López.

are deeply rooted in *both* my father and mother's lands. Homesickness would have been felt, whether we were home or away (Kaplan, 1996) due to the multiple places where I felt belonging and because *my* home is a composite of many places. So, even though we yearned to return to our family's place of origin; we dreamed even more of a place where we could have both cultures and families, and all the parts of our selves together.

Dislocation. Diasporic communities also experience a dislocation of home, family, and culture (Rinderle, 2005). *Abuela* Concha and Grandma Dot, when I feel disconnected, misunderstood, or isolated, when I am challenged by outside influences as to who I am, or when I feel torn between cultural identities or at a loss of words with how to define myself as many Multiracial and diasporic people are reported to feel (Anzaldúa, 2002a, 2007; Davalos, 2001; Fordham-Hernández, 2009; Hall, 1990; Jackson et al., 2013; Levins Morales & Morales, 1986; Malhotra, 2012; Mohanty, 1998; Rinderle, 2005); I find comfort in imagining your homes and my sense of belonging with you. Did you know that my multipositional identity, born into two very different cultures and classes could be disorienting (Rinderle, 2005)? Because of the fact that dichotomous perceptions of identity state to be Brown means not to be White; to be poor means not to be middle class; to be a minority means not to be part of the dominant majority and vice versa, *my* experiences were contested. These dichotomous ideas could not define me, but were projected onto me nonetheless. But, I was not willing to choose one of these experiences to define me, to trade one-half of my heart for another and I refused to let go of my loneliness for another more painful experience of (Levins Morales, 1986) assimilating, passing, or choosing a single identity. This has led to a complex relationship with my motherland, the U.S. and my fatherland, Mexico.

Hybridity. I am a product of hybridity continually coming to terms with multiple home spaces (Rinderle, 2005; Malhotra, 2012). There is a push-pull dynamic between the place I grew up and the place I was born. As a result, I have struggled with feeling both a presence and an absence of home/land, another common experience for diasporic communities (Davalos, 2001) thinking for quite some time that we had given up one home (Mexico) for another. However, examining my experience through the lens of diaspora, I understand our family occupied more than one position, that our multiple and dynamic identifications based on race/ethnicity, class, and phenotype, were contradictory—we could simultaneously be empowered on one axis and oppressed on another³⁷ (Fordham-Hernández, 2009, Holvino, 2012, Shohat, 1998) and ‘home’ was dynamic, found in multiple places (Malhotra, 2012). Cultural theorist Hall (1990) defines diaspora in exactly this way, as dynamic and transforming. He asserts that the experience should not be categorized through essentialist characteristics of purity, but instead by its diversity and heterogeneity.

Further, he asserts that the identity of diasporic communities is framed by their differences, by its hybridity and dynamic transformations (1990). We began as a family living far away from the U.S. and my mother’s family. We were Multiracial, bicultural, and plural instantly, speaking English and Spanish in our home and living as both Americans *and* Mexicans despite our life being embedded in Mexico. The everyday lives around us were Mexican: cobbled stone streets and bright multi-colored houses, the occasional smell of gun powder from fireworks and gas, the early morning sounds of

³⁷ Ella Shohat (1998) asserts “oppression” and “empowerment” are relational terms, that there is a “wide spectrum of power relations” (p.4) in place of a dichotomous oppressor/oppressed perspective.

brooms sliding across wet sidewalks, Spanish only in the street, the chattering buzz in market, and sharp contrasting shadows from the sun.

My brother and I were born with two birth certificates and dual nationalities instantly; all at once, we could claim Mexican nationality and an exotic sounding American Born Abroad title. The dual identities have both privileged us and marginalized us. When we moved to the U.S. to be closer to my mother's side of the family, our everyday lives turned American; although it seems to me that our hearts remained deterritorialized (Davalos, 2001). It was not only the migration from south to north or the distance from one family to the other that created a disorienting jolt; it was the severe differences in culture we experienced and the severing of ourselves from Mexican culture, at least from day to day life. Spanish and all the sounds of Mexico dissolved. The casualness of open patios and 'Mexican time' was replaced by the rhythm of East coast seasons and their noticeable severe contrasts; emerald green humid summers and icy winters replaced warm and dry dusty land.

Complexity and Alienation. I understand the complex relationships and alienation with the home and/or hostland that Rinderle (2005) describes in her discussion of Mexican diasporic communities. I self-identify as Mexican, (Anglo) American, Multiracial, and Chicana, *and* various combinations of these based on context and situation, all due to my diasporic and Multiracial experiences. My fluid and situational identity experience is similar to aspects of Root's (1990) Biracial identity resolutions (particularly resolutions two and four), Renn's (2000, 2004) Multiracial patterns of identity (particularly pattern two, three, four, and five), and Anzaldúa's (1993, 2007) assertions that identity can be contradictory and changing, among other theorists who

also discuss these themes (e.g., Alvarado, 1999; Brekhus, 2003; Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012; Harris & Sim, 2002; Harris & Thomas, 2002; Holvino, 2012; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Wijeyesinghe, 2012). And, my choice to name my identity uniquely reflects Wijeyesinghe's (1992, 2001, 2012) Multiracial identity model, which frames racial identity as a choice influenced by contextual factors, and fluid or changing elements. My need to story my experiences reflects Chang's (2014) finding that Multiracial individuals produce and assert Multiracial identities and find the courage to break monoracial structures, by telling their stories in Borderland spaces. Outside of the home, both growing up in Pennsylvania or now as an adult in California using these terms together or individually is complex, and at times I am met with contention.

My close connection to both sides of my family and my and races/ethnicities was lovingly maintained by my family. That fact had made it easier, although not effortless, to name myself with all the self-identifiers I list in this project. However, self-identifying or expressing my dual consciousness by aligning myself with all the parts of my racial/ethnic heritages has been a more complicated effort. As Williams (2003) notes, I experience "dual consciousness, not as a split, but as a fluid, seamless, parts of who I am—only when forced is my identity constricted" (p. 149). Not only am I susceptible to discrimination from my own race, but from other races as well (Brackett et al., 2006). And, as Alvarado (1999) asserts, Multiracial experiences represent the entangled and uncertain state of race in the U.S. today. Further, embodying the bridge between neighboring countries whose relations are interdependent but contentious compounds the complexity of my experience, one that is marked by a "unique standpoint or life experience," (Brackett et al., 2006, p.439) that is noticeably different from monoracial

experiences. Rinderle (2005) explains that the U.S.'s "pulls" on Mexico in labor recruitment programs (e.g., the Bracero Program) and "pushes" through repatriation and anti-immigration actions, while Mexico "pushes and pulls" on the U.S., through dual U.S.-Mexican citizenship, creating the potential for expatriates to gain the right to vote in Mexico, and in tourism campaigns directed at U.S. Latinos to "come back" as tourists.

My body is defined by several intersecting and inseparable social identities (Holvino, 2012), and acts as a bridge that is both an obstacle and a point of metamorphosis (Anzaldúa, 2002). I have confronted painful hurdles and discovered healing shifts by embodying both. I have an entangled relationship with the U.S., not with my American heritage because I am prideful of my maternal ancestry but with its politics. And, I have experienced the contradictory framing of Mexican-origin people that means we are legally classified and institutionally appointed as Caucasian/White, while we are socially labeled and marginalized as a separate ethnic group (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012, Gross, 2003; Ochoa, 2004; Ortiz & Telles, 2012). The result, Ortiz and Telles assert, are "severe racial barriers, which have structured opportunities" (p. 42) for Mexican-origin individuals. It should be noted, the current U.S. Census states Latina/os can be of any race (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). The labeling of Mexican-origin individuals, who are inherently mixed, is a paradox. Mexican-origin individuals are a blend of indigenous and Spanish races. However, the racial makeup is predominantly indigenous and accordingly generally speaking Mexicans do not carry White features. The predominantly indigenous features of Mexican-origin individuals have caused them to be marginalized (Pizarro & Vera, 2001).

This construction fosters the reported mistreatment and discrimination of Mexican-origin individuals (Niemann, Romero, Arredondo & Rodríguez, 1999) and, the sentiment of them never fully being accepted by the U.S. (Davalos, 2001). Davalos (2001) explains people of Mexican-origin “are simultaneously part of the territory but not part of the nation; or they live with symbols and practices that they identify as ‘Mexican’ but that are not validated or accepted by the nation unless reappropriated as “American”” (p. 24).

I have felt this alienation from the U.S. (Rinderle, 2005). I have felt it indirectly through my father’s experience as a Mexican-immigrant resident of the U.S and directly as a Mexican-origin woman. Further, I have been told that I am not Mexican by Mexicans in Mexico, and by Mexicans and Chicana/os in the U.S., treated as an outsider from my birthplace. I have been told that I am not Mexican/Chicana-enough, or not Mexican/Chicana in the right way by Chicanas/os. I have been marginalized as woman of color in the U.S. Essentialist, monolithic perspectives of who can be Mexican or what it means to be American have made me feel not fully accepted by either place (Davalos, 2001; Menchaca, 1993).

I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds.... This task – to be a bridge.... The pull between what is and what should be.... The mixture of bloods and affinities, rather than confusing or unbalancing me, has forced me to achieve a kind of equilibrium. Both cultures deny me a place in *their* universe. Between them and among others, I build my own universe, *El Mundo Zurdo*. I belong to myself and not to any one people. (Anzaldúa, 1983, pp. 205-209)

My family, like many diasporic communities, shares a collective identity, defined by the relationship between homeland and hostland (Clifford, 1994, Rinderle, 2005). The “between-ness is the condition of our familial life” (Fordham-Hernández, 2009, p. 1156); our lives are anchored between the poor and working-class Mexican experience of my father and the (Anglo) American middle-class experience of my mother. We experienced the simultaneity of racial and ethnic inequalities *and* social privileges (Fordham-Hernández, 2009, Holvino, 2012; Williams, 1999). Apparently, many others that are part of a diaspora also have these feelings of displacement, dislocation and hybridity, wanting to return home, a complex relationship with the hostland and homeland alienation, dynamic and multiple belongings, and collective identities from this shared experience (Hall, 1990; Mohanty, 1998; Davalos, 2001; Rinderle, 2005; Malhotra, 2012).

Because cultural identity is “always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth.... [and] does not proceed, in a straight unbroken line, from some fixed origin” (Hall, 1990, pp. 226), my Multiracial identity and multiple self-identifications (framed by two different ethnicities, classes, and places) can be understood through my stories of diaspora and home. This is to say, my re-memories and redefinition of ‘home,’ composites of ethnicities, common ancestries, memories, stories, people, and places (Hall, 1990) are devices for reading my identity.

Home

In this section, I expand the definition of home as it relates to my identity, and to demonstrate the significance home has had on my self-identification. Here, I frame the concept of home through a lens of belonging, identity, and identification for a Multiracial woman. The traditional meaning of home is defined as a place in which one’s affections

are centered, a site of retreat, and a region in which something is native. I employ home in this mode, though I also expand home to reference the multiple countries and, therefore the races/ethnicities/cultures I identify with, my own personal spaces and practices, memories, identity labels, and my inner self, which regularly construct and negotiate my identity.

I would like to redefine home by what it includes, rather than being exclusive or essentializing home, in the same manner Hall (1990) and Anzaldúa (2007) recognize identity as open-ended, flexible, and transformative. For me, home is a collage of several places, people, and cultures—a site inclusive of my racial and ethnic backgrounds, *vivencias* (lived experiences), belief systems, and dreams. Furthermore, home is a place where I feel a sense of belonging rather than a tangible space (Mohanty, 1998). As a result, I attribute my belonging to and find ‘home’ in an imagined community (Anderson, 1991), a composite of cultures that emerge from my family’s collective stories, myths, traditions, and common ancestry (Hall, 1996). Imagined communities form as a result of five characteristics: (a) a narrative of the nation is passed from one generation to the next, connecting every day lives with a preexisting national destiny, (b) origins and traditions are believed to be immortal, (c) invented tradition of rituals, symbols, practices, and stories, even if recent, appear to be timeless, (d) foundational myths are created that are either distant and difficult to verify, or are newly developed myths for new nations who do not have long histories; (e) a small group of pure, original people defined as the nation’s origin (Hall, 1996). Through this lens, my home is not a place that can be easily located and discernibly pinned on a map nor is it a singular site. Instead, I find ‘home’ in

an imaginative and ideological space (Malhotra, 2012; Mohanty, 1998) in the way transnational feminist, Mohanty characterizes it:

Home, not as a comfortable, stable, inherited, and familiar space, but instead as an imaginative, politically charged space in which the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analysis of social injustice, as well as a vision of radical transformation. Political solidarity and a sense of family could be melded together imaginatively to create a strategic space I could call 'home.' (Mohanty, 1998, p. 491)

I find 'home' in the Borderlands, the point at which my home *aqui* (here) is sutured together with my home *alla* (there). That is to say, my home is the embodied point of two intersecting vectors where disparate worlds meet; "the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture" (Hall, 19990, p. 226). This autohistoria/autoethnography redefines and embroiders 'home' (ideas, memories imaginations, places, ancestors, cultures, dreams, and belief systems and self-views) by and through my *vivencias* (lived experiences).

Casa Concha. I construct my hybrid identity through the experiences I have had with my multiple homes and the reimagination of the concept of home in this thesis. Namely, I locate my Mexican identity in my *abuela's* courtyard where my mother bathed me in a yellow *tina* (tub) as a baby. Particularly, after we emigrated to the U.S. in 1983, her house became a faraway place I returned to in order to visit my Mexican family and as a method for constructing my identity. The courtyard in the center of my *abuela's* house was where I played as a little girl with my cousins—where we spoke in a made-up English-Spanish half-gesturing language to each other. It is where the *lima* (sweet lime)

tree my *abuelo* planted still grows and where I remember him passing me my favorite green fruit from the heavy branches, a regular custom we acted on each and every time I visited—our nearly silent way of saying “I love you” and all the other words we weren’t able to speak in each other’s language. It is where we gathered as a family for long awaited reunions, *comida* (food), music, heavy-hearted goodbyes, and *novenas* (nine days of prayer following a funeral). It is where my mother taught me to wash my clothes by hand in my *abuela*’s stone *lavadero* (outdoor wash basin) and where she and my father enculturated me to my Mexican cultural identity *and* where I observed my family identity as an interracial unit, the environmental factor that Poston (1990) suggests parents practice to help facilitate positive development of racial identity.

Moreover, it is where I felt belonging, and a constant (still) inner tugging to return. That is to say, my ‘home’ as Malhotra (2012) asserts is located with my culture rather than rooted physically—“in the values, practices, and customs, which can be anywhere physically or literally” (p. 75). My *abuela*’s home, her stone patio that was a dirt floor for my father growing up, where his umbilical cord is buried, and where he, my *abuela*, and *bisabuela* (great-grandmother) were born; this is the central point to my family’s soul (in my imaginary) because our (father, mother, brother, sister) collective history meets here. It has a likeness to a mother’s womb: a central place of origin and a site of development and nourishment. Shaded by the *arbol de zapote* (large leafy fruit tree) I played under with my cousins, I imagine the elaborately colored Mexican *árbol de la vida* (tree of life) rising from the patio and connecting us as an *axis mundi*, the world’s sacred center most always seen as feminine, where the four compasses meet and where the sky or heaven and earth are connected (or a place or point that reflects this

connection). This axis was the center of our family, culture, and to this home (be us near or far) just as strong maternal figures nourish and bond families together.

Abuela Concha, your home: with the sounds of you speaking Spanish, the noisy street out front and pacing dogs, the long slow groan and sharp clang of the metal front door, the smell of beans and rice on the stove and warm homemade tortillas tucked away in embroidered *servilletas* (napkins), sweet *aguas* (water) made with fruit on the table, freshly picked *limas* from the tree, colorful plants and trees planted by my *abuelo* that fill the center of house, and the small colorful concrete rooms that surround it; is ‘home’ to me. I did not grow up here, but for me, your house in the town where I was born; it represents my origins. It is a place I can ground myself to feel whole and connected, even the parts of me that seemingly have nothing to do with Mexico. This experience is not unique to me; it is shared by the Mexican and Multiracial diaspora (Davalos, 2001; Levins Morales & Morales, 1986; Malhotra, 2012).

Abuela Concha, the deep sense of belonging that I felt with you is what I call ‘home.’ Home is a place where we feel belonging rather than a tangible space (Malhotra, 2012; Mohanty, 1998). It is the communities we are surrounded by (families, friends, school, media, power structures in society) that prompt this sense of belonging (Malhotra, 2012). Your home has been significant in my self-development and identity construction—in this telling of who I am and where I am from. I was ‘home’ when we sat together in your central patio, the heart of the house. The two of us were unable to speak easily through my struggling-Spanish sentences. But, you still told me stories about yourself and your life and about myself and your memories of me in Mexico. We laughed together when you offered to baptize and name one of your birds in honor of my then

teenage boyfriend, together picking the prettiest one. And we laughed when I came home from the *mercado* (market) with matching wooly *medias* (knee socks) like you or when I wore your rubber boots to the *feria* (fair) with my gypsy-style dress because I thought they were so stylish (of which you disagreed but were amused by anyway). Even in silence drinking *té de manzanilla* (chamomile tea) with you and not able to say everything I wanted to, or watching you hang laundry on the line and observing how different our every days lives were from each other, I was at ‘home.’ *Abuela*, you held my hand with my whole arm protectively tucked under yours as we walked through *El Valle* down the cobble-stoned hill behind your house or through the market for a shopping trip. I can remember your tight grip from your tiny hands on my own, my arm still tucked under yours; I would be proudly introduced to each one of your *compañeras* (friends). Emphatically you would hold out my arm, helping me to shake each hand in an awkward but well-meaning three-person shake. *Ella es mi nieta, la hija de Manuel. Sí, de Manuel* (This is my granddaughter, the daughter of Manuel. Yes, Manuel), you’d say in a loud boasting voice, repeating the words to make sure your news was known. I felt so much belonging to you, to your home, and to the people and place where I was born.

At Home. *Abuela* Concha, I was ‘home’ each time I sat in your kitchen with a mug of tea. I remember the mornings that were still, before the bustle of day, a chill in the air, and the last sounds of rooster crows. The warmth of *té de manzanilla* (chamomile tea) was comforting and familiar. I loved the well-worn blue tea kettle that you used to heat the water so much that I had *tio* (uncle) Lole help me find a matching one the summer I came to photograph your house. You had already passed and I could not show you my matching blue kettle and how it and your dark blue apron are the most beloved

items in my kitchen because of you. You had already passed and I could not show you these photographs of your house, a place I see as sacred, an offering honoring you, which I took on one of my ‘pilgrimages’ to your house.

Davalos (2001) tells us that “by making a pilgrimage to an *ofrenda* (offering) to honor someone’s life and death, family and friends sacralize the life of an ordinary person and enact their empowerment” (p.185). “The tea would fix everything,” you assured me, a tummy or head ache and even sadness and longing. I still live by that, fixing myself a cup with a scoop of sugar, to chase away heartache or loneliness. I also remember drinking *atole*³⁸ with you (as we still do in your kitchen at least once during our visits) in your kitchen and it held as much importance as the *manzanilla*. It is through the thick pre-Cortesian drink that I imagine you transferring culture and tradition onto me. Each visit we paid, you would eventually be welcomed with atole; a family member would prepare it, your sister *Juana* maybe, and bring it by your house. Through sips, you and my parents and aunts or uncles would share stories of a more rural childhood, of the healing properties of the drink, and the meanings and uses of the various flavors.

