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**THE BORDERPSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT:
IS THERE A SPECIFIC PSYCHOSOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS THAT FRAMES DEVELOPMENT FOR
BORDER WOMEN?**

By

María Gloria Munguía

A.A., Houston Community College, Houston, Texas, 1992
B.A., Psychology, University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas, 1995
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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
American Studies**

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Dedication

For my mother and father, who brought me into this world, and into the borderlands, and did the best they could to show me how to survive. For my daughter, who I brought into this world, and into a different borderlands, and with whom I did the best I could to show her how to survive and succeed. For my two grandsons whom we will all teach how to survive, succeed, and thrive. *Los amo.*

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Thank you to all those who helped and supported me in this effort from the University of New Mexico.

Muchas gracias to miya y su familia in califas, mi familia en tejas, mi esposo, mis hermanas y comunidad aquí en burque, y a todos los demas – ustedes saben quien son – si no hoy, mañana.

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ABSTRACT

Often placed at the center of psychotherapeutic training rhetoric are the notions of cultural sophistication, competency, and responsiveness; however, these notions are often pushed to the margins of practice. This qualitative and interdisciplinary community project explores an important strand of psychosocial development that has always already existed, but had yet to be named. Psychosocial consciousness develops, through time, as a natural human response to our day-to-day experiences and encounters. These experiences and encounters form, reinforce, and perpetuate systems of understanding of self and others which profoundly impact our experience in the world. The exploration of the psychosocial development of a specific cohort of *mujeres* from the USA-Mexico border is a means toward the expansion of the understanding of psychosocial development of an underrepresented

strand of *mujeres* and leads to the imagining of a culturally relevant and responsive intervention.

This dissertation is designed to engage with the ongoing exploration of theories of identity, culture, and community; this as a means of contributing to border and borderland discourse in multiple fields of study, research, pedagogy, and praxis. This project braids together three strands of discourse. First, the voices that emerge from a process of a historicized and sequential connection of literature drawn selectively from multiple fields of study in order to build the foundation, shape the framework, and contextualize the notion of borderpsychosocial development. Second, my *cuento*, reflexive stories that emerged from my personal, professional, and academic experiences. Third, the cuentos of *las seis mujeres del valle* who provide a glimpse into their experiences of living on the border.

Interviewed were six *mujeres* of Mexican heritage between ages fifty and sixty-five who live in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas near the USA-Mexico border. Written and video recording methods are used to gather contextual- and *cuento*-data about their specific psychosocial experience with religion, traditional medicine, language, and education from childhood through adulthood that constitutes their psychosocial development on the border. Selected findings provide a glimpse into border-based experiences, the dilemmas that result, demonstrate the value of centering the marginalized experience and theorizing of psychosocial experience, and imagine a clinical intervention.

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Chapter One

¿Qué? ¿Por Qué? Y ¿Cómo?

Introduction

*Hay tantísimas fronteras que dividen a la gente,
pero por cada frontera existe también un puente.*

Gina Valdéz¹

This qualitative project explores the space currently filled with traditional and mainstream psychosocial development theories and calls attention to what lies at the margins of this space. By way of drawing the gaze toward the historically marginalized theoretical voices and marginalized lived experience, I will make evident the notion of borderpsychosocial development. That is, bringing forth evidence of a different form of a psychosocial encounter effected by cultural experiences that have particular manifestations on the USA-Mexico² border. This project brings forth the historically marginalized voices – in both public and private spaces. In addition, this project will demonstrate the urgent need to infuse current training and educational processes by expanding the notion of psychosocial development; thus, challenging the status quo.

With these stated goals in place, I ask the following relevant questions:

- 1) Is it possible for an individual to successfully negotiate and navigate through the expectations, traditions, and norms that present themselves while living on and within borderpsychosocial spaces?