Because ‘home’ is located within the culture, in the values, practices, and customs, rather than rooted physically (Malhotra, 2012), each sip brought me closer to home, to your house and the homes of our extended family. Each sip connected me to every ancestor who lovingly mixed the same ingredients, guiding my indigenous history/identity into the present. My identity, like my home cannot be defined by nationality, but instead found in the stories my father tells me about his life and yours

³⁸ *Atole* is a warm corn-based drink that includes *masa* (corn hominy flour), water, and *piloncillo* (unrefined sugar) and sometimes other flavors and spices. It has deep cultural and historical meanings.

abuela, the Mexican songs, folklore, and traditions my mother taught me, in the foods you cooked, the dances and ceremonies I reclaimed and learned as an adult, and in the values and practices of my families and cultures that I cherish³⁹ (Attali, 1999; Malhotra, 2012).

Abuela Concha, I was ‘home’ through the smell of tortillas, beans, rice, and your *sopa de fideo* (tomato-based noodle soup) floating from your kitchen. This always amused you that all I, *su nieta American-Mexicana* (your American-Mexican granddaughter), needed to feel content were the same foods my father grew up on. The humble ingredients and simple dinners you made for your family came from necessity; it was all you could afford. And, it was all I ever wanted to eat. “*Un plato de frijoles y arroz por favor* (a bowl of beans and rice please). “And, could I use the ceramic dish with painted blue flowers, that one is so pretty!” I have favorite dishes in your kitchen, this dish, the blue tin mug, and the big ceramic water pitcher with blue painted designs that you used for the flowers I would bring you. The feeling I have holding them is just like the one I have when I hold my favorite glass, the little one with butterflies on it, in my grandma Dot’s kitchen. I was proud to eat your food; it was a part of me. It felt like it was what I was made of. I imagine the *maíz* (corn) from the tortilla, the *maíz* (corn) from *El Valle de Maiz* (Valley of the Corn), running through my blood, the same corn that grew plentiful here in your neighborhood long before you; the corn that our antecessors harvested. Each bite of your food *abuela*, lovingly cooked for me with stories and history and culture brought me ‘home.’

³⁹ Economist Attali (1999) asserts identity cannot be found in a territory, but instead found in stories, songs, dances, and ceremonies of a culture (p. 85).

Abuela Concha, I was ‘home’ in your pink painted bedroom. The room where you and my *abuelo* slept was the same room we all gathered in as a family: for a chilly Christmas Eve dinner, a refuge from a rainy patio lunch, or nighttime *novelas* (Mexican soap operas) on a flickering TV with only a few channels. This room at the end of the patio that used to be a chapel before my father was born, was filled with photographs and mementos from wall to wall when I was growing up. This room always held a weighty presence, feeling familiar but also revered. It wasn’t until a few years ago that I realized I saw myself, in my entirety, in this room in a way that was different from anywhere else in the world. Every inch of your bedroom was saturated with imagery; your precious photographs surrounded you. On the wall hung my school-age portraits, where I smile back in an American gingham dress, my Mexican-era baby photos, the serious faces on my tios’ diplomas, cousins playing in the patio, our homes in Pennsylvania and snapshots of my life in New York City. All of my tap dance and ballet-costumed photos were hung, alongside *nichos* (small sacred box) with mementos, saints, prayers, rosaries, and Jesus himself. It is on these walls of collected images from your life and ours (from Northern U.S. to central Mexico) scattered across your wall, that I saw the only place where all of me existed. It was a cohesive story of who I was, not missing any parts or divided in any way. The collection of imagery mapped out my life from one world to another and back again.

In the years between visits, when time would stretch on, you *abuela* were one of my most significant connections to Mexico. Adding each of my life’s events through photographs and letters my parents mailed you to your bedroom wall; I was part of your everyday life. You kept me connected despite the significant distance from our home in

Mexico to our other home in the U.S. My life's journeys were reflected in the mish-mosh of collaged memories across your room. Now, it is in the collected imagery in your bedroom that I see my diasporic identity. My multiple, disparate, and far away mother and fatherlands live together as a cohesive whole in what you created in your home. Viewing the collection of imagery in your room through this lens allows me to understand the significance of your house has on my self-concept. And, I am now able to understand the tremendous impact migration, return, and connectedness (and disconnectedness) has had on my life.

Abuela Concha, I was home when I looked at the flower-patterned potholders hanging on your stucco kitchen wall. My Grandma Dot mailed you pansy patterned potholders (her favorite flower in her garden that is also my favorite) or snow themed aprons over the years. They were small domestic gifts between two women who never met. The juxtaposition of purple and yellow pansies, the flowers grandma Dot taught me how to plant and take care of in her garden, hanging from a thick and clumsy nail on a rough, cracked stucco wall the color of bubble gum, illustrated who I was. I looked at that cluster of potholders, sitting in the kitchen after both of you had passed and I realized, there I am, in that moment on the wall. It was two very different words, two completely different realities occupying the same space. The contradictions embodied my shifting identities and ideologies (Anzaldúa, 2007). The American gifts from my grandma Dot living in my Mexican *abuela's* kitchen fused two realities; I was the "interface between two" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 59) worlds. These were the bridges my grandmothers created for me to travel back home and between my homes.

Grandma Dot. The summer I traveled to Concha's house to photograph everything I could before her home changed, I did not expect to find you there. The letters I came across were simple 'Hello' and 'Thank You' notes you wrote to my *abuela* Concha. You were in her beloved bedroom with me in cursive letters on cotton paper and in English-language sentiments that showed how sweet and loving you were. Finding you there showed me how my home was really an imaginary construct that shifts from here to there, between physical places, histories, and emotional sensory places and memories (Malhotra, 2012). Grandma, I was home finding little bits of you embedded in my other *abuela's* world. My home, like the diaspora, is dynamic (Hall, 1994; Malhotra, 2012) and I identify through multiple places of belonging and memory (Malhotra, 2012; Mohanty, 1998). Grandma, it would not have been home without you being there as well.

Abuela Concha and Grandma Dot, you created the community that kept me connected to home and fostered belonging (Malhotra, 2012). Your relationship with me, your love and acceptance of my fluid identity, and your link with each other through shared long distance letters, gifts, and photographs acted like stitches moving back and forth. From north and south and back again, you helped to hold me together like threads embroidering my identity. Your acts helped me to find belonging when my physical home was absent (Davalos, 2001). Because of this, I have opened myself up to practice my identity as inherited, modified, and invented re-memory (Davalos, 2001), where I can reimagine my home (a place I construct identity) to be "in the interstices of fantasy and reality" (Malhotra, 2012, p.79).

Quién Soy Yo⁴⁰

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the branches of the polychromatic tree.

Too many colors in my leaves to identify with one.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am woven from many cultures.

Born from my mother's Southern mountain blood,
my father's Mexica ancestors, the Chichimec and Otomí.

I am the baby born outside of el mercado in a small doctor's office
to an adventurous 60's child escaping Americas war and drugs
and finding a new home in Mexico full of ritual, familia, and history.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the güerita my abuela Concha asked for that day,
who carried me so many times in her rebozo with love
up steep cobbled stone streets.

⁴⁰ *Quién Soy Yo* translates from Spanish to English as "Who Am I". This is a reference to the epic poem *I am Joaquín. Yo soy Joaquín* by Rodolfo Gonzales (1972) from the Chicano Movement. The narrative poem epitomizes Chicana/o identity, the struggle for economic and civil rights as well as coming to terms with being Chicana/o: a hybrid identity of Mexican-origin in the U.S., which works towards justice, civil rights, and cultural recognition.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the granddaughter of blue-eyed Dorothy Robinette.
With the same fire and spirit of my jitterbug dancing grandmother
and the same sweetness of her Southern drawl.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am El Valle de Maiz,
the neighborhood where all the Aranas,
the Chichimec in San Miguel come from.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the little girl at a school concert,
the envy of my ivory and porcelain toned classmates,
not old enough to wear nylons
who covet my naturally brown legs.

I am the girl who feels the boys' eyes on me,
curious and tempted about the difference in my skin,
a slight slant of my almond shaped eyes.

I am the girl with lots of friends but who will never be asked to the dance.

I am the girl who is part of the in-crowd
but still not quite rich enough, average enough, not White enough.

I am the girl who finds comfort in Mexico.

Looking into familiar deep brown eyes.

I am the girl that does not fit in there either.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the girl in my mother's arms, listening to stories

of my abuela, my aunts and uncles, their history.

I learn I am the pride and strength of Mexico's indigenous people.

I learn it is still running strong through my blood.

I learn I am beautiful, determined, and proud

like Doña Maria my great-grandmother, Concepción my abuela.

I am the little girl in my mother's arms who is stubborn like Zapata,

creates like Frida.

I am the little girl who touches the outstretched hand of a woman begging for
money as she sits on a San Miguel sidewalk.

I recognize those fingers and see they are the same color as mine.

I am the little girl who makes a promise to not forget her.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the little girl who sat with and felt comforted by the dancing Indios,

Los Aztecas in the jardín.

I am the danzante who waited a lifetime to learn and dance Tonanzin,
and smell copal again.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the magnolia flowers my great-grandmother Bessie paints on her canvas.

I am the gardenia flowers the blind man sells under the portales.

I am the blue-grass music played by mountain men in Virginia.

I am the cumbia playing from the broken-down speakers on the bus.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the teenager who pilgrimages countless times to Mexico
looking for history, art, family, and for myself.

I am the teenager full of culture, experience, and stories centuries old
bursting inside the seams of my small Pennsylvania town.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the woman who has always lived in two worlds,
who has always been asked to choose sides.

And who proudly refuses,
but internally questions my space.

I am the woman who never felt quite enough.

Quién Soy Yo?

I am the woman unfolding,
beginning to find my identity and comfort
woven somewhere in-between a rich blend.

I am the branches of the polychromatic tree
too many colors in my leaves to identify with one.
And I am evolving.

I Am What I Am

I am what I am and I am U.S. American I haven't wanted to say it because if I did you'd take away the Puerto Rican but now I say go to hell I am what I am and you can't take it away with all the words and sneers and your command I am what I am.... Take it or leave me alone. (Levins Morales & Morales, 1986, pp.138-139)

I take a deep breath because I now recognize the familiar feeling of displacement. I remember the conversations I have had with my mother and father, and the endless stories of our American family history from my maternal grandfather. I recall the words my uncle just said to me, "These stories tell you about where you come from. This is your family, your history." I hear my parents words, "You know where you come from."

The anxiety I felt by wanting to be a member of a group, but anxious I would not fit in is the same anxiety I had in joining the Masters cohort in Chicana/o Studies. "How dare I try to be part of this group?", I said in a nasty judging voice to myself, while also feeling the tug to learn about my culture and history and participate as a voice of my

community. I am constantly worried that in a White setting, I am too Brown (Mexican, Chicana/o, Latina/o) of a voice speaking. And in a Brown setting, my Whiteness is a blinding interrupting presence that cannot be ignored. But, when I am with my family, when we are laughing and recounting memories, and when I am asking to learn about our history, or stumbling over Spanish to share a story, I am neither one of those things. I am just a member of the tribe designated with a family name, matching features, or a genealogical number that shows me which direct line I come from.

This thesis project is about my experiences and how I am intertwined with the two parts (many more really) of my heritages. Therefore, all parts of myself must be included: all the places I come from and all the races/ethnicities/cultures/heritages/people I identify with are absolutely necessary for me to feel whole and to write from a truthful place.

Flowers and Roots

Place. How I always begin with place: the most potent imagery for a wandering Jew, an immigrant Puerto Rican. “What will this place give me, do to me? What landscapes, what houses will it leave in my dreams? What layers will it add to the collage of my identity, my skin, my permanent passport?” (Levins Morales & Morales, 1986, p. 192)

Spring, 2009. It is the first few days of spring and I am filled with longing, again. This feeling of being homesick is old; the place is new. I am driving through our current California town that is as foreign to me as any of my international travels have been. My fiancé and I are temporarily living in this Central Coast town made iconic by its surf and surrounding strawberry fields and lemon groves, juxtaposed by fields dotted with the bent backs of Mexican farm workers. Passing blurry palm trees in my speeding car, I am

struck with how much I miss the East coast and how the four seasons marked a rhythm in my life that I am accustomed to. For me, “spring” is a very different sensation than what I am feeling here in California. It is a time that reminds me of my grandma Dot’s garden, marked by the brave purple crocuses that push through heavy white snow, ushering change. Crocuses are the first spring flower and the last time I saw one was the day after my grandmother passed away. There was still snow on the ground, but the sky was bright blue. The blossoms seemed to be nudging us that a new season was here. Every spring, the dreary gray-blue Pennsylvania sky and brittle bare trees are transformed with color and vibrancy when spring arrives. My maternal grandma Dot’s garden was always filled with color. Happy yellow daffodils are the first flowers to follow the crocus, then the purple and pink Easter hyacinths, the painterly Iris that are David, my brother’s favorite, the big bright forsythia bushes that line her property, and the fuzzy pussy willows—my childhood favorite that were soft like bunnies. Then bloom the mid-spring Azaleas—magenta and filled with bees, Black-eyed Susans with deep purple-black centers, and the soft, pink flowering Dogwood tree. With the arrival of summer, come the miniature blue bells, candy-colored roses (yellow were grandma’s favorite), and bright pink Peonies. All of these flowers bloomed in waves under her affectionate care in her Pennsylvania backyard. Each of the flower’s names are imprinted in my memories of her, along with their smell, colors, and the careful planting, pruning and flower arranging techniques she taught me. I deeply miss the changing seasons of the East coast. The longing I feel now is paired with a sense that I am not home. Displaced again. Pennsylvania, a place I rarely identify with now feels like home and I am reminded of the interlocking and interwoven make-up of my identity.

Your lineage is ancient,
your roots like those of the mesquite
firmly planted, digging underground
toward that current, the soul of *tierra madre*—
your origin.

[translated from Spanish by the author] (Anzaldúa, 2007, p.224)

Fall, 2013. I feel like I must be the only person in the world sitting alone at the keyboard struggling to tell their story when I call my uncle Bill. We speak and I find out he too has been struggling through the process of writing family histories; sitting too long at the computer, surrounded by research, photographs, notebooks, and letters. This reminds me of my maternal grandfather who could always be found at his steel tanker desk buried under family history research. I look at my surroundings and I am amused how this describes me too. Physically, digitally, and psychically; I am surrounded by family imagery, stories, memories and reimaginings, research, books piled high, notes, and sketches. My uncle tells me about the work he is doing on his Civil War book. It will be a reference book, a historical documentation of the Robinettes'⁴¹ involvement on both sides of the war. He is exhausted, mentioning his desire to be “done already” with this project he started years ago. I smile on my end of the phone realizing I am not alone in my tortured-researcher/writer thoughts. He is painstakingly recounting 150-year-old information on our ancestors, so that these lives and stories are not lost with the passing of time, and so this period of American history can be understood from a reading of our family's experiences. Similarly, but through an autoethnographic approach, my intentions

⁴¹ My maternal grandfather's name was Jack Anderson Robinette. According to the Robinett Family Association, the spelling of this last name varies from Robinett, Robinette, and Robnett.

are to apply my family and personal experiences to existing research. With vulnerability and purpose, I will tell and show my American (Southern and English-heritage), Mexican (a blend of native-born and first generation), and Multiracial experience within academic and artistic discussions (Holman Jones et al., 2013).

In our hour-long conversation, we laugh and sigh in agreement about the painful role of the writer, the reencounter of history. Yet here we both are committed to telling stories of our family that may be lost if never found or shared. The intent of my phone call was to retain the historical details of my American heritage for inclusion here, the same information my paternal grandfather shared with me many times while I was growing up. History, learning, and family genealogy were immensely important to him, and encouraged throughout my family. To be able to casually call my uncle and discuss three hundred-plus year old information about my direct family line is an enormous privilege. My uncle says: “We have an incredibly interesting family history that is well documented. People have been interested in this and documenting it for quite some time. There is no need to invent any stories about where you come from. You can pull from the history that exists. These stories are not just pieces of history, they tell you about where *you* come from. This is your family, *your* history.”

After our conversation, I realize a simple truth that is incredibly meaningful during this journey towards completing my masters, which has always been a project of self-discovery. Beyond the historical records and treasured heirlooms that I am privileged to have access to; I recognize that our history and stories, the lives that came before me matter incredibly to my family (maternal and paternal). I most certainly could narrate my life experiences without knowing the specific details of my family genealogy, as many

people without this privilege have done. But, it is in recognizing that I come from a long line of preservers of history (whether through oral tradition or academic research), who were preoccupied and fantastically curious about who and where they came from, and devoted to preserving and sharing this information. More significant to me than the dates and places of my origin, although this is precious information, is that I come from a family of storytellers: from kitchen table raconteurs; *cantantes de corridos* (signers of ballads); methodical genealogist; lullaby whisperers; and keepers of recipes, letters, books, photographs, and linens.

My Four Directions

I became aware of how important it was to story my experiences and my family narratives, the “beloved everyday people and familias who generated mixed ethnic, cultural and linguistic landscapes” (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2009, p. 390) because in my research for this thesis project, I found very few families or experiences like my own. This absence within scholarly literature brought to mind the common experience of my absence in standardized forms by way of racial and ethnic check boxes (while now more inclusive than ever), which do not make room for me to accurately document my identity. My detailing of my family genealogy here is less about proving where I come from or reciting history. Instead, it is to provide a foundation for understanding the vast differences in the make-up of my experiences and to illustrate how my family’s practice of preserving history and telling stories has helped me develop and express a Multiracial identity. Acknowledging each of my four grandparents’ lineages and stories throughout this thesis project is an act that honors them, an *ofrenda* (Davalos, 2001). The wandering path-like way I share their stories, some filled with facts and dates and others memories,

feelings, or through colors and imagery, mirrors my own non-linear experiences and self-identification process. And, it is comparable to the *Mexica* way of honoring the four directions, the four cardinal points of the compass, the basis for creation; North, *Mictlampa*; South, *Huitzlapa*; East, *Tlahuizlapa*; and West, *Cihuatlapa*. As I write, I remember my father acknowledging the four directions during the burial of my maternal grandmother Dorothy at the Pennsylvania cemetery. The Mesoamerican signs were delivered over her remains followed by my father dropping a silver Catholic rosary into the ground with her even though she had been brought up Protestant. In that act, I was again reminded of the interlocking and interwoven composition of my identity.

My (North) American Heritage. My maternal family history is framed by immigration, pioneering new opportunities, and the hard work of transforming one's life into something new. My maternal grandfather's family can trace the beginnings of our American history to 1682. That our history is so carefully documented and preserved was a startling fact I learned as a teenager by my maternal grandfather whom always taught his family how important it was to know where we came from and shared the joy of learning with us. The study of this Robinette lineage was initiated in the 1890's and continues until present day by numerous family members and by the Robinett Family Association. The information available on our family line is a mass of material. There are photographs of my ancestors as far back as the late 1850's; direct family genealogical records that I can access from 1632 to my own birth in 1980 and beyond; academic research documents exploring the history of England and our family history before emigrating; and an online digital database of more than 60,000 decedents (recently developed by my uncle Bill). This is in addition to the family stories and imagery shared

with me, mostly by my mother and maternal grandfather in general family chats around the kitchen table that also included my maternal grandmother's family history and stories. Direct family history is also well documented within countless detailed individual stories handwritten in notebooks and letters and found in the faces of old photographs. In recounting this information now, I cannot help but be curious of the individuals who held onto family knowledge—stories, wills, birth certificates, marriage licenses, and family bibles,⁴² making it possible to research and access now.

I remember my grandfather telling me about the Englishman, Allen Robinett of possible Huguenot descent (although this connection cannot be confirmed and is doubted by some). The family records that I am reading now identify Allen as “the first American ancestor,” who immigrated in 1682 to the colony of Pennsylvania with his wife Margaret Symm and their children. Allen's migration from England changed the direction of our family lineage and we eventually became American.

I remember my grandfather's home office filled from floor to ceiling, from end to end with books, a massive library. I look at the Robinette records, shared with me by my grandfather and uncle, spread out in front of me now and I remember the mountainous piles of papers throughout my grandfather's office. He had a passion for studying genealogy and he researched the family lineage extensively, significantly contributing to the Robinett Family Association records and holding the position of family historian for ten years. This position of archiving, researching, and writing our family history now belongs to my uncle Bill. One summer while I was home from college, I filed what felt like millions of papers and painstaking cataloged hundreds of books for my grandfather.

⁴² Two of three bibles brought from England by Allen Robinett are on display in the Robinett Reading Room at Reeves Library at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri.

In the process, I found my own “Family Group Record” and my genealogical catalog number, 132 347 332 113. How bizarre and fascinating it was to see where I came from summarized on a sheet of paper and in a long twelve-digit number that traced me back to Allen Robinett (whom is listed as number one in the data base). The records spread across my desk now are familiar and I can remember them floating around my grandfather’s office years ago. These archives are detailed with information beyond what I have room to share here. The genealogical documents are only portions of the information that is available from endless individual family members’ stories.

The records tell me that Allen Robinett purchased 250 acres of land while living in England, in the area of Ridley Creek (not far from Philadelphia), described as “virgin wilderness.” He emigrated from Bunbury, Cheshire County, England (although originated from Southwark, London) to the colony of Pennsylvania soon after. Allen came across with William Penn’s colonists in what was called the “First Purchasers and Adventurers from Old England into Pennsylvania” and lived at his “homestead plantation” until his death in 1694. Despite these well-documented Pennsylvania origins, my maternal family identifies as Southern. I distinctly remember my grandparents jovially announcing that they would never be Yankees, usually during kitchen table chats or card games. I remember my grandparents and my mother aligning themselves as Southerners despite their homes throughout the U.S., and myself feeling reluctantly Northern, a Yankee to them. The records in front of me say that Allen’s descendents migrated south like many at the time for opportunities in the newly forming colonies and available government land grants. Their migration took them through the highly

trafficked migratory route, The Great Wagon Road running from Pennsylvania to Georgia.

My grandfather Jack was born in rural Blackwater (Lee County), Virginia. He grew up in a rural setting and what we would classify as poor today. The family came from humble origins, his grandfather William Beauregard Robinette, a subsistence farmer, only grew crops for the family to eat. My uncle tells me he remembers hearing stories of my grandfather reading by kerosene lantern in dirt floor cabins. In 1935, my grandfather's family relocated to Pacolet, South Carolina where he lived until attending graduate school at Cornell University, on the GI Bill. Family stories say his parents never had more than a hundred dollars in the bank at one time.

My maternal grandmother's Wilburn genealogy from Spartanburg, South Carolina is originally from Scotch-Irish heritage with ties to the Southern state of Georgia. Her family has been documented but the manner in which stories were told and information transferred to me feels more artistic and storied than my other family lines. My grandmother's father, William Wallace Wilburn was a cotton broker and her mother Bessie Boon, from Georgia was a painter. It is through Bessie's large magnolia painting that hung in my grandmother's house and through helping my grandmother in her garden and painting and sewing with her, that I learned about Bessie her mother and stories about who my grandmother was and where she came from. My mother, who was not able to meet her grandmother Bessie in person, has a great love for her. She passed onto me the importance of sharing our family history and cherishing the artifacts; the old family photos, the few pieces of jewelry, the paintings, and the stories. These are the tangible things we can hold onto and that help us re(member) these significant women in our

lives. They show up as symbols and icons in my artwork such as: my maternal great-grandmother's magnolia flowers (see the background pattern in Figure 36) and my maternal grandmother's garden pansies (see Figure 16). They appear in the artistic methods I choose to express my ideas, such as sewing (see Figures 25-36) and crafting (see Figures 37-40). And they are present in the deliberate choices of fabric I use in embroidered drawings, such as the Victorian-like fabric in Figure 27 and the soft pink feminine fabric and embroidered circles of Figure 31 that are juxtaposed with a crude drawing of my paternal *abuela*'s kitchen table embroidered onto it. My mother and I certainly have more talking and sharing to do about my great-grandmother's family history.

My Mexican heritage. I think about my *mestizo* lineage, the indigenous that inhabited the central highland Mexican town of San Miguel de Allende, in the state of Guanajuato. I imagine my indigenous elders confronting other tribes, resisting the Spanish, eventually calling themselves *Mexicanos*, and then battling each other in a civil war. Otomí and Chichimec tribes inhabited the central highland Mexican town of San Miguel de Allende, in the state of Guanajuato. I can see the flat Otomí nose on my paternal *abuela* and longer, more prominent Chichimec nose on my paternal *abuelo*.

My paternal *bisabuela*, Maria Godinez Chavez de Olivares,⁴³ owned a piece of property in *El Valle de Maíz* (Valley of the Corn) in the town of San Miguel de Allende. The family was poor and she held on to her *tierra* (land), handed down to her from her late first husband, as it was all they had. A portion of this land was eventually passed onto my *abuela* Concha and then to my father. Today, my name is on the land's deed and

⁴³ Later, my great-grandmother remarried and her name changed to Maria Godinez Chavez de Pichardo.

I am privileged to be able to preserve our family history in *El Valle*—the birthplace of my *abuela* and my father. My father has shared with me many stories of his life in this home and the histories that came before him here. I re(member) his stories and use the imagery in my artwork such as: the maguey plant from the stories he has shared about this family preparing *pulque* in the home in exchange for corn and beans (see Figure 30), the animals that shared the home with him like chickens and pigs (see Figure 33), the words of his *abuela* (see Figure 36), and my own memories throughout this space like the kitchen, bedroom, and courtyard (see Figures 2-24).

I began this part of my narrative, wrestling with how to tell this part of me. How do I incorporate the girl that grew up in Pennsylvania, whose maternal family came from the South within a discussion of Multiraciality and from a Chicana feminist perspective? How do I find the courage to let all of my voices speak despite the interruptions, contradictions, or questions they may provoke? In my conversation to find out more about my maternal family history with my uncle, he mentioned that I should join him for the bi-annual Robinette gathering in Missouri where extended family members meet at the Church of St. Mary, Aldermanbury. I am accustomed our family's smaller reunions where about 60 Robinettes gathered at Grandfather Mountain, North Carolina for food and reminiscing. As a child and teenager, I loved these trips down South, feeling part of the extended family however much our Northern accents stuck out. First, I am filled with eagerness because I want to dedicate as much effort as I have with understanding my Mexican identity and with Chicana/o Studies to my maternal family roots. And then as is typical, I worry. How will I introduce myself? What do I call myself and where do I say I am from? Maybe I can impress them with my master's degree because my research is

centered on who I am and where I come from. I am equally a researcher of family and heritage, a writer of past stories, and a preserver of history like they are. But will I really fit in (a consistent preoccupation of mine)? What will they think of this *mestiza*, this olive skinned Chicana feminist; this ex-New Yorker who flew in from Los Angeles but grew up in Pennsylvania? What will they think when in one breath I say I am a Robinette, a descendent of the English Allen Robinett and an Arana from Mexico? My worry about fitting in comes back.

A Complex Identity

Because I am Multiracial and my phenotype is somewhat ambiguous, I occupy several positions; I am privileged to be able to “choose” to identify with both races and ethnicities. I am privileged to have been enculturated with all of my cultures. However, I am also marginalized when I choose to identify myself as Mexican, Brown, Chicana, Latina, a woman of color, or Multiracial; yet since this is a choice (except for the times an identity is projected or ascribed to me), my marginalized position comes from a privileged position. I am marginalized when any one of these communities of color do not acknowledge, or have room for my Multiracial voice. It is typical for Multiracial individuals to not only have dual marginalized and privileged experiences as research suggests (Williams, 1999), but to also face discrimination from both the racial/ethnic communities of which they are a part of (Williams, 1999). My identity is shaped by the poor, working-class, *and* middle class experiences of my parents. I did not grow up poor, yet I would not classify my parents’ economic status as middle class (as defined by owning a home, new cars, computers, and the ability to pay for higher education with no or minimal student loans). I am shaped by the values of my father’s poor and working-

class family who struggled to eat and be clothed, who were marginalized as *mestizos* in the true sense of the word. Their marginalization did not materialize in the sometimes romanticized and appropriated-nostalgic Chicana/o sense. Because to be *mestizo* does not mean to wear the word or appropriate the image in a pop culture graphic t-shirt across your chest. It is instead played out in the everyday experiences for people who are positioned at the near bottom of a social hierarchy, where they are expected to put their head down when a “Spaniard” (a Mexican national of lighter skin or higher economic status) walked past them in the street. I am shaped by my father’s cultural and economic history, the way he winces when he sees me lazily walking barefoot in my *tía Adela’s* (aunt Adela’s) house in Mexico. This is a reminder of how he grew up and my *abuela’s* efforts, despite their economic status, to keep her children *bien educados*, bathed, groomed, polite, educated, and *never* without shoes. The shame of bare feet reminds me of the concept of “lo Indio” and its ugly meaning; dirty, uneducated, poor, and dark skinned, still relevant despite my/our Americanness and my Whiteness.

Equally, I am shaped by my mother’s, educated middle-class parents, by way of the “classic American dream.” For example, my grandfather’s ability to educate himself with an Ivy-League master’s degree despite his family’s humble farm beginnings (through the GI bill). I have had a White experience. I have also had a Brown experience, and I have had a third Multiracial, ambiguous hybrid experience that matches the Multiracial individuals who have documented their lives (e.g., Chang-Ross, 2010; Johnson 1999; Levins Morales & Morales, 1986; Williams, 1999). When individuals tell me that I “can pass” or that I experience the world through White privilege, that may be true but it is not all of the truth. Who is to know the moments of privilege and marginalization when

I have been a White woman, a Brown woman, perceived as both or neither? All I know for sure is that I experience *all* of these.

I had always used the words “Mexican” and “American” (never hyphenated together) as a pair of labels to identify myself, or various forms of “Hispanic,” “Latina,” “Mexicana,” “White,” and “just American.” I reluctantly applied the troublesome, “other” to standardized forms, as it was my consistent stand-in identity label. Using “other” was my way of refusing restrictive or ridiculous sounding classification options such as: “only select one race;” “White or Hispanic;” “Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish;” “White Hispanic or Black Hispanic.” I used the term “other” to distinguish myself differently from “White, Black, Hispanic, or Asian.” But, this identifier was inclusive and restrictive at the same time, and it was ridiculously sounding.

This “other” label (or check box) was something between an amusing and confusing selection the first time I employed it in early adolescence. I was curious about the seemingly subversive and mysterious choice I was “allowed” to check off in comparison to the other restrictive “standard” choices. Using this obscure designation made me feel like a secret agent, a being from an unknown place, exotically invading the small-town dentist’s and doctor’s offices (by way of their medical forms). I remember my mother and I laughing and rolling our eyes, agreeing that “other” best described my identity only because the other options excluded parts of me, parts I was not willing to “give up” or deny (by essentially choosing either my mother’s or father’s race/ethnicity). I would opt for ridiculous over invisible, although wasn’t I just as invisible with the “other” label? It was amusing, puzzling, and came to be infuriating throughout my life. “It sounds like I might be an animal or an alien,” I said marking the box, setting the

clipboard down, and waiting quietly for my appointment. I hated to be confronted with the choice of “either/or” and I resented having to align myself with only one of my heritages, only one of my parents. What is more, I was frustrated because I seemed to be alone in this dilemma. Because I was young, I wondered, whom was I supposed to speak to about having been left off of the forms. Who were the people in charge of leaving me out?

We are all we have and so we become obsessed with who we are, with our history and identity. We must feel the vibration of the resonance of our identities. (de la tierra, 2002, p. 359)

Standardized test. I was sitting in my seventh grade classroom, prepared to take the state’s standardized tests. Although I disliked these tests, I believed in the importance our teachers had communicated. I had honestly believed that I needed to do well in the tests in order to correctly reflect the educational level of my state. I began eagerly filling in bubbles, but I quickly had to stop. The test was asking me for my race. The test also clearly said, “Only fill in one bubble.” My first thought to myself was “Well, this is funny, I will have to fill in two bubbles.” But, then I remembered our teacher’s stern face and the importance she placed on following directions. What if I broke the rules and filled in my two bubbles (White and Hispanic)? Would all the work I completed on the test be void because I had not followed directions? I was young so the thought of breaking the rules or refusing the test seemed severe and not a viable option. However, being honest and expressing who I was, was also very important to me. After a lot of thought, I concluded that I absolutely could not fill in only one bubble.

I looked around and noticed I was the only student still on the top section of the test; everyone else had seemingly moved on with ease. I knew I had discovered something tremendous. I thought about the other people like me, although I had never met any, that could not honestly fill in this “standard” form. I thought to myself, the form was a liar and the directions were frustratingly impossible to follow. I concluded, that since I had been left off of the list of options and since I could not possibly follow the directions, I could not complete the test. I put my pencil down proudly and took the test to my teacher to explain. I held my breath; still angry that the form did not apply to me but ecstatic to point this out. I knew I was breaking a rule by speaking up and I knew it was something I absolutely had to do. I had a purpose. I let my teacher know that I could not move on beyond this point. I had to whisper because as I had been told, this was a serious testing environment. My teacher did not understand my situation at first. I explained again, losing a bit of my bravado and feeling a little silly. She told me to continue the test and waved off my dilemma. Eventually when I would not budge, she said, “Just pick the one you feel closest to.” I stood there stunned. What? Her confused face in response to my question, her dismissal, and most of all her direction to “*Just* choose one” was shocking to me. Her suggestion was even more ridiculous than the test’s directions.

How can I pick one? I had never even heard of that. An image of my mother and my father came to mind. All of my family members, celebrations, and family meals, were all mixed up in my head. Which ones were more important to me? Which ones did I like best? I was enraged with her suggestion. Why had she not just said, “Yes, I understand that would be difficult for you to fill in”? Anything would have been better than what she

said. My youth made me believe that I needed to follow the rules, that I should go back to my desk to be quiet and find a way to complete the test. But, my adolescence and its notorious rebelliousness helped me to respond to her before returning to my seat. I let out a big sigh so she would understand my frustration and see how important this issue was. It seemed as though she and the people who designed the test had never met anyone missing from this form before. My concern was about who I was, my identity, my family, my history, every part of me. Here I was being waved away and discounted with the filling in of a bubble on paper. I adamantly said to her, “That is impossible to do, I am evenly *both*,” and retreated to my desk.

I had always maintained that I would NEVER choose only one of my nationalities at age 18, as was the law while I was growing up. From the time I was a very little girl, making that choice did not seem true to who I was. Even as a practical choice, I felt defiant about my complete identity being denied on paper. As a necessary pragmatic act, my older brother chose American nationality when he turned 18. It was a decision that avoided necessary military time in Mexico and afforded him, at least legally, all the privileges of an American citizen. I am sure my parents also hoped it would prevent him from experiencing any obstacles of living in the U.S. as a Mexican national. Mexico legalized dual U.S.-Mexican citizenship in 1996, two years before my 18th birthday. I was privileged once again and I never had to choose just one nationality. As of 2001, there were a reported 20 million plus dual American/Mexican citizens with one foot in each world (Sistema Internet de la Presidencia, 2001).

My account illustrates my frustration with society’s reinforcement of monoracial constructs. The constraining either/or options, my missing-self, and the experience of not

having a racial designation on standardized forms which is common among Multiracial individuals (Miville et al., 2005; Townsend et al., 2009), is “one of the most invidious experiences of racism that occurs to multiracial people” (Miville et al., 2005, p. 511). The lack of legitimacy and acknowledgement angered me. It infuriated me that this teacher did not feel the same need to discuss the issue or just hear who I really was. It felt as though no one did. Looking around the room, it appeared that none of my classmates were concerned or challenged with the same issue. Trying to help, my parents patiently listened to me and they agreed the test’s limited options were ridiculous. But, I wanted to have a shared experience. I wanted to know that someone had the same feelings I had, that they had also gone through the constraining and perplexing experience of being asked to choose.

Cultural shifting. High school and college were extremely important periods of time where I explored my identities, reclaimed indigenous aspects of my Mexican heritage, and spent as much time in Mexico as possible, connecting with family and investigating and aligning myself with Mexicanness. During this time, I strongly identified with both my racial/ethnic backgrounds, not feeling more one than the other. There were times however when I was concerned with not being Mexican enough, when I would visit my family in Mexico and be alarmingly aware of my “Americanness.” In contrast, however, I was comfortable performing my identity by wearing *Huipiles*, revolutionary style braids pinned at the crown of my head, and bright Mexican ribbons in my hair; adorning my room with Mexican ornaments and photographs of Zapata, Frida, Adelitas, and my Mexican family. I was an East coast girl who sometimes seamlessly transitioned and other times stumbled through these cultural shifts; from the woods and

cornfields of Pennsylvania (high school), to the grit and hustle of New York City (college), all while consistently returning back to my family's Mexican home (poor and working class neighborhoods within a beautifully ancient and advanced culture) and learning about my mother's American heritage too. I moved from each region fitting in and sticking out simultaneously.

The push and pull of leaving and returning, feeling "the same" and feeling "different," digging up a past to make myself new, became a familiar personal tide. This experience is common among Multiracial people and reported by many scholars (e.g., Chang, 2014; Levins Morales & Morales, 1986). I remember the constructing, merging, and performing of my multiple identities during this time as mostly exhilarating and additive. I was learning, creating, traveling, performing, and adding layers to who I was and where I came from. Yet, it was challenging and confusing, and it was sometimes lonely. Where is everyone else who looked or felt like me? But, I felt mostly in control and comfortable with whom I was. What was out of my control and what did box me in was the available language I used to describe or classify myself (listed earlier), and the external probing regarding "who" or "what" I was, the omnipresent question frequently presented to Multiracial people (Chang 2014; Jackson, 2012; Jackson et al, 2013; Miville et al., 2005; Terry & Winston, 2010, Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

California.

The only danger in my air is from some whirring voice inside that always says you don't belong and if you don't utter just just right they will know you don't belong and toss you out and I feel that everytime with every group of any color no matter what they speak... (Levins Morales & Morales, 1986, p. 57)

For ten years, I was a hurried, cramped, and frenetic, New Yorker. At the tail end of that period, I took myself on a self-discovery solo trip to Peru. An inner feeling of connectedness drove my love for Central and South America, and my interest in indigenous and *mestizo* lives made me want to explore these people and places. I had backpacked once before throughout Mexico spending most of my time in the southernmost state of Chiapas, living within, although separate from, an indigenous community in the mountains above San Cristobal de las Casas. During this time I spent many days speaking with and learning from the men and women of the community about their daily lives and struggles. I played with big-brown-eyed little girls in fields dotted by *campesinos* (rural farm laborers) as they explained how the flowers were all the toys they had to play with—their mother Esperanza plowing the fields behind us.

Halfway into my journey through Peru, I spent one day in Nazca, a town near the southern coast. Here, in one of the driest places in the world where all I ran into was dust and small shacks, I met Nathan, now my fiancé. That chance meeting was followed by several years of long distance love, and then put to a rest when we both moved to Southern California to be together. His job and visa restrictions made it necessary for us to move to a suburb in California's Central Coast. We would have gone anywhere to be together. I left my life in New York City to what felt like the middle of nowhere. My frustrations with a much slower-paced life, leaving the city I loved for farmland surroundings, and isolation from East coast friends and family were soothed when I discovered I was living in what felt like the heart of Aztlán. I was shocked that our move based around our love story had brought me to a place I had always dreamed of

discovering—a world somewhere between Mexico and the U.S. and where both and neither seemed to exist simultaneously.