- 2) What skills and coping strategies are developed and performed that lead to social and psychological success for those who live on and within borderpsychosocial spaces?
- 3) What aspects of the borderland experience, lived by the six women interviewed for this study, form a distinct and common experience?
- 4) What are the theoretical models that in part contribute to further understanding the process of living on and within borderpsychosocial spaces?

With these goals and questions in mind, this project provides an interdisciplinary review of the discourse relevant to the process of exploring and theorizing borderpsychosocial consciousness and development. My dissertation opens a space to present *los cuentos de las seis mujeres del valle*³ in order to ascertain borderpsychosocial patterns that elicit redefinition of self-concept – including my own – and contribute to a theoretical formation of borderpsychosocial development, and its implications.

Yo Soy/Situating Myself

I am a fifty-nine year old heterosexual woman. Born into a monolingual Spanish-speaking family, I entered Catholic school in Detroit, Michigan without any English speaking skills. I am now functionally bilingual in Spanish and English. I am a bicultural Mexican and American. The maternal side of my *familia* is from the state of Nuevo Leon, Mexico and the paternal side is from the borderland region of Texas, the Lower Río Grande Valley. The paternal side is also of Mexican heritage from *este lado*; the maternal side is from *del otro lado*. I was born in the same small town as my father, in Raymondville, Texas; known as *Raymond* by locals. I do not want to ignore the fact that this project is also a personal

exploration of the geographical and sociocultural landscape of the Lower Río Grande Valley of South Texas, the place where I was born and where most of my *familia* still lives. This makes me *una de las mujeres del valle*.

During my training as a clinical social worker, the limitations of the dominant theories and praxis I was exposed to emerged. The tendency was to learn to apply, rather than question theory. As a consequence, I found myself experiencing a sense of being at the margins; not quite connected to what I was being taught. In response to this experience and to supplement my institutional education, I sought out links to the local Mexican community and relationships with people and agencies working in the fields of anti-oppression, diversity and equity. By seeking out exposure and experience in community-based work (outside of the academy) that pursued issues of social justice, I was able to expand my own consciousness and bring such awareness to my clinical and academic work.

My career as a clinical social worker in community-based outpatient settings has and continues to provide me the opportunity to engage with a diverse population. The individuals, families, and groups I work with are both English and Spanish-speaking children, adolescents, adults, and elders, and there is diversity among this population in regards to language proficiency, race/ethnicity, class, gender, religion/spirituality, education, and sexual orientation.

A Borderpsychosocial *Momento*

The memory is as clear to me right this very moment as it was when I experienced it. The year was 1961. I was in third grade at Harding Elementary School in Detroit, Michigan. I was the only Mexican in my class. It was my turn. I walked up to the front of the class and

stood next to my teacher's desk. As my classmates watched, I prepared to answer a social studies question. The right answer would be rewarded with an "inside" the classroom single, double, triple, or an "out of the park" home run. The consequence of a wrong answer was not simply strike one, two, or three, but considered an "out," which meant I would have to return to the "bench" – return to my seat. I looked at my teacher. He smiled at me and asked the question. I responded. "That's right!" he shouted. I don't know if it was real or imagined, but I recall hearing "the crowd" cheering for me as I made my way to first base. My body, mind, spirit, and soul consumed this phenomenological experience. It had a powerful impact on my psychological and social development. This childhood memory is one of just a few positive school experiences I am able to recall.

What made this moment in my life so memorable? Was it the positive response from my teacher? Did it make a difference that he was male and white? Was it what I perceived as his sincere and supportive smile? Was it because I knew the correct answer? Was it the experience of feeling proud of myself? Could it have been the sense of relief I felt because I did not have to go back to my seat feeling humiliated, ashamed, or embarrassed – an experience with which I was already quite familiar? Was it having won, if even for just a moment, the admiration of my peers? Was it the feeling of being a part of a group instead of being left out? In other words, was this moment made memorable because of the external social response I received by my performance? On the other hand, could it have been the internal response this event elicited in me and the impact and impression it left in my body, my mind, my spirit, and my soul? Actually, it was all that y *más*. My experience that day, in the third grade, was made memorable by the significant

impact resulting from the convergence of the social experience and its psychological impact – my psychosocial experience. Psychosocial theory emphasizes the social and cultural effects on us and our relationship to and with the social environment. “Our socialization,” as stated by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, “is lodged within us in our psychological, lived, material experience.”⁴