Everything about being in California was new to me. Everything seemed to tug at my emotions and challenge my self-identity. My heart broke as I drove past Mexican farm workers daily in strawberry fields. I watched their bent over backs from my car window, instead of the distant way I had only heard about migrant workers in occasional news stories on the East coast. My eyes widened when we noticed we were the only White faces (or partial in my case) in shopping malls. I had never experienced that outside of Mexico. I often called my dad to share my new experiences and amazement with him, like when I saw mango carts on the side of the road or Mexican men in boots and cowboy hats kicking up dust with their horses. Before moving to this part of California these scenes were reserved for Mexico in my experience. These were the beloved experiences we had to wait for, until we could make our long trip to Mexico. You see, in our American life, anything that was Mexican was very, very far away. We lived between two worlds but those worlds were separated by a very long distance. “Dad, they’re here, they’re all here” I exclaimed over the phone to my dad in Pennsylvania. What I meant was all the Mexicans, the Mexicans who were American, the images and people we had only seen played out on the TV or movie screen. “Yep you’re in the middle of it,” the middle of Chicana/o culture is what he meant. Although my family had lived in and created a world that was between Mexico and the U.S., we felt different than Chicana/os in the Southwest. My family’s in-betweeness was largely played out internally, in our hearts and heads and isolated to just our experience. While for Chicana/os, the in-betweeness was all around. It was tangible in the language (their

ability to switch from Spanish to English and back again), the food (their access to Mexican cooking ingredient and American ones too and their celebrations that combined both), and in the music (my car's radio could now take me from Middle-America to the heart of Mexico, to Chicana/o Aztlán in seconds). The culture itself was something I had never experienced before, but yet it defined me in many ways. My dad asked me, could I really speak Spanish to just about anyone and buy just about everything that we had always longed for from Mexico here? He was as surprised as I was and so was my mother as she tasted the beloved *horchata* and chocolate *atole* (traditional Mexican drinks) without having to cross the border during one of her visits. I told my parents, "It's Mexico here." Or, so I thought.

I had grown up loving the *danzantes* (traditional Mesoamerican dancers) in Mexico City's plaza and in San Miguel's *jardín* in front of the pink *parroquia* (parish church). On visits to Mexico when I was a teenager and college student, I would passionately photograph the spinning *danzantes*, and their rattling *chachayotes* (anklets made of dried seeds). I accompanied my cousin to her *danza* (traditional Mesoamerican dance) practice and felt the deep beat of the *huehue* (upright drum) in my gut and my heart. It felt deeply familiar, as I had always been drawn to the dancing, even as a little girl. I treasured the *traje* (traditional *danza* regalia) my family had made for me several years before my move to California, customized with red cloth and gold beads. I selected red because that was the color of my Chichimec heritage and the color of the important *Cruz Roja* (Red Cross) in *El Valle* that my *abuela*, our family, and all of her neighbors celebrated each May.

Our first November in California, Nathan and I went to the *Dia de Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) event in our new town. We sat in a circle in the cold grass around the *danzantes* who were encircled by a ring of bright orange *cempazuchitl* (marigold) flowers. I was deeply moved with the dancing and I was filled with a feeling that I had come home because I was surrounded by elements of Mexican culture. I was proud to show Nathan how rich in history and tradition, and powerful in spirit my culture was as the dancers spun past us in a colorful blur. I was proud to show him how talented and dedicated the dancers were at preserving and expressing Mexican and indigenous culture as their bare feet danced past us. I was proud to show him how fused with indigenous beliefs my Mexican culture was as the men beat heavily on the *huehue*. It felt as if the passion, dedication, and purpose that the dancers had, expressed how I felt about my identity.

In the weeks and months that followed, I would join the *danza* group, get to know a small group of women, and learn the dances and ceremony traditions. I was ecstatic with the newfound access to my Mexican and indigenous culture here in the U.S. My body leapt and twirled during practice and I feel completely at home dancing to the drums and through *copal* drifts. I looked at the other members during practice and felt a deep love for where I came from and part of a community who shared my passions. I saw facial profiles that matched my own, prominent noses, which I had been ashamed of growing up. I felt the love for myself grow and a newfound comfort in being myself. I was honest with everyone in the group, sharing where I had come from (all the places) and how unbelievably new and also familiar my experiences with them were. In this new California home outside of my partner Nathan, I had no friends or family near me to

count on for support. Everyone from my past life on the East coast was three hours ahead and the change in time zones made it feel like they were a world away. I had no friends in our new town when we first arrived and it felt isolating. Nathan (who is English) and I were most definitely foreign to everyone we came across. Therefore, I found comfort looking for home in the Mexican culture around me: in faces that looked like mine; food that tasted like home from roadway taco stands; and with this group that was as passionate as I was about my *cultura* (culture).

There were many times growing up in my Pennsylvania town when I did not feel at home. Surrounded with many friends, there was still an unspoken otherness about me. I know now, I am responsible for some of these feelings; I know that artists as well as Multiracial individuals undoubtedly have a sense of disconnection. As I have grown older, I have come to understand common Multiracial experiences, their context, and ways of transcending them. But, it has been difficult to understand and articulate my sometimes un-definable identity, to allow myself to audaciously stand out or not conform to normative monoracial structures and to define myself beyond the limiting labels that were and are available to me. My liminal existence, wrapped between two cultures, could at times (and still does) mystify people who expect individuals to identify through clearly defined notions of race and class. Their expectations and need to box me into understandable labels and categories often came in the form of comments and questions I felt deeply and took personally. Like a perpetually running photocopier, the Multiracial *and* monoracial microaggressions (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007), the stereotypes and slights (intentional or not) that I heard, still clunk around inside my head. Hearing other students in high school laugh about Mexicans “immigrants with green

cards” (this seemed like a particularly shameful thing to have where I grew up) stung as it brought to mind our own immigration and the difficulty my father went through to come to the U.S. It brought to mind my father’s “alien” status as it is listed on his permanent resident card, his accent, and our Brown skin. These were the easily identifiable things that made us different from our community. I remember painfully hearing the words “wetback,” “spic,” “dirty Mexican,” along with snickers to describe Mexican people. Whether these kids realized they were speaking directly about me or not, I felt both shame and anger; I wanted to hide and fight at the same time. I remember having to defend our home in Mexico and all of its beauty against endless questions and general hurtful laughter about Mexican stereotypes: donkeys and dirt roads (they had no idea we had roads and cars); sombreros and ponchos (that is all Mexican’s wear right?); and our food (that made them sick). I had to deflect ideas that Mexico was undeveloped, dangerous, and dirty. I can also remember the feeling that came with class differences, when I was invited to dinner at a friend’s house and the parents’ uncomfortable shifting and downward eyes when I answered their questions “what do your parents do?” and “where are you from?”

I did not expect to confront judgments like these in California because it seemed like there was so much possibility in feeling connected to Mexican culture here. But wrapped in the beautiful discovery and participation of my heritage language, culture, and traditions that California provided, also came challenges, questions, and impasses for my fluid identity. I had assumed I would receive acceptance and understanding from my new Chicana friends. I had assumed the feeling of returning ‘home’ to Mexico (via Southern California) would be reciprocated with open hearts. I had a fantasy that

California would be a place where I could be understood and share my Borderland experiences because of its' in-between qualities, a place where two cultures rubbed up against one another. That did not happen at least not at first.

Our suburban California experience was short lived and it most certainly was not all negative, but the judgments I faced protrude in my memory like a splinter, subtle but painful. The feelings I had before, long ago in the much less racially and ethnically diverse Pennsylvania, came flooding back. It left me coughing up tears, insecurities, and more displacement not knowing where or if my fluid identity had a place. Lighthearted moments with new friends, birthday drinks in my apartment, sunny Southern California car rides, and laughs between girlfriends were interrupted with, "you're a coconut," "you're brown on the outside, but really you're white on the inside." I heard contradicting, attacking messages and challenges like: "hmm, you don't look Mexican, see you don't have an indigenous face like me" and "you're not dark enough." This contrasted with, "you look at lot more Mexican that you really are" and inquiries like "are you really down?" that were meant as ethnic credentials (DaCosta, 2007), tests required to pass to be a member of this group (Jackson et al., 2013). However ridiculous these words sound now, they hurt and cut through me. Like the times when I was younger, I wanted to scream back, what are you talking about, you have no idea where I come from or who I am, and how important my Mexican identity is to me. But the shame of being mostly monolingual; the awareness of my White privilege I carried; and the inability to explain how Multiracial people can simultaneously experience more than one racial experience (Williams, 1999) and that to be Mexican does not mean to live up to a monolithic stereotype, kept me silent. This self-consciousness around my racial identity

and the conflicting embarrassment and pride I felt when I was challenged with ethnic credentials kept me silent. The fear of not being Mexican “enough,” or that I might not perform my racial/ethnic identity “correctly,” kept me silent. I thought, maybe their ugly judgments were right. It was what Anzaldúa (2007) calls the Shadow-Beast, or internalized oppression, that caused me to believe the microaggressions as truth and I consequently judged myself just as harshly. Hearing “you’re just whitewashed,” “a coconut,” “assimilated,” “middle-class,” and “you’re not a real Chicana,” even if those words were not meant intentionally to hurt or judge me by the community in the Central Coast town and by some students in my graduate program at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) unfairly and incorrectly labeled me and my experiences. I was a Multiracial New Yorker, a grown woman, exploring California. I was East coast woman who grew up isolated from Mexico geographically but remained connected to Mexico because of my parents’ enculturation efforts. And, I was exploring my Mexican culture and newly discovering Chicana/o culture in the U.S. for the first time. It was not just in Chicana/o settings that my “otherness” stood out. I was not fully comfortable in mostly White settings, at least not in the California suburb we first called home and I felt a need to hide or quiet my Mexican identity expressions and my Multiracial fluidity. At this time I was nurturing both my homesickness for the East coast New York City life and Mexico, while I was simultaneously being challenged for expressing my Multiraciality, my Whiteness, and my Mexicanness. I was once again struggling in *Nepantla*’s (Anzaldúa, 2002a, 2002b) push and pull of emotions, feeling displacement along with beautiful cultural awakenings and loneliness and judgments along with deeper awareness about myself. It was a time of constant vertigo.

My everyday life, up until the day I left for California was an incredible mish-mosh of New York; people piled on top of each other so close that my body touched skin of every color with each movement through daily life. It was hard for me to identify any segregation riding crowded subway cars through the Jewish Upper West Side; Hasidic Brooklyn; Dominicans and soul food in Harlem; hip-hop through Bed-Stuy; New Jersey construction workers; Wall Street bespoke suits; neo-hippie Park Slope moms with strollers; Brooklyn artists; and punks on bikes heading downtown; or emerging subway stairs to African jewelry for sale along dirty city streets and deep beats on plastic buckets in city squares. It is said by some Multiracial people (Johnson, 1999) that it is easier to be around individuals that are so vastly different, that you do not receive the exhausting ethnic credential challenges from monoracial ethnic groups. There is a space to be different, and an opportunity to perform ones Multiraciality or a monoracial identity (or both) with individuals who don't feel they can critique and police how a Multiracial/Multiethnic identity is produced and performed. New York provided this for me. While I still had the inner tugging of missing Mexico and Mexican culture (I was not integrated with Mexican communities in New York) and there was sometimes a loneliness from the feeling being alone in my Multiraciality (I did not have Multiracial friends or a support network); there was much more of an opportunity to express myself uniquely in New York City than there was in my first experiences in California.

In California, I faced the common Multiracial and Chicana/o ethnic credential inquiries hearing: "Can you even speak Spanish?" "How can you be a Chicana if you don't cook," and "What are you?" Joining the *danza* group it felt like everything about me was challenged even my own handmade *traje* that was made for me years before in

San Miguel. The group had decided I had not earned the right to wear it with their group based on their hierarchal structure that I had not passed through. It also seemed at times in my graduate program that my perspective was unfairly and inaccurately challenged because it was assumed to come from a specific racial and class position (White and middle or upper-middle class). I heard: “You have had it much easier because you can pass as White,” “You are only saying that because you’re White,” and “You are so White” as an explanation for my actions or opinions more times than I would like to remember. I wanted to fit in, I wanted to explore Chicana/o culture in California, and I wanted to connect with others whose lives were often challenged with *Nepantla*’s contradictions. But it was not easy to transcend the essentialized boxes I was put into. And, it was impossible to live up to any of the monolithic Chicana/o stereotypes that we must look, sound, dress, act, and feel only one way. I heard: “Chicanas don’t do that, they don’t listen to that music,” when I listen to hip-hop or, “This music is White people music,” when I listen to indie rock, folk, classic rock or DJ sets. Even my cultural and artistic explorations of dancing with a *danza* group, or trying *folklorico* and *zapateado* (Mexican folk dances) seemed to bring critiques and comments from Chicana/os who debated which type of cultural practice was the most authentic or most appropriate for me to practice. It seemed that my choice to move within and outside of the various practices and cultural barriers, experimenting with and exploring cultural practices, rubbed people the wrong way or was seen as suspect, a common experience of Multiracial people (Chang-Ross, 2010; Williams, 1999).

Despite these challenges I did not give up on California and its Mexican and Chicana/o culture completely. I did discontinue participating in the *danza* group and I

find my healing and cultural connection in other areas. I have taken away the positive knowledge I learned. And I know, whether this group accepted me or not, the indigenous knowledge is already a part of me. It was a part of me before I ever arrived in California and my heritage is not something that can be measured or judged by someone else. I miss dancing between feathers and *copal* drifts, and I miss connecting spiritually through *danza* practice. My hope is that I can find a group open minded and without essentialized expectations of its members for me to join. And, that I find a way for my Multiracial voice to be heard within my graduate program in the Chicana/o studies department.

This thesis project required me to carve out my own space, however difficult, for all of my racial/ethnic identities to have a voice. It took strength to assert my Multiracial self within an ethnic studies program. This project was the process with which I confronted my own identity crisis-type challenges and found the strength to assert my Multiraciality.

In addition to the academic rigor of graduate school, the program at CSUN required considerable reflection and writing on my own life experiences. The reflexive work, my displacement from New York City, isolation in California, and my immersion in a very foreign (to me) Chicana/o culture triggered a *Coatlilcue* State (a confusing and vulnerable state of mind) that came in severe emotional waves. The academic setting of graduate school was incredible. But what was terrifying was that everything around me seemed to be disrupted; perceptions of others and myself were challenged and shattered. I was introduced to the history of the Chicana/o civil rights movement and found it incredibly inspiring although, I was deeply troubled by this history that I was never taught before. I was introduced to Bernal, Knight and their colleagues' theories on ethnic

identity and child development and the processes of acculturation, enculturation, and assimilation in development. I learned about self-perception and the factors that shape ethnic identity. These concepts fascinated me, but they forced me to look at what had shaped my own racial/ethnic identity. Phinney and Marcia's development models and identity statuses, and the concepts of self-perception gave me the language to describe identity experiences, but this meant I had to deeply examine my own self-concept. I felt incredibly empowered, but overwhelmed. It was as if the ground underneath me was shaking—there was definitely a shift happening in my consciousness.

Academically, I awoke and a part of me felt connected to the material and validated like I had never been before. But, what about the other parts of me? I did not see my East coast experiences or stories of Mexicans/Chicanos/Latinos outside of the Southwest in the material I was reading for my courses. I did not read about Multiracial families or even our back-and-forth homeward migrations to and from Mexico in any of the literature. The discourse, although I acknowledge its great significance, aligned with very little of my lived experiences and it became hard for me to immerse myself in scholarship and in a program that was focused on monoracial and mostly regional experiences of Chicana/os. There were many times that the literature and discussions around me felt exclusively “not White.” I became anxious and it actually felt like a part of me may slip away if I fully immersed myself in the material. Class discussions also became uncomfortable places for me, where I felt judged by essentialized views of what it meant to be Mexican or Chicana/o. I was assumed to be middle class (we were not), assimilated (I would not call myself this), and “whitewashed.” I searched for appropriate responses but remained silent, only thinking to myself in frustration; How do I say, I am

ACTUALLY WHITE, not whitewashed, not a watered down version of what I “should” be. It seemed as though the deeper I dove into my studies, the more I felt pushed away and isolated. It seemed as though there was not room for *all* of me. I was disheartened to not find literature that explored experiences of the Mexican diaspora—my own East coast cultural isolation and how removed we were from Mexico. Or, the longing we felt for Mexico, our homeland and the ways in which we remained connected, or the food and family we had to let go of in exchange for our American life. The literature also did not reflect my Multiracial experience and I did not know how to create a space to talk about it. We did not discuss the Latina/o diaspora in New York City that I had been surrounded by for so long, the blending and merging of many Brown cultures in the one tiny island I had called home. Or, the scatted Mexicans/Chicanos throughout the U.S., or the collective immigrant experience in our country shared by many Latina/os. There did not seem to be room to talk about how I felt so far away from Mexican culture, that I filled with pride and excitement when I moved to New York City and was exposed to Cuban music and dancing, Central American empanadas, Nuyorican tricked-out bikes with boom boxes and spoken word poetry, Dominican coconut ice cream, and my first Latina girlfriend (outside of my cousins) whom I made art and music with. I felt so isolated from Mexico that in New York, I would take what I could get in summer Manhattan street fairs, in cafes and gypsy-cabs in Queens, and in corner bodegas and liquor stores in Brooklyn. Because *that* was the only way I could travel home to Mexico. There did not seem to be room to talk about the familiar and collective experiences I had with my few friends of color: suburban first and second generation Chinese and Argentinean, urban working class first generation Ecuadorian, exchange students from India and Puerto Rico,

or Black from Queens, because *that* was how I felt at ‘home.’ Those were friendships without essentialized judgments of what it meant to be American or Mexican.

In California I was not always brave enough to stand out, my Whiteness seemingly interrupting my experiences and my statements, and I did not want to be misunderstood. I did try, but representing the “other” seemed harder than it had been growing up in Pennsylvania. Eventually, I toned-down my discussions of Mexico, the East coast, and my Multiraciality. I toned-down what might be perceived as Multiracial and White in order to fit in, much in the same way many Multiracial individuals tone-down ethnic characteristics. Upon realizing that I was the only individual in my courses to refer to myself as something other than Chicana/o, I worried that I would be outed as an imposter. I performed actions like quieting my voice and going back into all of my completed papers to replace the word “Mexican” with “Chicana” to describe myself, even before I felt comfortable adopting this term as a self-identifier. But the softening of my “otherness” did not make me feel better in any way, the actions only frustrated me and I felt as though I was forcing myself to assimilate. I became disappointed in myself for not having the audacity to be different or to at least just be myself. Where was the courage that I had carried much better as a teenager? I seemed to be caught and silenced between either/or structures that cause me to feel shameful to use the words “White” or “American,” and then frustrated with myself that I would consider hiding these identities at all. I felt squeezed between internal and external judgments and expectations, and I wondered if I would ever come across stories like my own.

Finally, as I worked through the graduate program there was a shift and a new world blossomed for me. I was introduced to Anzaldúa, her Borderland theories and the

concepts of *Nepantla*, *Mestizaje*, and fluidity that came from it. I gained an understanding that my confusing and painful experience was an opportunity for renewal, the *Coatlicue State* (Anzaldúa, 2002a). I came to understand that I was not alone in my “otherness,” particularly through reading experiences that mirrored my own (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2009; Chabram-Dernersesian, 2009; Chang, 2014; & Levins Morales & Morales, 1986). This re-vision of self was a spiritual and political crossing of *Nepantla*’s in-between state and occurs before a higher spiritual and political consciousness is reached (Anzaldúa, 1999). I saw purpose in my challenging journey to define and articulate who I was. Within Multiracial identity literature I found that identity could be flexible, changing, situational, constructed (and co-constructed), performed, and greatly varied. The Multiracial identity theories were flexible and inclusive, and I saw my experiences reflected for the first time in scholarship. This was shocking and powerful. I was able to look at my life experiences and contextualize and understand them with clarity. I did not feel compromised, squeezed out, or silenced. This knowledge provided the trigger for transformation and also the nest for healing that I needed. I began to identify myself as “Multiracial” and seek Multiracial groups and literature for support. Utilizing this completely new label, interacting with new social groups, and identifying as something separate from either one of my parents, were things I had never done before.

I was exposed to Chicana feminism and autohistoria. The artist within me, who had felt suffocated in academic discourse, began to reconnect as the women-centered concepts resonated with me. I felt at home and whole. I blossomed each time I read about the importance of the marginal voice, the female voice, and the significance of personal testimony. I was introduced to feminist methods of research and I saw purpose in the

artwork that I was creating. And with this, I acquired a more comprehensive understanding and loving perspective on my own artwork. I was able to begin valuing my voice, peeling off the layers of silence that had built up. I kept reading Anzaldúa's works and each time I passed over her *Borderlands*, I gained strength in being my Multiracial East coast Mexicana/Chicana (and all the other labels) self.

I was introduced to Fordham-Hernández's (2009) *Great White North* article and could see my mother, the Anglo-Chicana (as I would describe her) who vehemently enculturated me, who taught me how to be this American, Mexican, Multiracial, Chicana. I absorbed Chabram-Dernersesian's (2009) article depicting her "Mexi-Rican" experience in California, and I began to develop multiple names for myself that were inclusive. I tried on variations of East coast Anglo-Mexi-Chicana among others. I used the word *mestiza* for the first time to describe myself. And, I combined labels using more than one to describe myself because it felt comfortable and authentic to use many labels to describe who I was. I was encouraged to read other feminist of colors' experiences with diaspora, like Malhotra (2012) and Mohanty (1998), who talked about multiple homes and imagined spaces. All of this literature helped me to feel connected and part of a collective experience. A powerful metamorphosis was occurring. I began to obsessively collect stories of Multiracial Latinas, and I looked everywhere for Multiracial experience and narratives that were like patchwork quilts—ones that included disparate cultures in one body; from literature, to poetry, to art, and performance. I connected deeply with stories like Cisneros' *Caramelo* (2002). Fictional women like her character Ceyala and other Latina protagonists became my soul sisters who protected me in lonely and disconnected moments. I found Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales's *Getting*

Home Alive (1986) and I became brave enough to write about my own experiences in non-traditional ways. I saw how these two Latina women intertwined their Multiracial lives through New York, Puerto Rico, the East coast and eastern Europe, together as beautiful tapestries in the form of prose and free-form poetry. I was deeply moved and inspired with the truth in their writing and how each woman could story particular aspects of her identity without letting go of another seemingly contradictory aspect. Their writing felt like 'home' to me because it expressed how I experienced my Multiracial Latina identity and it allowed me to create the work here in this thesis project. Entire words were opened up to me. I saw myself in the literature and it provided the language for me to talk about the experiences I had been trying to communicate my whole life.

Collected words on a page are my experience, and I hope they appear similar to others who read them. (Carbajal, 2002, p. 51)

I now use many words to describe myself, at times I even refuse to identify (when I do not see myself represented), or I add my self-identifiers to conversations or forms, inserting and scribbling that which has been left out. I have used "Mexican," "Mexicana," "Latina," "Brown," "White," "Anglo American," and "American and Mexican" to describe myself. And, I have adopted the words "Chicana" and "Multiracial" as new ways to self-identify. But most significantly, I make sure to identify myself and talk about my lived experiences in ways that are not limiting. I use multiple labels, whole sentences, photographs, stories, and drawings to illustrate who I am. And, I work against the feeling of being constrained to "pick just one" or fit neatly into standardized check boxes. I am an East coast Mexi-Anglo Chicana, connected to Pennsylvania and New York City, Mexico, the South, England, and California, and I am so much more.

Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

Not to justify my existence in this world.

Not to keep the races separate within me.

Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.

Not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical or ethnic ambiguity.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

To identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify.

To identify myself differently than how my parents identify me.

To identify myself differently than my brothers and sisters.

To identify myself differently in different situations.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

To create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial or multiethnic.

To change my identity over my lifetime--and more than once.

To have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people.

To freely choose whom **I befriend and love.**

(Root, 1994)

⁴⁴ Shopping in the market in San Miguel, you will often have a vendor throw in *el pilon*, a little something extra, one for the road. I share Root's *Bill of Rights* (1994) as the *pilon* because it is something that has helped me tremendously on this journey.

Storytelling Interlude

Both of my cultures have deeply rooted ancestral forms of storytelling that passed histories from one generation to the next and enculturated identities. The use of my stories (intertwined into theory, narratives, poems, conversations, photographs, and embroidered drawings) is part of my families' practice. And, it became a compelling form for theorizing and analyzing the daily constructions and contestations of my culture and identity (Holman Jones et al., 2013). This autohistoria/autoethnography and the fluid, hybrid forms composed, serve as a text through which to consider Mexicana/American/Chicana /Multiracial/artistic epistemologies.

Storytelling crosses both sides of my body—my Anglo and Mexican features and cells. It is in the roots of my ancestors; the travelers who crossed miles, mixed blood, and survived wars, invasions, emigrations/immigration, religious and spiritual persecutions, disease and death; who were colonized and who colonized. When I begin to tell a story, I am reminded of the stories I was told: of Southern ancestors in the Appalachian Mountains; the possible French Huguenot link in our family; the maybe decedents of King Charlemagne; and the mixed Melungeon people I wonder about. When I create artwork, it is a journey into the past through memories, narratives, songs, and ephemera. It is a way that I reimagine my identity. I envision the pathways that lead these past events to become the stories my family shares or the songs we sing, which define who we are. When I begin to tell a story, I am reminded the stories I was told about the Otomí and Chichimeca tribes who inhabited our central highland Mexican town. I imagine my indigenous elders confronting other tribes, resisting the Spanish, eventually calling

themselves *Mexicano*, and then battling each other in a civil war. Some of my favorite stories come from my paternal *bisabuela*'s life. The last time I remember seeing her, she was sitting in the little room where she made her tortillas. I remember the heavy metal tortilla press under her old hands patting the *masa* (corn hominy flour). That press is now in my mother's kitchen in Pennsylvania, a spirit of the ancient past in our modern home. Maria, my *bisabuela* would tell my mother stories about cooking for the men during Mexico's revolution. She was forced to cook and give away the little food they had to both the soldiers and the revolutionaries that demanded to be fed. The men sat in the same kitchen where we told our stories in decades later. In those early twentieth century moments, I suspect Maria never would have imagined retelling her experiences to an *Americana*, the mother of her future great-granddaughter. Who would have guessed that her words would be translated in English for that little girl to understand, and then remembered and recounted in this thesis project? My *abuela* Concha told endless stories too, from the same kitchen. Histories, gossip, lives, and where we came from were all told within that kitchen, over food and children running noisily, and in chilly nights over *té de manzanilla*.

My maternal family had a strong tie to storytelling too. Growing up with my Southern-bred grandparents, we were surrounded with tales that tied us to the Robinette's and that family's journeys. I shared most of my life's memories with my maternal grandparents and storytelling and music are a substantial part of those memories. I remember one of the first being a song my mother and I would sing as we approached the wooded and winding hill towards my grandmother's house. The song seemed to have been written just for our trips to see them. We boisterously sang:

Over the river and through the woods. To Grandmother's house we go. The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh. Through white and drifted snow...

The songs from my childhood, which my mother and my maternal grandmother sang to me, are significant in my memories of my family. Every Sunday my grandfather would read the Funny Pages to my brother and me. He would end each session with an educational piece printed in the paper, patiently explaining the history or science lesson for that day. Sharing their own history was also part of our visits with my grandparents. My grandfather would laugh at how surprised we were learning about his life on a farm—the adventures to the outhouse and his mother's practical ease in chopping a chicken's neck for dinner. After a few stories he would put on some music, a big band tune or some bluegrass.

I always felt instantly connected to my grandmother's tales. Her southern drawl recounted a life that was surrounded by music and art. Her mother, Bessie, was a painter and my grandmother often told me she remembered her painting by the fireplace with a paintbrush in her hand and a cigarette dangling from her mouth. My grandmother Dorothy and her sister were the musicians. My grandmother embraced art and music, and I emulated her creative spirit growing up. I played several string instruments just like she did, learning how to play the bass and cello in school, while her expertise was the violin. Dance was also our shared passion. Music would come on and she would want to teach me her best moves, as if I was her girlfriend. Usually she wanted to dance the Jitterbug while telling me stories about meeting soldiers at Camp Croft in South Carolina and summer trips to Myrtle Beach. Now, I look at the black and white photographs of her in her bathing suit and those great long legs the Wilburn women are known for. She looked

as beautiful as a pin up girl in those beach shots and I wanted to be just like her, fashionable and fun. I remember dancing with her in her kitchen; she was not shy at all, not bold, but she knew how to enjoy herself. She would have a sweet smile and her blue eyes would light up, as she put on The Andrews Sisters.

He's the boogie-woogie bugle boy of Company B

A-toot a-toot, a-toot diddle-ee-ada-toot

My brother and I learned about our history through my paternal grandfather's Anglo-Saxon accounts of stories, poetry, and songs. He would also read us Native American poetry and tell elaborate stories of the Robinette's that came before him that exemplified our complex origins and the fascination my grandfather taught us for all cultures. He informed us of our history with immense pride and also laughed at some of the characters in our family history that we were related to. He read stories from the kitchen table, choosing the most wild to share with us, knowing I would appreciate them. Laughing in amusement at my surprise, my grandfather told us of moonshiners, hillbillies, convicted witches, and he winked as he asked me what I thought about the people I came from. I also remember my mother's deep fascination with these stories, pulling out the women's narratives and sharing them out loud. Many times we would relax in the living room and he would put on music. His tastes were incredibly varied and we would listen to big band, classical, and jazz. My favorite though was the old-timey Southern music. I was fascinated by the blend of sounds that mixed Irish jigs and English ballads with a South Carolina twang. Songs like *Mama Don't Allow No Low Down Hangin' Around*, a fiddle song by my own ancestor Melvin Robinette, pointed to our rural mountain past. I would imagine my relatives gathered together telling the stories of

their journeys, and their ancestors from their simple kitchens or men gathered around campfires with fiddles and banjos. The childhood songs that seemed arbitrary then, are a nod to our family's origins. One of my favorite songs followed the tradition of singing about ones journey.

I came from Alabama, Wid a banjo on my knee,
I'm gwyne to Louisiana, My true love for to see.
It rain'd all night the day I left, the weather it was dry,
The sun so hot I froze to death; Susanna, don't you cry.
Oh! Susanna, Oh don't you cry for me,
Cos' I've come from Alabama, Wid my banjo on my knee

And the song my mother sang to me to help me sleep reminds me now of the stories she told me about her grandmother's cooking; warm biscuits, fried ochre and chicken, dense pound cake, and all the sweets a grandmother makes.

Mama's little baby loves short'nin', short'nin',
Mama's little baby loves short'nin' bread

The stories of my family's experiences and the songs that go along with the memories of their words guide me through my life's journey. Between the Smokey Mountains and the Sierra Madres, our family blends folk and *ranchera* (traditional Mexican music) melodies, songs known for their narratives of the countryside and national pride.

My home's across the Smokey Mountains,
And I'll never get to see you any more, more, more,
I'll never get to see you any more.

Goodbye honey, sugar darling

Que me entierren en la sierra al pie de los magueyales

y que me cubra esta tierra que es cuna de hombres cabales

[Let them bury me in the mountains at the foot of the magueys and let this soil
cover me, this soil which is a cradle for upright men]

Untitled Poem

I find myself where two pieces of fabric are sewn together

where a piece of Mexican manta meets my grandma's vintage silk scarf.

I am finding myself in that deep in between space,

hidden within the threads that bind those two disparate pieces of fabric together.

Weaving in and out of each and creating a whole,

new territory.

The twisting and blending, the sewing and dancing of thread

in and out that holds the two pieces tightly beautifully

and awkwardly, surprisingly and familiar,

this is who I am.

The thread that embroiders her way through the borderlands

between two, creating a third space/place

of my own.

Methodology

The colorful variegated narrative I have sewn is my living testimony. That is to say, this thesis project is an autohistoria/artful autoethnography that reveals the complex experience of identifying as (Anglo) American, Mexican, Chicana, and Multiracial in the U.S. It also exhibits my search for self and self-definition, home, belonging, the many labels I embrace as part of my multifaceted identity performance, and the strategies I used to come to this understanding. Specifically, this layered text braids together (a) a theoretical discussion of identity, diaspora, and home, (b) my *vivencias* (lived experiences), and (c) arts-based inquiry.

This non-traditional thesis project is a needed disruption to linear social science models, traditional analysis, and positivism.⁴⁵ In particular, theory is not separated from the personal as I interweave my experiences and voice into traditional social science analysis.⁴⁶ As such I fuse academic research with autobiographic visual artistic narratives to illustrate the refusal of binary thinking; the tearing apart of body and mind; and the separation of the academic with the aesthetic/literary/personal. In addition, the visual art component is a disruption to both traditional autobiographic and artistic practices inasmuch as the art “supersedes the pictorial” (Anzaldúa, 1993, p. 113), appearing not as supportive illustrations, but instead artful actions and narrative. Also, my self-reflections are

⁴⁵ I was influenced by feminist research methods (e.g. Reinharz, 1992), Chicana feminist methods (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2007; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Hurtado, 1998), and autoethnographic methods (Holman Jones et al., 2013).

⁴⁶ This is an essential characteristic of feminist research that is not typical of mainstream analysis (Reinharz, 1992). See Anzaldúa (2007), Chabram-Dernersesian (2009), Chang (2014), and Fordham-Hernández (2009) for examples.

blended and weighted equally with theory. Moreover, language and the written word were not privileged over visual, personal narratives, or experiential knowledge. Through this lens, this aesthetic project and personal journey/narratives become a mode for inquiry (Homan Jones et al., 2013) and *I* myself appear as the research subject⁴⁷ (Reinharz, 1992).

I adopt Chang's (2014) perspective that Multiracial individuals can use their *Multiracial facultad*⁴⁸ and our *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 2007) as tools for survival from racism and intolerance, and to deconstruct racial identity boundaries. Therefore, for Anglo-Latinas from the Northeast, Multiracial identities, or any identity on the margins, this project, a counter-story offers a window into a world otherwise unseen (García, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso 2002).

To observe moments of resistance to absolute and dichotomous identity perceptions, this section addresses the Feminist methodologies utilized in my project. Then, I define Chicana feminist autohistoria and artful autoethnography, two modes of inquiry employed in this project as a counterhegemonic strategy for Multiracial individuals to understand and communicate their experience, and to refuse "the fragmentation that comes from the boundaries of identities" (Cruz, 2001, p. 667). Finally, I record my autohistoria as an imaginative recovery (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2009) of identity in the Chicana/o and Multiracial

⁴⁷ This is another essential characteristic of feminist research methodology that is not typical of mainstream analysis (Reinharz, 1992).

⁴⁸ In her examination of how students of color come to identify as Multiracial, Chang (2014) introduced the concept of *Multiracial facultad* to highlight the unique perspective and cultural intuition Multiracial individuals bring to understanding and performing a Multiracial identity, and resisting monoracial normativity. As described by Anzaldúa (2007), the concept of *la facultad* is a shift in perception by which awareness for deeper realities, inner knowing, and survival from oppression are possible.

repertoire. As such, I construct my reality as a counter narrative (Klahn, 2003) through these modes of inquiry and I re(imagine) a story about myself. These acts provide entry to an otherwise invisible experience, challenge dominant discourses on race (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and broaden the discussion of racial identity and self-authorship through aesthetics.

Feminist Alternative Research Methods

For feminists, hegemonic and traditional methods of research (qualitative and quantitative) do not capture the realities of their experiences (Hurtado, 2003). Therefore, their investigations require that they develop new methods of theorizing and inquiry, and utilize multiple methods of research (Reinharz, 1992). They also do this as a method to disrupt racist, heterosexist, imperializing language, deficit stories, and master narratives (Hurtado, 2003). Because Multiracial identities are left out of dominant discourses, I found alternative research methods, such as feminists approaches to be required.

Feminists include poetry, literature, biography, readings of aesthetic representations, and artistic production, as legitimate sources of data and frameworks for inquiry that provide multidimensional perspectives of phenomena (Hurtado, 2003). For example, the feminist anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) transforms theory by combining the multiple genres of poetry, letters, essays, interviews, prose, and narratives (Anzaldúa, 2009). A non-academic example, is Norma Zuñiga Benavides and Blanca Zuñiga Azios' novel, *Holidays and Heartstrings: Recuerdos de la Casa de Miel* (1995), a Chicana's examination of cultural experiences. This novel documents the family's story as the women reveal and preserve the cultural experiences of their lives on

the U.S./Mexican border. Through a patchwork of woven passages, family mementoes, history, photographs, poems, letters, *antojitos* (snacks), prayers, family myths, celebrations, and memories are shared.

Writing the Self

Autobiographic works⁴⁹ have been powerful means by which racial/ethnic and gender/sexual minorities have voiced and legitimized their experiences, initiating agency, healing, and self-transformation through the authoring of fragmented and painful experiences (Slepoy, 2003). Anzaldúa shaped an innovative autobiographic act to give voice to the marginalized, a genre to write the self that she coined *autohistoria*, or, a story of the self (2002a). This method of autobiographical narrative, employed especially by women-of-color, disrupts⁵⁰ limitations of Western academic reasoning and traditional autobiographic disciplines (Anzaldúa, 2009) by transforming storytelling into a counterhegemonic method to reimagine and rewrite personal and cultural stories.

we can only repeat the voices previously unheard, rebuffed, or underestimated as we attempt to redeem that which has been disregarded in our history. Voices of women from the past, voices of Chicanas, Mexicanas, and Indias, are utterances which are still minimized, spurned, even scored.... We are spoken about, spoken for, and ultimately encoded as... women... who cannot know how to express or authorize our own narratives. But we will. And we do. (Pérez, 1999, p. XV)

⁴⁹ Embodied and creative autobiographic works include, but are not limited to prose, poetry, essay, multidisciplinary anthologies, oral history, autoethnography, fables, colloquialisms, musical composition, theatrical/dance performance, performance art, photography, painting, drawing, and printmaking (Hurtado, 1998; Reinharz, 1992).

⁵⁰ Employing “disruption” as a methodology is a canon of Chicana feminism. See Hurtado (1998) for more information.

A theoretical basis for all feminist scholars is to locate and contest what is left out (Hill Collins, 1990), and to employ methodologies that do not silence women's voices (Hurtado, 1998). There is an urgency to bring untold and under-told narratives to the forefront. Chicana feminists are committed to extracting and reclaiming female knowledges and voices in order to make visible and legitimize women's stories (Cruz, 2001). The feminist methodology of self-writing, provides an opportunity to infuse *herstory* into historic, and academic and cultural spaces that challenge and repair the historically male-centered record of women where women have been left out and silenced (Pérez, 1999; Reinharz, 1992). This affirms for women their own space and language within society and provides a lens to rewrite and reimagine the histories and experiences of women (Cruz, 2001; Pérez, 1999; Reinharz, 1992; Slepoy, 2003).