Vivid memories such as this are foundational to the development of my enduring relationship with, and interest in, the social and behavioral sciences. As my exploration and understanding of culture and history expanded, so did my theorizing about individual and group development. I was naturally drawn toward a nuanced understanding of psychosocial development. I named this expanded notion of psychosocial development, borderpsychosocial development. The formation and manifestation of borderpsychosocial development is the focus of this dissertation.

Drawing upon my personal, professional, and academic experiences and interests, this dissertation is designed to engage with the ongoing scholarly exploration of theories of identity, culture, and community by introducing the notion of borderpsychosocial development; this as a means of contributing to the discourse in multiple fields of study, research, pedagogy, and praxis. This interdisciplinary project braids together three strands of discourse: first, the voices that emerge from a historicized and sequential connection of relevant literature drawn selectively from multiple fields of study in order to build the foundation, shape the framework, and contextualize the notion of borderpsychosocial development; second, what I dub my *cuento* and *cuentitos*, that is, the reflexive stories that emerged from my personal, professional, and academic experiences; third, and vital to this

project, are the *cuentos* of *las seis mujeres del valle* who provide a glimpse into their social and cultural life experiences. The conversations that occur in this process are consistent with the notion of sharing as “a responsibility of research...about demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community” (Smith 1999, 161).

This *trenza* renders a multi-vocal synthesis for analysis that provides both evidence and rationale for the need to bring attention to, and place emphasis on, the impact of the social, historical, and cultural experience common to women who live on “borders”⁵ when theorizing and imagining psychosocial development. Identifying particular patterns of struggle, coping, survival, and success, and connecting them to the process of recovering, remembering, and redefining self, reveals something innovative. The notion of borderpsychosocial development creates a place for this innovation. My hope is that a dissertation aimed at the exploration and explanation of the notion of borderpsychosocial development will contribute to the growing body of literature directed at a more nuanced understanding and conscious awareness of self and others. The contribution of theorizing borderpsychosocial development could be evidenced by an increase in our experiences of empathy toward, and connection with self and others, an expanded recognition of social justice issues related to self and others, and a demonstration of “love in a postmodern world” (Sandoval 2000, 10).

This dissertation is based on readings and writings about the USA-Mexico borderlands and *el valle*, in particular. I am relying primarily on the writings of Chicanas and Chicanos, my own personal, professional, and academic experiences and the set of interviews with *las seis mujeres del valle*.

Significance

We live in a remarkable country. Perhaps nowhere else in the world will we find such social, cultural, linguistic, spiritual, and ethnic diversity. In its diversity, the United States of America is a microcosm of the world. Given the ongoing growth of our population and the diversity within the population, more than ever it is important to continue to explore ways in which we can further our understanding of difference, similarity, and sameness within and amongst us. This ongoing demographic shift calls for an ongoing shift in understanding.

The focus of this study lies within the Latino⁶ community which accounted for 15% (Nogales in Ocaña 2009, 46) of the USA population before the 2010 Census. The number of Latinos rose from 37 million in 2002 to 47 million in 2008 (U.S. Census in Gurza 2009, 30). There were an estimated 46.8 million Latinos living in the USA, and the largest portion, 30.7 million, are of Mexican descent (U.S. Census in de Rubio 2009, 65). Out of the 16 million Latino children, 11% are considered first generation, meaning they were foreign-born; 52% are considered second generation, meaning they are U.S.-born of at least one foreign-born parent; and 37% are third generation or higher, that is, U.S.-born children of U.S.-born parents (Pew Hispanic Research Center in Hispanic Oct/Nov 2009, 17). Currently, as of the 2010 Census, the U.S. "Hispanic" population is 16.3%, which registers as 50.5 million Hispanics - an increase of 43% in ten years – (Larson 2011, 33) and has been predicted to increase to 30% of the U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census in Munsey 2009). However, recent predictions are higher and estimate that by 2050, "a third of the U.S. population will

be Latino” (Navarrette 2011) which is a projected 133 million Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau in Poder Hispanic 2011, 27).