There are only stories—many stories. The ones that intrigue me are the tales by or about women... as I reconstruct the past. (Pérez, 1999, p. XV)

Another theoretical basis for feminist scholars is the awareness of women's conditions in life, and their/our oppression makes the struggle for justice more possible (Beauvoir, 1993; Lorde, 2012). Simone de Beauvoir explains: "It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting" (1993, p. 113). In the same way, Chicana feminists privilege women's lives and the adversity they experience from marginalized positions (Slepoy, 2003). The self-examination of a woman's pain can lead to self-realization and therefore self-transformation (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) Therefore, reflective awareness and acknowledgement provides women an identity of epistemic privilege, an advantaged knowledge about society's hierarchies and the patterns of power (Moya, 1997). In

addition, personal experience is an asset to feminist analysis and often a starting point from which to develop inquiry *and* data, and to analyze findings, often presented in the voice of the researcher herself (Reinharz, 1992). In much the same way, value for the lived experience grounds Chicana feminist theory, which insists that theory be developed from our everyday lived experiences (Hurtado, 2003). Furthermore, Chicana feminists suggest starting from the language we know best (Moraga, 1983b), our own narratives (Anzaldúa, 2007) and the female narratives in our families (Cruz, 2011).

In the same manner, autohistoria is concerned with who is telling the story and what stories are being told (Anzaldúa, 1993). For example, Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1983) foundational anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back* challenges the limitations of Western academic reasoning, acting against the disconnection of the lived experience with the intellectual. Instead they, among other Chicana feminists, insist theory come from writing *and* lived experiences (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1983; Hurtado, 2003). Autohistoria draws from feminist practice by centering marginalized female voices and contributes to contemporary methodology in the social sciences by reviving story-telling/oral history—it is feminist work that validates women's experiences (Reinharz, 1992).

Chicana/Latina transformative self-writing falls under several labels such as: autohistoria (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2002a, 2007), autobiographic fictions (e.g., Klahn, 2003); Automitografías (e.g., Valasco, 2004); Latina Autobiography (e.g., Torres, 1996), Latina Feminist Testimonio (e.g., Smith & Watson, 2010; Menchu, 1998; Hurtado, 2003) and can also be found through other creative practices (Henríquez Betancor, 2000). Despite the linguistic terminological differences, these Chicana/Latina self-writing practices

privilege experiential and embodied knowledge and they (re)read and reimagine Chicana/Latina identity, community, and culture in ways *she*, the Latina, would have herself be read, which fosters agency, resistance, cultural critique, healing, and transformation (Velasco, 2004; Anzaldúa, 2007, 2009).

In particular, the self-writing practices that emerged as a result of the 1960's Chicano Movement (the sociopolitical movement for civil and cultural rights) offer counter narratives to negative representations of Mexican-origin people from mainstream American accounts, and redefine Mexican/Chicana/o identity and culture through their own voice (Klahn, 2003; Velasco, 2004). For people of Mexican-origin in the U.S., whose experience is shaped by a history of colonization and subsequent marginalization, life narratives can create a space of resistance (Velasco, 2004). For example Américo Paredes' foundational Border novel, *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958) (re)members a community by retrieving lost territory, memory, and stories of communities absent from American history and discourses (Klahn, 2003).

Autohistoria, like many feminist practices, asks woman to reach “down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself” where “each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling” (Lorde, 2012, pp. 36-37), to write herself. It is a relational form of autobiographical writing that is as much self-reflection as it is storying the self (Anzaldúa, 2009). The autohistorian embeds her search for personal and cultural meaning within her life story (Anzaldúa, 2009). For example, Anzaldúa's autohistoria, *Borderlands* (2007), the most recognized and acclaimed of autohistoria-teoría demonstrates how the act of self-writing is a method of understanding, contextualizing, and communicating the complexities of

one's identity and cultural experiences, specifically the boundary crossing indefinable Borderland identity (Anzaldúa, 2007). In another example, found in *This Bridge We Call Home*, Anzaldúa (2002a) demonstrates, through her process of *conocimiento*, how writing and creative acts can be ways of examining and ultimately transforming the self. These self-reflexive actions resemble multi-method feminist researchers who draw on different tools throughout the 'journey' of their research and whom are open to discoveries and changes to research inquiries and self-transformations as a result of the journey (Reinharz, 1992), much as I have done with this thesis project. For both multi-method feminist researchers and autohistorians, "the process becomes part of the product ... new experiences are interwoven and new voices heard" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 212). In other words, feminist researchers use the process of research itself as a means to reveal new findings about their subject matter and the self (Reinharz, 1992). Much in the same way, Anzaldúa coined her own method of personal transformation called *conocimiento*,⁵¹ a process of developing autohistoria and theory, *and* a method of transforming the self. Developing my autohistoria would not have been possible without bravely walking through this process and actively reflecting, contextualizing, and communicating my experiences.

Chicana and Latina women's identity is shaped by cultural experiences and the intersections of their social identities. Artist, curator, and scholar Amalia Mesa-Bains (1991) asserts heritage, origin, and cultural practices are deeply rooted in the worldview of Chicanas. For many Chicana/Latinas and Multiracial individuals, theoretical and

⁵¹ *Conocimiento* is a Spanish word that means knowledge, however I am applying the word as Anzaldúa (2002), described as a "consciousness urging you to act on the knowledge gained" (p. 577). *Conocimiento* is a form of spiritual inquiry and a path-like process of deep awareness reached via creative acts (mental and somatic)

cultural productions are a blend of cultural and personal biography. For example, Amalia Mesa-Bains and Anzaldúa assert their work is not only a representation of the self, but also their culture (Anzaldúa, 1993; Mesa-Bains, 1991). Moreover, Anzaldúa asserts she “cannot separate [her] writing from any part of [her] life. It is all one” (2007, p. 95). Autohistoria is an intersectional approach from which theory and cultural production can be developed around personal and cultural meaning. It is an act that “goes beyond the traditional self-portrait or autobiography” (Anzaldúa, 1993, p.113) in that the soul of the community, cultural and familial history, tradition, fictive elements, self-reflection, and sometimes art practices, are embedded in the writer/artists’ biography (Anzaldúa, 1993, 2002, 2009). In this way, autohistoria can document the complexities of the Chicana/Latina and the Multiracial condition. Moreover, autohistoria empowers the development of interwoven, politically informed individual and collective identities (Anzaldúa, 2009; Slepoy, 2003). That is to say, “Personal experiences—revised and in other ways redrawn—become a lens with which to reread and rewrite existing cultural stories” (Keating, 2005, p. 6).

As a result, autohistoria reveals the limitations of Western academic reasoning, linear social science models, and traditional autobiographic disciplines. And, the self-aware autohistorian devoted to social justice (Anzaldúa, 2009), employs this method as a strategy to discern and transform adversity (Slepoy, 2003). The autohistorian can create new images about herself as she writes her autohistoria, consequently critiquing, redefining, and constructing identity and culture which, thereby activates resistance, agency, healing, and transformation for herself and others (Velasco, 2004; Anzaldúa, 2007, 2009). This is because, when one’s personal experience is voiced through

autobiographical narratives, an empowered understanding of the world is created (Slepoy, 2003). That is to say, she reimagines herself by finding the scattered pieces of her *Coyolxauhqui*-self and putting them back together (Anzaldúa, 2002a). Creators of autohistoria are bound through an intersectional collective identity. They/we are called upon by Anzaldúa to make work from this intersectional place, to “rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv)

Effective examples of research which have married data with personal experience in order to expose seldom told Multiracial/Multiethnic experiences, are the works of: Chabram-Dernersesian (2009), who contextualizes her Mexican-Puerto Rican experience in Southern California which was missing from federal classification and Census data reports; Chang (2014) who offers her own Latina-Asian-White testimonial within her study of Multiracial students and the sharing of Multiracial stories in Borderland spaces; Fordham-Hernández (2009) who reflects on the paradoxes, contested experiences, and identity simultaneity of being a White mother raising Multiracial Chicana/os in the American North; García’s (1998) oral history research which attempts to capture the experience of Chicana/os in the Pacific Northwest in a way that honors the long established ancestral method of oral history; Jackson et al. (2013) who examined Multiracial participant life-story event narratives to reveal the resilience processes they employed to cope with Multiracial stressors; Johnson (1999) who synthesizes ethnic identity and Multiracial terminology within his paradoxical bicoastal White-Chicano life story; Kennedy & Romo’s (2013) autoethnographic action study that explores the processes a Multiracial/Multiethnic family uses to maintain their children’s heritage

language and the family's multiculturalism; Romo's (2011) interviews of Black-Mexican individuals which shows how choosing, accomplishing, and asserting a "Blaxican" (Black-Mexican) identity challenges the dominant monoracial discourse in the U.S. particularly among ethnic communities; and the MAVIN Foundation's anthology (Root & Kelley, 2003) of Multiracial research and issues written alongside of Multiracial youth's testimonials. What is more, studies which have broadened the research of Latina/os outside of the traditional areas of the Southwest and West or examined Multiracial-Latina/os are far and few between. These include: Cardenas's (1976) review of Chicana/os living in the Midwest; Fordham-Hernández (2009) reflections on the paradoxes, contested experiences, and simultaneity of identity through her experience of being a White mother raising Multiracial Chicana/os in the American North; Garcia's (1997) analysis of immigrant and migrant mushroom workers in Pennsylvania; García's (1998) oral history research which attempts to capture the experience of a Chicana in the Pacific Northwest; Gómez's (2000) study on the phenotype of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in the Northeast; Smith's (2006) survey on Mexicans living in New York City; and Solá's (2011) history of Latina/os in northeast Ohio. Finally, aesthetic works: literature, poetry, and visual art from Latina/os that speak from marginalized communities and outside of one-dimensional experiences should not only be seen as evocative or creative but as personal works that critically comment on the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). These include: Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales (1986) whom blend both of their Multiracial-Latina-Jewish narrative voices, in Spanish and English, from unlikely sites (Europe, Brooklyn, the Caribbean, and California) in *Getting Home Alive*; Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) who combines dual language poetry, prose, and

philosophy with theory and academic cultural discourse from a hybrid-identity, queer, Chicana experience; the spoken word poetry of *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe* (1994) a compilation of voices from the Nuyorican Poets Café; and myself (this thesis project) in which I share my Mexican/Anglo-American/East Coast/self-identified-Chicana narrative and aesthetic project. These endeavors, from seemingly singular Chicana/o and Latina/o voices, expose often-unheard Chicana/o and Latina/o communities.

Arts-Based Inquiry and Artful Autoethnography

In this second section, I define radical arts-based inquiry and artful autoethnography, to exemplify how a text-only or visual art only methods are not adequate to theorize and encapsulate the complexity of my identity and experience. Arts-based inquiry allowed me to understand and communicate the meanings behind my artful actions. Particularly the practice of artful autoethnography (via creative narratives and visual art) allowed me to communicate in the aesthetic language I know best (Bartleet, 2013).

Autoethnography is an interpretive, critical, and qualitative method similar to but different than autohistoria. Autoethnography is defined as the critical use of personal experience for theorizing and critiquing culture experiences. This methodology is specifically characterized by personal work that also (a) purposefully examines or critiques culture, (b) makes a contribution to existing research, (c) intentionally utilizes vulnerability, and (d) creates reciprocity with audiences (Holman Jones et al., 2013). In this way, autoethnography challenges and disrupts traditional social scientific research paradigms and problematizes the

notion of objectivity and impersonal research. In contrast it honors artful, emotional, and embodied knowledges; approaches individuals and experiences consciously; and welcomes transformation and difference (Holman Jones et al., 2013). This reflexive methodology characterizes the distinct, nuanced, and dynamic facets of life that are often considered un-objective or too feminine by traditional research and therefore devalued. It stories the experiences of individuals, emotions, and bodily experience; embraces the aesthetic and literary, and the experiences of the disenfranchised; characteristics which traditional and impersonal social science research is not as capable of (Holman Jones et al., 2013). Furthermore, it is concerned with the ethics and politics of research and a commitment to social change. A shift in the last four decades has brought more attention to reflexivity to qualitative research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and awareness of the impact social identities (such as gender, class, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity) have on research and understanding positionality and difference (Holman Jones et al., 2013).

As such, autoethnography challenges traditional research paradigms that fail to represent Multiracial identities in the discussion of ethnic identity and the historically silenced experiences of both Multiracial individuals and women of color, by challenging monoracial normativity and providing a method of reflective self-representation. Particularly, autohistoria/autoethnography allowed me to tell my complex story of being a *Nepantlera*, a woman straddling multiple cultures and, it is the processes with which I came to self-identify and find 'home' and belonging. In doing this, my autoethnography redefines what it means to be

American, Mexican, and Chicana. However, more significant was the process itself of deep reflection and truth-telling (what Anzaldúa identifies as *conocimiento*) that revealed in true autohistoria/autoethnographic fashion, a hopeful (Holman Jones et al., 2013) and transformative (Anzaldúa, 2002a, 2007) journey of becoming Multiracial; what Chang (2014) calls, being an *altravesada*, “a person who dares to live outside normative parameters and to be different” (p. 27). It took courage to tell.

Autoethnography, like autohistoria transforms storytelling into a counterhegemonic method to reimagine and rewrite personal and cultural stories from an insider’s knowledge of those experiences. Storytelling is both a deeply rooted ancestral practice for many, and in qualitative research can be an essential way of knowing for some communities (Holman Jones et al., 2013). Therefore, autoethnography, like autohistoria is particularly helpful and transformative to Multiracial individuals whose narratives and image have long been forbidden (Ifekwunigwe, 2004) and misunderstood (Root, 2002).

Radical arts-based research and artful autoethnography. Finley (2005) defines radical arts-based research as a social scientific based method of inquiry that involves art production as a research method. It is a conscious practice of ‘action-centered’ creative practice, which grounds itself in critical race, queer, feminist, and Third World postcolonial theory, and creates reciprocity as it is applied to the same communities where the works are produced (Finley, 2005). It is disruptive and revolutionary to traditional inquiry in that it affirms that art is equal to science and even a more relevant means of inquiry (Finley, 2005). Like

autoethnography, radical arts-based research uses personal experiences as a lens to read cultural histories and to express the texts that formed an individual (Finley, 2005).

Some autoethnographers produce autoethnographic research by presenting aesthetic projects (e.g., visual art, poetry, film, dance, among others), which is a radical arts-based approach to research. Ellis and Bochner (2000) define this as artful autoethnography, a method of inquiry and producing cultural knowledge, and a form of representation for research that is developed from creative forms of expression. It is an intimate and imaginative way of producing new and dynamic products of qualitative research and it engages audiences in emotional and sensory ways (Holman Jones et al., 2013). As such, artful autoethnography provides a creative action to discern, contextualize, and communicate reflexive stories and critique cultural experiences (Holman Jones et al., 2013). Because Multiracial individuals' sometimes situational, flexible, and adaptive identity is often mistaken for confusion (Root, 2002), or perceived as deviant or taboo (Anzaldúa, 2007; Chang, 2014; Ifekwunigwe, 2004), artful autoethnography provides an alternative means to explore, understand, and communicate the sometimes disorienting schizophrenic-like identity, outside of hegemonic judgments that are thrust upon non-normative identities. Artful autoethnography is a method of doing this that reaches beyond words and academic prose. Because a text-only autoethnography or a visual art-only endeavor could not theorize and encapsulate my multifaceted identity and my experience, artful autoethnography (along with autohistoria) allowed me to tell my *nepantlic*, complex story. And, it

is the mode of inquiry with which I came to self-identify. It is how I found ‘home’ and belonging, and contextualized my experiences. In doing this, my autoethnography redefines what it means to be American, Mexican, and Chicana and illustrates this process.

However, more significant was the process itself of deep reflection and truth telling (what Anzaldúa identifies as *conocimiento*). Art is an inductive practice in which we learn from doing, reflecting, and discussing (Gray & Malins, 2004). It has changed the way I think about my identity and it has provided new ways to name and identify myself. My autoethnographic art reveals a hopeful (Holman Jones et al., 2013) and transformative (Anzaldúa, 2002a, 2007) journey of becoming Multiracial. It is a counter narrative tool for sharing the experience and knowledges of Multiracials and provides the artistic and embodied visualization of my self-identifications.

Who Am I

“I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me” (hooks, 1994, p. 59). Like hooks, my desire was to communicate my multiple allegiances and the experience of inhabiting multiple worlds, to show you my *Coyolxauhqui*-scars from what Anzaldúa describes as being chopped up into little fragments—each piece of an ascribed and labeled self (Anzaldúa 1983, p. 205).

Before completing this thesis project, I did not understand why places and photography, simple domestic items like my paternal *abuela*’s Mexican napkins, or the embodied creative knowledge my maternal grandmother taught me, held

such great meaning. I did not understand why it was so hard for me to allow myself to perform a contradictory identity that included all of these people, places, and memories. However, when I re-examined my homesickness, my attachment to familial ‘things’; and when I investigated the answers to the question, “who am I”; I realized I had a profound need to share these stories, objects, and memories as they related to my identity.

At the same time, I began to learn, through Anzaldúa and other Chicana feminists that I could (re)member and reimagine my identity. I learned that the homesickness was common among diaspora and could be quieted through creative acts. I chose writing and art. I learned that these precious ‘things’ and blurry half-memories could be artifacts part of my inquiry, elements of my data for this autohistoria/autoethnography. Therefore, my enchantment with autohistoria was natural as it theorizes around the experiences of Chicanas and Latinas, interweaving personal stories and identities to share politically informed collective identities and histories (Anzaldúa, 2002a, 2009; Slepoy, 2003). In constructing my own autohistoria, I realized I could be inclusive and voice the different and conflicting worlds that I identify with and the multitude of contested experiences. I could create a counter narrative to the absolute and exclusionary demands I have heard from many of the communities of which I am a part of: Mexican/Chicano and (Anglo) American. Inspired by Anzaldúa who asks us to reimagine identity in expansive and open-ended ways (Keating, 2009), autohistoria provided me with a canvas to “reject the demands of monolithic identities and exclusive, single-issue alliances” (Keating, 2009, p. 2) and expand

the concept of identity.

Employing a feminist multi-method approach reflects my life, my profession, and my studies. I identify with multiple racial/ethnic and class-based communities. My professional experiences and my studies have been interdisciplinary. I have always lived in contrasting worlds, straddled borders, and embodied crossroads. Throughout my life, I have drenched myself in art, aesthetics, and women's stories. I have also been moved by the call for social justice by feminism and Chicana/o Studies. And, I carry a curiosity for disciplines beyond these: embodied knowledge and dance, psychology, philosophy, cultural studies, and literature, among others. This thesis project, much like my identity, is the central point where these disparate worlds meet. This thesis could only be interdisciplinary. It is my hope that the "richness I've tried to bring to [this project] can give women insight into what it means to exist with the body of [this woman]" (Demetrakopoulos, 1983, p xi).

This autohistoria/autoethnography is focused on five research questions:

1. What do my everyday Multiracial identity constructions look, sound, and feel like and how do these relate to my self-concept and the perception of myself to others?
2. How do I, a Multiracial woman part of a Mexican diaspora and also an (Anglo) American define 'home'?
3. What strategies can be used as a response to the rigid boxing-in and labeling of racial identities and, to cross normative monoracial constructs? Do these coping mechanisms have the capacity to heal the fractures from absolute and dichotomous identity-label oppression, and create personal agency?

4. How does memory, storytelling, and visual art offer possibilities for knowing, re(imagining), and revealing my racial/ethnic identities.
5. What is the result, if I request help from the women of my past, my grandmothers and ask them to guide me together in answering these inquiries?