Given the continued growth of the Latino population and the complexities within this diverse population that exist in therapeutic, educational, familial, and all relational encounters, a sensible approach includes working toward a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics and impact of social/cultural encounters. Clearly, the successful hearing and seeing of each other will lead us onto a *camino* of greater connection, compassion, and love. I am always seeking evidence of further cultural understanding.

In 2008, we, as a country, witnessed a historical moment, a decade defining event; we elected Barack Obama as our President, our first multiracial, multicultural President. This means different things to different people. For instance, to Cherríe Moraga (2011) it represented “a multiculturalism that is not truly a multiculturalism in that it is imagined and defined by whites... At the same time Obama understands what is to [be] marked by the color of his skin” (153-154). I am of the opinion that ethnic and social dynamics of the United States of America visibly shifted and had a profound impact on all of us; whether we were conscious or it or not, whether we could articulate it or not. As a result, a new space opened up - a space to consider the expansion of understanding self and others beyond that to which we have become accustomed. This first of its kind event seemed to reinforce the significance and need for ongoing exploration of what often sits at the margins of psychological theory of psychosocial development – and is often ignored – a different perspective; one of color. Our capacity for understanding, acceptance, cooperation, and collaboration is at stake.

I have claimed a portion of this imagined space as my own and find myself situated to allow for the intimate look at the lives of *seis mujeres del valle*, their self-awareness, and of the world around them. This provides the opportunity to gather social evidence of the specific negotiation and navigation process that occurs as a result of a variety of historically constructed social and cultural factors such as race, class, gender, education, religion/spirituality, and language. While *las seis mujeres del valle* may demonstrate variation in psychosocial development, and in the manifestation and negotiation of struggle, survival, and success, there are also significant similarities that connect their life experiences to each other. Understanding these factors will help answer the following questions: What difference does it make to be born, grow up, move away, return, and/or spend your entire life on the border and in the borderlands? Is there a specific psychosocial consciousness that frames development for women that live on the border and in the borderlands? These compelling questions drive the line of inquiry of this project.

To demonstrate the theoretical and practical significance of asking these questions, and my personal interest in them, I set additional goals for this project. As an exploratory project, I set out to gather *cuento*-data significant to the explication of the notion of borderpsychosocial development. I also set out to determine the viability of borderpsychosocial development and awareness as a theoretical, social, and clinical intervention. Next, I want to provide a finished product that will be accessible, especially to *las seis mujeres del valle*, and will provide them with the documentation (transcript and video) that will serve as a reflection of their borderpsychosocial experience. This project will also discern the personal, professional, and academic processes that nourished my

desire to explore and expand current thought on psychosocial development. Last, but certainly not least, it is my hope that this project will contribute directly to the task of addressing existing inadequacies related to current theories of psychosocial development put forth and given prominence in various training and clinical environments.

Methodology

My academic experience, prior to American Studies, involves the fields of psychology and social work. As a result, my research projects have historically drawn on the research methods found within those academic programs. In this case, I place the primary focus on quantitative methods and findings of statistical significance. Given my process of accumulating personal, professional, and academic experience, I became acutely aware of the value of, and my movement toward using qualitative methods. Denzin and Lincoln state that what is emphasized in qualitative research is "...the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied... [and]...how social experience is created and given meaning." Denzin and Lincoln go on to say, "In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes" (2003, 13). Developmental processes are clearly the focus of this dissertation, and therefore I draw on qualitative methods. Denzin and Lincoln offer us this generic definition: "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (2003, 4).

In *Feminism & Methodology*, Sandra Harding identifies three components of research - methodology, epistemology, and method – and points out that "...method is often used to refer to all three aspects." Harding proposes that, "a methodology is a theory

and analysis of how research does or should proceed...a research method is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence... [and] an epistemology is a theory of knowledge” (1987, 2-3). What follows is my sorting out of these three aspects - methodology, epistemology, and method - as they intersect with my experience with the borderpsychosocial project.

This qualitative and interdisciplinary dissertation is informed by a significant amount of personal, professional, and academic information; thus, it is indebted to Denzin and Lincoln’s notion of *bricoleur* to describe my role as a researcher and is consistent with Harding’s notion of methodology vis-à-vis how my research proceeds, as mentioned above.

Denzin and Lincoln write:

The methodological *bricoleur* is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to intensive self-reflection and introspection. The theoretical *bricoleur* reads widely and is knowledgeable about the many interpretive paradigms...The researcher-as-*bricoleur*-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms. The interpretive *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by...personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting. The political *bricoleur* knows that science is power, for all research findings have political implications...The gendered, narrative *bricoleur* also knows that researchers all tell stories about the worlds they have studied...The product of the interpretive *bricoleur*’s labor is a... *bricolage*, a reflexive collage...connecting the parts to the whole (2003, 9).

I interpret the conceptualization of *bricoleur*, as discussed by Denzin and Lincoln, as an analysis and description of how personal role, social objectives, and thoughtful procedures are applied to a research project by a qualitative researcher. As a Chicana feminist, I feel welcomed within a *bricolage*, and embrace the role of *bricoleur*.

Contextualizing Method

Harding posits three methodological features of feminist inquiry and analysis that are applicable to my study. First, Harding points out the identification of women's experiences as "new empirical and theoretical resources" which stands in contrast to the traditional use of men's experiences for the establishment of questions asked in the social sciences. Secondly, she draws attention to the feature of feminist research that seeks "new purposes for social science," that is, providing women with "explanations of social phenomena that they want and need..." and, I would add, they deserve. The third feature that Harding identifies is "locating the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter...the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" (1987, 6-10). The *camino* I take in this project proceeds with these features in mind.

In 1987, Harding wrote, "While studying women is not new, studying them from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world [,] can claim virtually no history at all" (8). However, six years earlier, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa were already engaged in the scholarly production that brought forth Chicana voices, and thus the experience of women of color through the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981); a "foundational anthology...which challenged white feminism for its exclusions and unmarked privilege" (Cantú and Hurtado in Anzaldúa 2012, 3). Two years later, Moraga joined Alma Gómez and Mariana Romo-Camana as editors of *Cuentos: Stories of Latinas* (1983). And, by 1987, the first edition of Gloria Anzaldúa's groundbreaking *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

was published. The inclusion of voices of all women (white and of color) expanded the theoretical basis of the process and practice of research; this project benefits from and proceeds with such an expanded feminist theoretical perspective.

Epistemology

I now turn my attention to the second component mentioned earlier by Harding, that is, epistemology – what are the ways and means of knowing. Here, I draw on the historical research and knowledge of Chicana feminists. According to María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, “Feminism is, among other things, a response to the fact that women either have been left out, or included in demeaning and disfiguring ways in what has been an almost exclusively male account of the world... [and]...a desire and insistence that we give our own accounts...For it matters to us what is said about us, who says it, and to whom it is said”(1983, 495).