It has been deeply important for me to self-name and give voice to the experiences I have had surrounding my identity. I am an artist who has always been fascinated with investigating and drawing on my lived experiences to create art (Saarnivaara, 2003). However, I was challenged with the “task of understanding and communicating the personal, creative, embodied, and cultural processes” (Bartleet, 2013, p. 444), which I used to create. The flexibility of feminist methods, like the work of Anzaldúa that calls for a tolerance for ambiguity, inspired me to develop honest and reflective personal narratives in a manner that was open-ended and inclusive. My work now, more than ever is informed by Chicana feminism, Borderland theory, and Multiracial identity theory, which I use to construct and reveal my self-identities. I look to feminism to draw strength, purpose, and sisterhood; and to autohistoria/autoethnography to show me how to communicate and to open my mind to the varied methods of sharing my stories. It is from this lens that I, as Frida Kahlo famously said, paint my own reality (Lucie-Smith, 1999).

Methods

For this project, photographic images within familial domestic spaces are used to reveal personal stories and memories, and embody feelings of belonging. Embroidered drawings that employ regional and colloquial language and

culturally symbolic forms, colors, and materials communicate personal stories of Multiracial identity and also reveal memories, and symbolic significance. Similar to the way Saldivar-Hull (1991) describes Anzaldúa's texts as being *mestizaje* themselves; my approach to this project was *mestiza*-like in that I focused on mixing together autobiographic methods to reveal my identities. "Like the people whose lives it chronicles, *Borderlands* resists genre boundaries as well as geopolitical borders" (Saldivar-Hull, 1991, p. 211) and I argue, linguistic and artistic borders as well. My aesthetic approach that employs various mediums, inspired by radical arts-based inquiry (Denzin, 2000), centers on every day and ephemeral phenomena, with intentions to vocalize the Borderland experience, as well as the familial ancestral voices that shaped my experiences and inspire my words, and which allow a broad audience to access, investigate, and become empowered by my work. The combination and juxtaposition of the two methods of art production depict the simultaneity of my experience (e.g., White/Brown, dominant/marginal), and the contrast and contradiction of my multiple racial/ethnic experiences. This thesis project and the accompanying art exhibition creates a unique personal gathering space to examine my lived experiences and for other Borderland identities to share their experiences. Through the multimethod use of re-memory, autohistoria, and artful autoethnography counter-stories were developed in a compilation of 23 photographs (20 on display in the May 18, 2014 exhibition), 8 embroidered drawings, a photography based hand-made book, and non-traditional text in the form of narratives and poetry. With these components, 'data' was co-constructed and my *Coyolxauhqui*-self was

mended, in a piecing together of personal and cultural meanings.

The grandmothers.

The grandmothers make a decision. They call for a gathering. Women from all the directions make preparations for the journey. They make sure things are taken care of in the everyday world. They know the time has come. This is the message the grandmothers send. (Hernández-Ávila, 2002, p. 531)

In my life both of my grandmothers have been significant female influences. And in this project I wrote myself by writing to my grandmothers. I ask my grandmothers for help, to walk with me in this journey. My grandmothers are here with us. They are part of the embodied investigations of who I am. My grandmothers are written on the pages of this project and they appear in each of the artful actions. The journey of creating this artwork has been a pilgrimage to a place where I found my grandmothers and also myself. The artwork acts as an *ofrenda* or an offering that honors their lives and deaths. This type of act, common among Chicana artists, “sacralize[s] the life of an ordinary person and enact[s] their empowerment” (Davalos, 2001, p.185).

The metaphoric and aesthetic use of my grandmothers (their homes, artifacts, everyday domestic tools and practices) and the conversations with them within this project, was a means of connecting myself to my two heritages, and a feminist biographic mode that is circular (Reinharz, 1992). It was a method of telling who I am with the help of the women of my past, my foremothers. I did this in the same manner Hurtado (1998) tells us many Chicana feminists (e.g., Cervantes, 1981; Moraga, 1983a; Moraga, 1983b; Córdova 1994; Cantú 1995) have done, who have written about their loyalty to their mother figures and the love and care received by them.

Chicana Art and Domesticana. The twenty-five years since the Chicano Movement has produced diverse Chicana artists of many media. As socially conscious artists, these women form a “new language of liberation for themselves” (Mesa-Bains, 1991, p. 10). Developing my own cultural texts through art follows this established Chicana aesthetic. The process of reaching back into my cultural practices and traditions, asking my ancestors to participate in my work, and centering the female voice within ‘traditional women’s work’ (embroidery, textiles, decorative and domestic arts, and photographs of domestic spaces), situates my work within the Chicana aesthetic, *Domesticana*. Mesa-Bains (1991, 1999) identifies *Domesticana* as subversion meets tradition and cultural imagery. *Domesticana* is a strategy I use to imaginatively recover and recreate my identity in intimate domestic spaces, and domestic tools are the method for crossing internal and physical terrains that take me ‘home.’

Photography. In the summer of 2011, I traveled to my paternal *abuela*’s house in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico with my camera. I knew I wanted to capture elements of my identity and the significance her house had on who I was. She had passed away in 2009 and her house, divided among her children, was now going to change forever. The pink walls, the clothesline running down the middle of the gray flagstone patio, and the rain collecting in the *lavadero* would disappear. The photographs of my life’s history that hung in her room would be taken down. In the months that I was there, I visited her house frozen and unsure how to capture such a significant space. Her house was a place I had come to several times throughout this thesis investigation, somewhere I felt called to return. My investigation began with sitting still in her house, moving from room to room, listening and remembering. I sat still and simply, felt, waited, paused, smelled the limas,

and sat with her candle (that had been lit since her passing) at night alone. I looked again and again at her home. Through the lens of my camera, I studied, questioned, and looked for myself in her house—in the dishes I knew well, her wall of photographs where I saw my own portraits through the years, and the broken patio stones. It was in trying to understand this site's significance and studying the familiar things around me that I came to understand my own significance and presence within her house.

I let my intuition guide the images, moving throughout her space in and out of each room. I selected everyday objects to examine, a drawer knob, a doorway, market bags. These were things that were familiar and recalled the familial. My technique was straightforward using local color (natural light) and leaving our family's "artifacts" as they were, as I re-examine and remember our familial space. I did this with intimacy, curiosity, and with love. I examined each common object and each well-known space, remembering the moments I shared and imagining the countless other moments that came before me in the house when it belonged to my *bisabuela*, and then all the times that were experienced by cousins, aunts and uncles while I lived a faraway life in Pennsylvania. This approach was particularly helpful in conceiving and coming to an understanding of myself that this thesis project was about truth telling, about being honest with myself and then out loud on these pages (and in the imagery) about who I am and what is important to me. This was one strategy I used to ask *quién soy yo* (who am I) and answer back with intimate imagery from a familiar domestic space. In addition, I let my camera move out of focus at times while I simultaneously felt embodied, sensory, blurry and half-there memories. This technique was particularly helpful for my autoethnographic writing process that followed, because the out of focus imagery helped me realize the importance

of sensory memory in my child-hood development, and the importance now as I examine it as data. It is through the soft-focus images that I could intensely study the colors in the images. They allowed me to recall my emotions and sensory memories tied to this place. Looking deeply through the camera lens and then re-examining the imagery—finding meaning in them became a strategy effective for healing the fractures in my self-perception and self-judgment.

Embroidered Drawings. I have been bringing some of my *abuela* Concha's cloth napkins back with me from Mexico on my trips to her house. I keep them folded together with pieces of cloth from my grandma Dot, sweet little hankies and doilies that she gifted me over the years. I use them as objects of beauty to decorate our house, to brighten a dark corner, or to keep food warm, or simply to recall these women. While developing this thesis project, I studied these items carefully. I held them in my hands and they helped me recall sensory memories—the touch of the fabrics and the embroidered images, colors, and text on cloth. Working through this project, I began to understand the importance these domestic objects held for me, realizing that they had been the colorful and graphic backdrops to domestic life in my grandmothers' homes. I remember embroidered *manta* wrapped around the tortillas on the kitchen table, or hanging to dry on the line and floating around us as we sat and talked and laughed. I remember dainty round doilies, gifts from my *bisabuela* to me. I remember dearly holding onto these pretty loops of crocheted objects in my Pennsylvania bedroom because they were the physical links back to Mexico. And, I can distinctly remember my *bisabuela* Maria handing them to me in my *abuela's* courtyard and not being able to share my gratitude with her in Spanish the way I had wanted to, but knowing and feeling our strong bond regardless.

When I think about why I am drawn to fabric, string, and ordinary objects from home to create with, I am reminded of the time I spend with my grandma Dot making crafts as gifts at her kitchen table. I loved digging through her boxes of fabric scraps, bric-a-brac, buttons, beads, pom-poms, confetti, and all kinds of things that we would experiment and create with. I loved the freedom she shared with me to create and collage reimaginings from her collected and recycled materials.

Book Art. When I am working with book art and collage materials, it is to express my contested and fluid Multiracial identity experience. Throughout this thesis project, I have been examining and reexamining my identity. Therefore, the messy and layered techniques and the juxtaposing and found materials of collage are appropriate methods to express my lived experiences. In the intimate *Amoxтли*-style (photographic) book I share my history, stories, memories, and personal iconography. For Chicana artists, book art projects like this can be viewed as paradoxical storage devices of the ephemeral or spirit-like (Pérez, 2007). In this manner, I used the creation of this book, the collecting of photographs, memories, colors, and patterns as I way to connect to my ancestors and to explore parts of my identity in a creative and embodied way. I used an existing book, removed the inside pages, and inserted my own stories in the same way this thesis acts as a counter-narrative. The serpentine shape of the book with no beginning and no end, only interpretable starting points, reflects the unfamiliar labyrinthine and *Nepantlic* path that racial identity often travels through. The winding path-shaped book is also a metaphor for my willful journey to explore my Borderland identities.

Artwork



Figure 2. Abuela's bedroom



Figure 3. Wall detail of my abuela's bedroom



Figure 4. Ladle and potholder



Figure 5. Servilleta 1



Figure 6. The lima tree



Figure 7. The courtyard



Figure 8. Blue ceramic mug

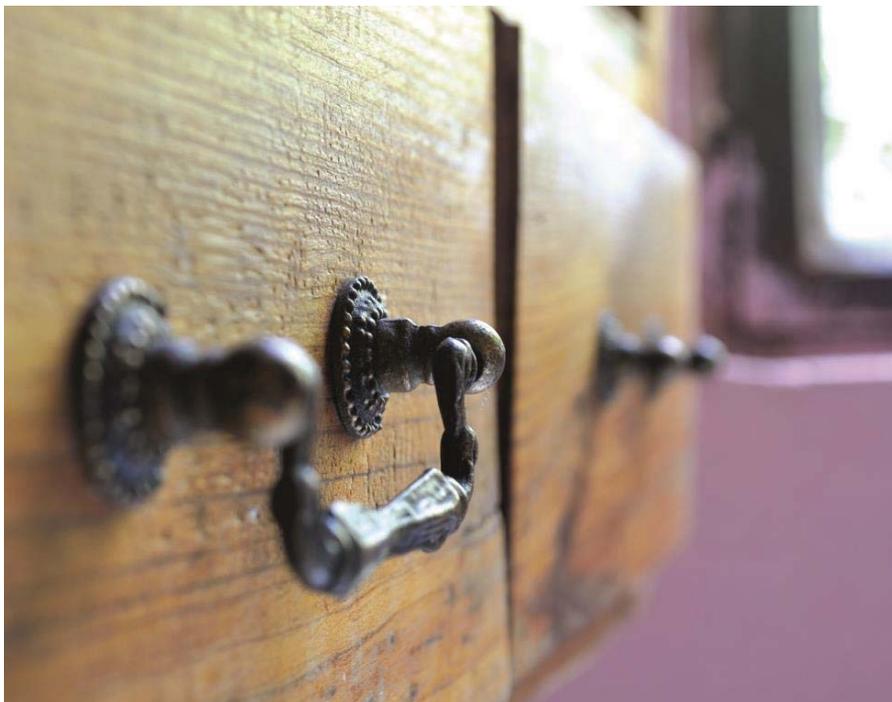


Figure 9. Kitchen drawer



Figure 10. Blue cafetera



Figure 11. Dorothy's letters to Concha



Figure 12. Shopping bags



Figure 13. Servilleta 2



Figure 14. Kitchen window



Figure 15. Corona box



Figure 16. Concha's potholders from Dorothy



Figure 17. Old white kitchen chair



Figure 18. Abuelo's machete



Figure 19. A candle for Concha



Figure 20. Folded servilletas in the courtyard



Figure 21. Servilleta 3



Figure 22. School picture on Concha's wall

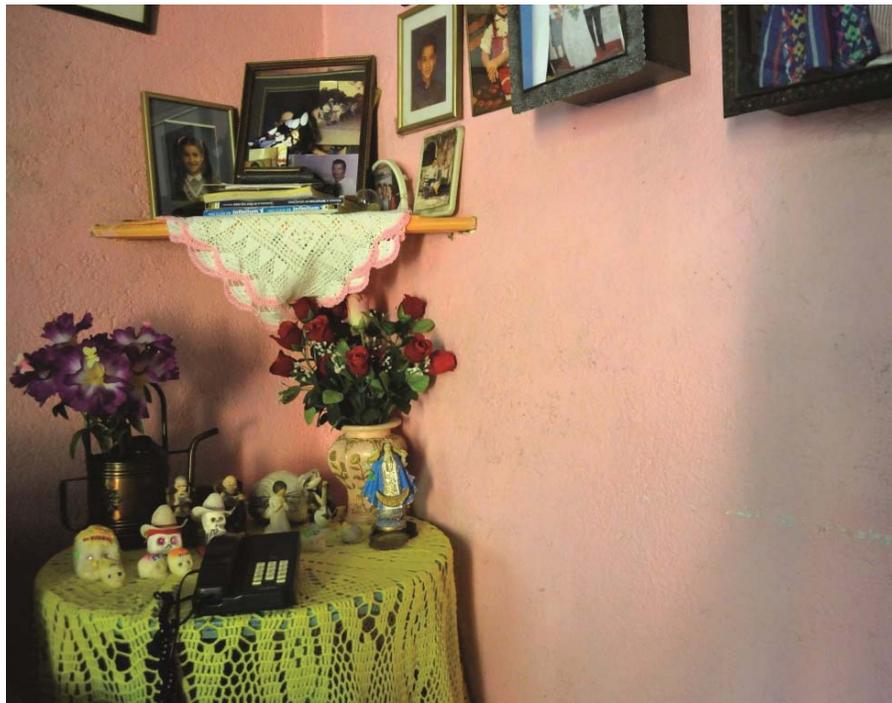


Figure 23. Ofrenda



Figure 24. Gas tanks



Figure 25. Living Testimony. Embroidery and paint on found embroidered cloth.



Figure 26. Living Testimony detail.



Figure 27. Mexico. Text and indigenous symbols embroidered and painted on Victorian cloth.



Figure 28. Mexico detail.



Figure 29. Home. Text made with French knots on found cloth.



Figure 30. Recuerdo. Embroidery and paint on stamped cloth.



Figure 31. Kitchen table. Embroidery on found embroidered cloth.



Figure 32. Diasporic Separations. Embroidery over monoprint on hand-died cloth.



Figure 33. Dreaming with Chickens. Embroidery and paint on found embroidered cloth.



Figure 34. Dreaming with Chickens detail 1.



Figure 35. Dreaming with Chickens detail 2.

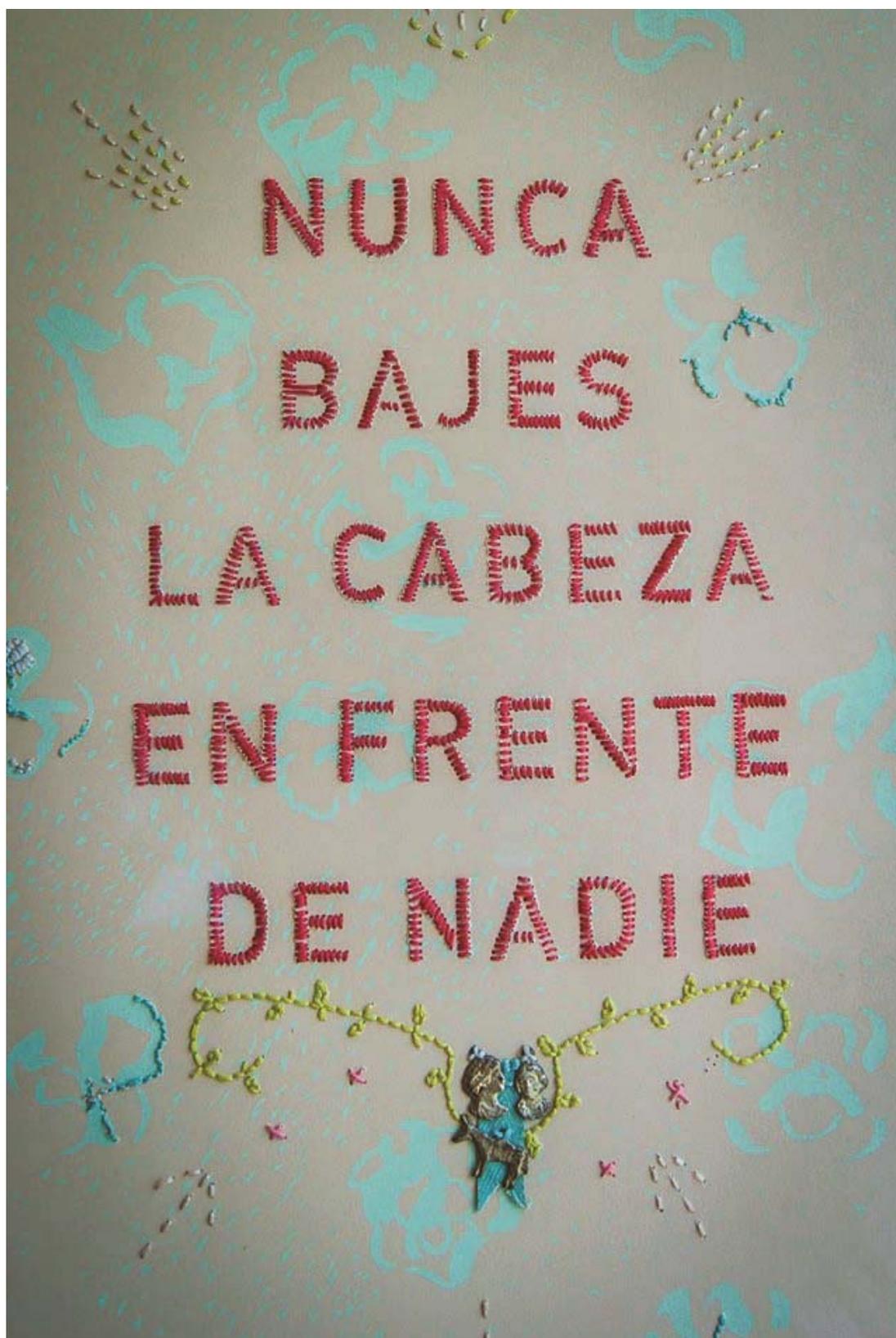


Figure 36. Nunca Bajas La Cabeza. Embroidery over screen print on paper with metal milagros.



Figure 37. Autoethnographic hand-made book. Mixed media Amoxtli-style (photographic) book.



Figure 38. Autoethnographic hand-made book detail 1.



Figure 39. Autoethnographic hand-made book detail 2.



Figure 40. Autoethnographic hand-made book detail 3.



Figure 43. Personal text under photographs. Thesis exhibition, Chicana/o House gallery, California State University Northridge, CA (May 18, 2014).

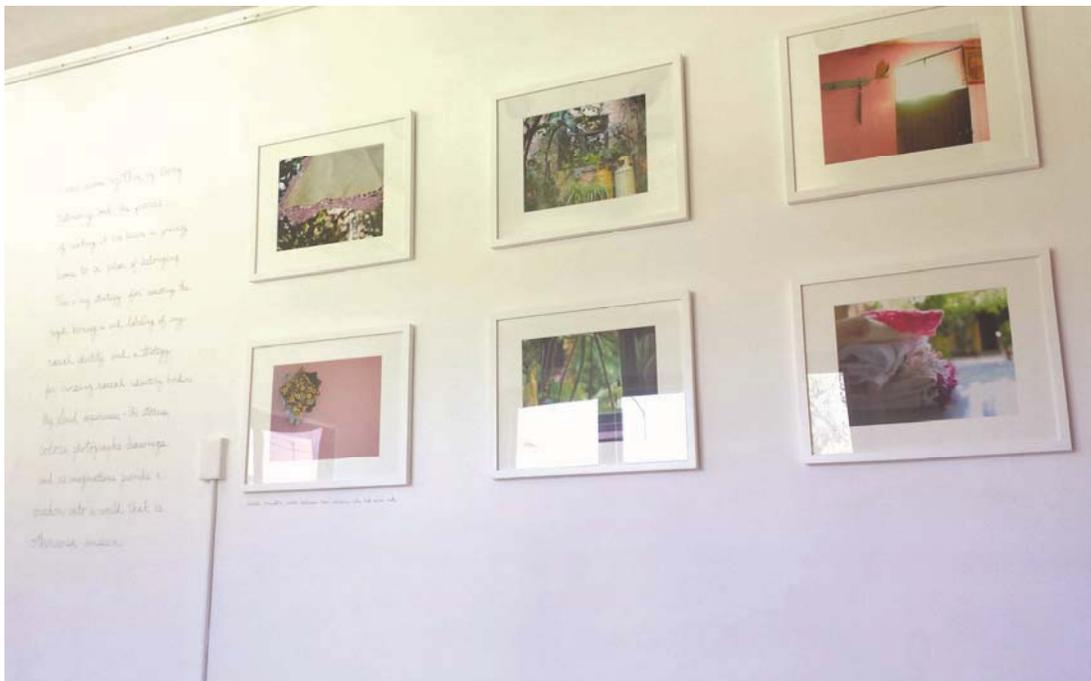


Figure 44. Personal text and photography display. Thesis exhibition, Chicana/o House gallery, California State University Northridge, CA (May 18, 2014).



Figure 45. Thesis presentation. Chicana/o House gallery, California State University Northridge, CA (May 18, 2014).

Please visit www.jessicaarana.com to view high resolution images of the artwork here and the Masters Thesis Exhibition that was held on May 18, 2014 at the Chicana/o House Gallery at California State University Northridge, CA.

Analysis

In this section, I present an analysis of my artwork. Informed by Chicana feminist theory and autohistoria, autoethnography, and art-based inquiry, this aesthetic project and my subsequent personal journey are the modes for inquiry (Homan Jones, et al., 2013). Therefore, as is consistent with feminist epistemology, *I* myself am the subject of the research and my autobiographic artwork stands in place of traditional ‘data.’ That is to say, instead of conventional data collection, I present my living testimony. This appears as written memories and reflections, poetry, photography, and intuitive and text-based embroidered drawings. The research questions posed in the methodology section provide the fundamental goals that drive the creation of these pieces, and I have made art from my findings (Anzaldúa, 1993).

I have sewn together my living testimony and the process of creating it has been a *camino* ‘home’ (a journey home) to a place of belonging. This is my strategy for resisting the rigid boxing-in and labeling of my racial identity and a strategy for crossing racial identity borders. My *vivencias* (lived experiences)—the stories, colors, photographs, drawings, stitches, and painted marks, and the re-memories and reimaginings provide both an academic and visceral window into a world otherwise unseen (García, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), in a tactile and accessible way. As I journeyed through the creation of these aesthetic projects, a place for storying my Borderland experience was created providing the opportunities for others to be empowered to share their own Borderland experiences.

Image making and personal texts

These aesthetic projects utilize varied approaches and media to accomplish pieces that were true to my contextual, fluid, and multifaceted Multiracial experience. Just as holistic models of racial identity development are needed to examine and understand Multiracial identities because they are multi-influenced by contextual factors such as other social identities (Wijeyesinghe, 2012), multiple forms of artmaking were needed to express and contextualize my experiences that were ambiguous, fluid, and multifaceted. In addition, combining and moving freely from prose, to photography, to drawing and embroidery, allowed me the room to create and author myself in a Borderland space—to create counter narratives from monoracial norms. What’s more is the shift from one type of aesthetic project to the next is not seamless or unnoticeable. Instead, shifting from color photography to tactile layered fabric texts illustrates the contradictory, shifting Multiracial experience. And, it is a conceptual device to illustrate the resistance to borders that Borderland identities share.

The embroidered drawings, some intuitive and inspired by *la facultad* and re-memory use line drawings, text and language, color, and textile together to illustrate the blend of my American/European and Mexican backgrounds. Working with domestic tools like needle and thread is a nod to the folk art I am surrounded by when I am in Mexico and a device to use the memories of my grandmothers and great-grandmothers. It is also a way of employing a feminist approach by using these women’s ways of knowing to express myself and create. Choosing these domestic and familiar tools in the important tasks of exploring and (re)membering my identity, and crossing monoracial boundaries, sacralize and preserves their knowledges. For example, the craft-like approach to the

embroidered pieces is inspired by the time I spent with my maternal grandmother crafting, decorating, and gift-making. The memories of sitting together in her home, learning techniques, and how to touch someone's heart through art and gift giving is transformed into a method of self-authorship, personal re-visioning, and healing. The fabric used is a combination of American/European-type decorative textiles and motifs (e.g., Figure 27) combined with more functional Mexican napkin and *manta*-like textiles. The stitched line drawings and text is inspired by the hand-sewn *huipiles* that I was surrounded and fascinated by in all my time spent in Mexico, and the protective napkin tortilla covers that were part of every meal at my *abuela's* house. I chose embroidery because it is a slow (very slow I learned in this project) process that allowed me to meditate on what I was creating and communicating, and to go back and add layer after layer until I had accumulative drawings that reflected my layered and complex experiences. I also chose this medium to express myself because pushing a needle back and forth, almost obsessively at times, forming cumulative marks on fabric, illustrates my story and acts as a metaphor for the journey I have been on to *atravesarme*, and tell my truth. This has been a journey to gather together my fractured and displaced *Coyolxauhqui*-self from the displacement of diaspora (Mohanty, 1998; Davalos, 2001; Rinderle, 2005; Malhotra, 2013) and the disorientation of a multipositional identity (Rinderle, 2005). The threads I have woven together have metaphorically been healing and create personal and collective agency.

The straightforward photographs of my *abuela's* house use a familiar domestic space to reveal personal stories and memories, and embody feelings of belonging. Selecting this intimate space to study and deeply examine identity, I looked at each

familiar object and each well-remembered corner of the house through the lens of my camera. This was a strategy from Chicana feminist theory that calls feminists to develop theory from everyday life (Hurtado, 2003). These photographs that move from room-to-room capturing intimate moments with inanimate objects is a method for examining a place I had felt a yearning for and a dislocation from. As a result, the examination through documentation of these things and spaces reconnected me and allowed me to reenvision and (re)member myself not as a split identity in *Nepantla* but instead as an adaptable, fluid and Borderland identity. This is evident as the photographs shift from a series of typical Mexican domestic objects to a tightly cropped photograph of a handwritten note in English. The image of a found ‘Thank You’ note between women who had never met—from one (American) grandmother to another (Mexican) *abuela*, captures the connectedness that existed within my family, in relation to my Multiracial identity. This photograph, like the image of the potholders hung on the wall, illustrates the significant bridge my grandmothers were in creating for me, a community (albeit virtual) that connected me to both sides of the border. Just as Anzaldúa (2002b) describes in *This Bridge We Call Home*, my family provided the passageways for me to be able to cross physical and metaphorical borders, and to not just exist but thrive in a liminal *nepantla* space that I know use as inspiration for creative acts.

The body of work here, imagery and text, form a mosaic that can be modeled as a strategy of sharing the multiplicity of backgrounds (Ochoa, 2004) of Latina/os of the diaspora and Multiracial individuals. And, for understanding and communicating the details of social identities, ancestries, and perspectives (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2009) of

these communities who have not been recognized by the U.S. government and racial classification systems like the Census and educational, occupational, and medical forms.

Home

In this collection of artwork I use domestic spaces, tools, and practices as a unifying device that illustrates the Chicana feminist method of utilizing home and familial and self-narratives to develop theory that is resistant to dominant discourses and centers the female experiences (e.g., Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Cruz, 2011; Hurtado, 2003; Moraga, 1983c; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). The series of photographs here depict intimate, everyday imagery from my Mexican *abuela's* house, a site that has been a central place of origin for my paternal family starting with my great-great grandparents, Petra Chavez and Margarito Godinez. My focus on familiar domestic spaces and objects, illustrates how 'home' is a place where I feel a sense of belonging rather than a tangible space (Mohanty, 1998). This is accomplished with my choice to represent myself, to answer the question *quién soy?* (who am I) through photographs of my paternal *abuela's* everyday objects in her home, a place that was vastly different and far away from where I grew up in Pennsylvania. The seemingly ordinary things are treated as remarkable artifacts, objects and memories that hold great importance. This is also accomplished with my choice to speak my truth by using crafting techniques and embroidery. These are practices I remember doing with my maternal grandmother in her home. Informed by the Chicana art practice of *Domesticana*, I focus on the everyday and the ephemeral, constituting what Mesa-Bains (1991) names a *familial aesthetic*, by employing family history and culture through imagery. This can be seen for example, in the photograph of a well-worn blue enamel steel *cafetera* (coffee pot), a hand-painted blue *taza* in the

kitchen, or happy polka-dots painted and stitched in cloth as affirmations of cultural value (Pérez, 2007) and as devices for reimagining myself in my *abuela* Concha's Mexican kitchen or sitting at home with my grandma Dorothy. Positioning my identity in my paternal *abuela*'s house or in Mexico is particularly significant and resistant to the rigid boxing-in and labeling of my racial identity that I have experienced. This is because, I grew up in a place very far away from Mexico and because I have had to resist judgment that I am not Mexican and White only (a common point of tension for Multiracial individuals).

This imagery is a device for me to return 'home.' In other words, creating this series of photographs that depict quiet intimate moments within the home, of objects and spaces left behind after my *abuela*'s passing, was the method I used to examine myself, my cultural roots, and to redefine her home and Mexico as *my home*—a place of belonging despite distances and differences (physical and metaphorical). This is because 'home' is located within the culture, in the values, practices, and customs, rather than rooted physically (Malhotra, 2012). My identity, like my home cannot be defined by nationality, but instead found in the stories, songs, folklore, traditions, foods, and ceremonies, and in the values and practices of my families and cultures (Attali, 1999; Malhotra, 2013). These photographs are evidence of my identity and my 'home.' Returning to this place to document these photographs is similar to Chabram-Dernersesian's (2009) Mexi-Rican narrative in which she returns to the neighborhoods of her youth to show insight on the communities that have not been observed by social scientists. I was able to connect my identity in this way, in part because of the enculturation practices of my parents and the bridging efforts of my extended families,

which connected me to both sides of my cultures. These actions are critical constructs which deeply shape an individual's sense of belonging and loyalty to an ethnic group and his or her feelings about group membership (Bernal & Knight, 1993). The result is that I have created a place for Borderland identities to reimagine and redefine 'home' and belonging. The personal images are a prompt to others to return to their ancestral origins (physical and metaphorical) and examine their home, and familial and self-narratives as a method for understanding identity and Borderland experiences. My photographic investigation and the presentation of the imagery as 'self,' is an effective strategy for resisting rigid perspectives of identity and for crossing racial identity borders.

La Facultad

Multiracial individuals can use their Multiracial facultad and *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 2007) as tools for survival in the face of racism and intolerance, and to deconstruct racial identity boundaries. In all of the art pieces, written narratives, and poetry I allowed *la facultad* or intuition guide the direction of the creative work. Like the participants in Chang's (2013) examination of Multiracial identity production, *la facultad* was one strategy I used for maneuvering through racial Borderlands, journeying 'home' through aesthetic projects, and for resisting monoracial boundaries. For example, my aesthetic approach allowed my *facultad*, my inner compass to guide the free-form lines drawings and text that are embroidered on the cloth pieces. These illustrated lines sometimes form easily recognizable objects and text and other times shift organically in abstract ways. The focus of these drawings is not to communicate a literal message but, instead to express feelings, ephemeral phenomena, and to simply be a free-form vehicle for investigating my everyday Multiracial identity

constructions. And they are my explorations and re-definitions of ‘home’ and belonging. Another example of *la facultad* can be seen in the photograph of my *abuela*’s memorial candle. During an evening of very quiet and still reflection in her room, I allowed myself to not know or plan out what I would be capturing. Instead, I simply sat, asked her to help me and I waited. The results were several high contrast images of her candle’s glowing light. They are intimate and quite images of our family’s homage to her. One of these images can be seen in Figure 19.

I found that traditional forms of inquiry could not capture the everyday experiences of Borderland identities as well as using one’s internal insight or intuition combined with art. This multi-method approach worked well to navigate and explore my identity constructions and performances. This project has shown me that creative practices guided by *la facultad* are effective strategies to negotiate everyday identity experiences, to journey ‘home’ (physically and metaphorically), and to discover and create sites of belonging. Additionally, incorporating other ways of knowing such as, intuitively creating art is an effective strategy for finding the courage to speak one’s truth and to cross racial identity borders.

Memory

I engaged in re-memories to develop artwork that communicates a deep connection to my homeland. The process of creating these pieces is a collective act of not forgetting or not allowing my homeland to be lost by the difference or distance of my current place in the same manner Davalos (2001) asserts Mexican diaspora employ re-memory to hold onto feelings, language, foods, and relations from their homeland. I use re-memory to re(member) my family, my homes, and my identities. When I included the

deep study of my memories to be a part of my inquiry, I was able to story my experiences, develop an understanding of my Borderland identity, and connect myself to distant people and places. This is the subject of many Multiracial/Multiethnic-Latina writers whose work informs my artwork. For example, Chabram-Dernersesian (2009) remained connected to Puerto Rico as a child in California by dreaming up “huge imaginative leaps” (p. 385) in the same way I did with Mexico. In my embroidered drawing, *Dreaming with Chickens On Her Head* (see Figure 33), I depict a suburban Pennsylvania girl greatly influenced by and deeply prideful of her poor and working class Mexican heritage. With both vibrant colors and radiating lines surrounding the chicken’s shape, I establish the important relationship I have with Mexico, our family’s memories of it, and my father’s stories. The title is from a common story my father tells me when he wants to communicate how comfortable our life is in the U.S. — “I used to sleep with a chicken on my head!” he’ll say communicating the lack of luxury and the space he shared not only with brothers and sisters, but with the chicken who once sat on his head. I love when my dad tells this story. Illustrating the large chicken from his memory, as my own reimagination of myself is a device to show how present my heritage and culture are in my everyday life. That is to say, that chicken from *El Valle* is always present in my psyche floating above my head and in my dreams. Like mixed-Latina radical feminists Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales (1986), dominant themes in my autohistoria are diaspora, home, longing, and identity from a Multiracial/Multiethnic lens. For example, my poem *Quién Soy Yo*, the illustrative sensory memories I detail in the prologue, and the purposeful colors and textures I photograph and use in the embroidered drawings demonstrate how my identity is entwined with the memories, dreams,

yearnings, and stories of my homes. Another example is the memory of my *abuelo* silently sharing *limas* with me like ritual each time I visited him in Mexico. The way I connected that memory with my Multiracial identity construction shows how everyday familial moments in my paternal grandparents' house are devices for reading and constructing my identity. Rosario Morales' narrative *Memory* and her poem *Nostalgia*, (in Levins Morales & Morales, 1986) where she expresses feeling deeply connected and a longing for Puerto Rico before she had even ever visited, is the result of growing up surrounded by the stories and dreams of her parents. Similarly, my reverence and longing for, and my emotional ties to the *lima* (and Mexico) come from cherished moments and memories with my *abuelo* because I had not grown up in Mexico or with easy access to my family there. But, also because I had grown up with the stories and the longing for Mexico by both of my parents, often verbalized in stories about simple familial moments and descriptions of faraway foods. In the colorful photograph of the *limas* hanging heavy in the tree (see Figure 6), the fruit towers over the viewer in perspective as a compositional device to capture my childhood memories of this place. In the still frame captured they appear as they always do in my memory, hanging high above the stone courtyard where I would reach up for them as a child, the sunlight dancing between the leaves. An important part of the artwork in this thesis project is that, by viewing this photograph of the *limas*, like the other everyday objects and spaces, I answer the complex "what are you" question. I respond to that ubiquitous question Multiracial individuals are constantly navigating (Chang 2014; K. F. Jackson, 2012; Jackson et al, 2013; Miville et al., 2005; Terry & Winston, 2010, Wijeyesinghe, 2001) with these simple, quiet moments at home. A significant realization I had regarding memory, was that the sensory

memories from my infancy and childhood, half-memories and re-memories (retold family stories and photographs) could be the subject of my inquiry—the elements of my data for this autohistoria. Therefore at times, I allowed my camera to move in and out of focus while I centered my consciousness on embodied, sensory, and, blurry and half-there memories rather than literal forms. The results are colorful images within my *abuela's* bedroom that capture the ephemeral, emotional, and the embodied memories and attachments to this place, which shape my identity. Memory is an effective means of constructing Multiracial and Borderland narratives, and for redefining ‘home’ in a Borderland space. Hall (1990) asserts ethnic identity is composed through memory and narrative. Therefore, my artwork here successfully functions as a device for reading and producing my complex identity. And aesthetic projects, created from re-memories, can be the agentic catalysts for reimagining and (re)membering the self and the concept of ‘home’ for Multiracial and Borderland identities.

Conclusion

Chicana feminists (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2007; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Hurtado, 2003) and Multiracial scholars (e.g., Chang, 2014) develop theory “from what we live, breathe, and experience in our everyday lives” (Hurtado, 2003, p. 216), therefore creating a space for others to do the same (Anzaldúa, 2002a). This thesis project draws on this rich history by merging identity development research with autohistoria/autoethnography and arts-based actions (narratives of my everyday identity constructions) that serve to critique existing identity literature, racial discourses, and dominant monoracial constructs. By voicing and visualizing my lived experience, this thesis creates a space for Chicanas/Latinas in the Northeast, and White-Chicanas/Latinas (as well as other

Multiracial voices) that have been omitted from racial identity discourses. Further, this thesis presents the scholarship of Chicana feminism, autohistoria/autoethnography, and art-based methodologies to a larger community, beyond academic spaces. This is possible because autobiographic and aesthetic projects are more easily shared with broader audiences and they can be understood through modalities outside of traditional academic realms, like embodied knowledge and sensory experiences. In this way, this thesis presents an example for future research in Chicana/o ethnic identity, Multiracial identity, and aesthetic projects to integrate disciplines as a method of understanding, contextualizing, and producing identity in new holistic ways.

The collection of aesthetic projects in this thesis embodies the courage it took to tell *my* truth as a Multiracial artist. It required me be brave enough to cross monoracial boundaries and develop a voice outside of social normativity. Each stitched line, uttered word, or photographed space is my method of bravely crossing the boundaries of normative monoracial constructions. I did this with the help of Chicana feminism, *la facultad*, and by recognizing the bridges my family created for me, and through the process of developing these creative pieces. In other words, the embodied practices of developing art by (re)membering, recreating, and reexamining, lead me on a path of self-realization and self-naming that developed into a Borderland space for self-authorship.

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