In 2003, Aída Hurtado wrote that it is clear to her that “...writing from a feminist perspective is personal. To avoid one’s perspective in clear and explicit terms is to hide” (35). To hide the personal is to hide a certain understanding of reality. Within our *cuentos*, our way of speaking our reality lays an important, but often marginalized, way of knowing. This project creates a space to center ways of knowing from my personal, professional, and academic experiences, and ways of knowing brought forth by the experiences of *las seis mujeres del valle*. Because of this, I use *cuento* as method to draw out information through story. Their *cuentos* include their ways of thinking and their experiences of socialization on and within the border and borderlands.

The direct and simple translation of the Spanish word *cuento* is story. The telling of stories has historically held an important role in many cultures. For example, in writing about her experience with research and indigenous peoples, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who identifies as Maori, said, “Storytelling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research” (1999, 144). Leslie Marmon Silko, who identifies as being of a mixed ancestry of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican and white, wrote, “I will tell you something about stories...they aren’t just entertainment. Don’t be fooled. They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off illness and death. You don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories” (1977, 2). *Cuentos* are also deeply rooted in Chicana/o communities. On the Westside of San Antonio, Texas, *El Riconcito de Esperanza* is the home of *La Casa de Cuentos*: “a space of reclaiming history, of recovering cultural selves, and of healing” (Castañeda 2010, 8). In my professional experience as a psychotherapist, I have become a listener of intimate *cuentos*. It seemed natural to nurture this notion of intimate, first-person *cuento* in my research. *Cuentos* are ways of knowing.

Another way of identifying an epistemology within the context of *cuento* is to look at the idea of ethnography. James Spradly advises that, “Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people” (1979, 3). This is my intent, that is, to learn about myself from *las seis mujeres del valle* while they learn about themselves from the process of participation in this study, with hope that people can then learn from us; this is an example of relational reciprocity.

I draw on the *cuentos*, personal disclosure narratives from *las seis mujeres del valle* and my own story, my *cuento*, my personal disclosure, as a way of knowing. By this, I mean

the *cuentos* provided by *las seis mujeres del valle* act as ways of knowing about a specific consciousness of lived experience that reveal themes related to borderpsychosocial experience of development for border women and demonstrate difference and diversity. My own *cuento* contributes to this dialogic process with *las seis mujeres del valle*, by providing a way to talk about my own individual formation and the formation and foundation of this research.

I end this section on epistemology by speaking to the use of Spanish words in this research. Aída Hurtado claims that “Spanish is...the language of intimacy and resistance” and that many Chicana feminists use multiple languages and as a result “create a woman’s space and discourse” (1998, 136). Without exception, all of *las seis mujeres del valle*, and I, used both the English and Spanish language in our exchanges; code-switching. The inclusion of multiple languages within a text has a robust history.⁷ Given that proficiency in a second language is required in the interdisciplinary academic space I chose to work within, and that a way of knowing comes from our use of language, it seems consistent and appropriate to both English and Spanish and include a glossary (App. A). The glossary is arranged alphabetically and can be found at the end of this dissertation. As noted by Ana Castillo in a preface to one of her books, “*A Note on Italics*. Traditional usage requires that languages other than English in a predominately English text be set in italics” (1996, 5). I have chosen to follow that tradition.

Gathering Evidence

I traveled to the borderlands at the southernmost part of the United States of America and of Texas, a region known as the Lower Río Grande Valley (known to many

locals as *el valle*) to gather the ethnographic interviews/stories or *cuentos*. Prior ethnographic research has been done at other locations along the USA-Mexico border such as the Ciudad Juarez-El Paso, Texas border.⁸ I have selected a particular part of the geographical border and borderlands that lie at the end of the Rio Bravo⁹ which lies 806 miles from El Paso. My familiarity with this area and my linguistic skills contributed to the selection of this site; however, the most vital reason I chose this particular region is this study is designed to learn from a specific cultural group of women of “Mexican” heritage who happen to live on the “American” side of the USA-Mexico border. As I had hoped, my personal connection and familiarity with the Lower Rio Grande Valley was an advantage instead of a liability in a number of ways. My “insider” status was established by my positionality as *una de las mujeres del valle*. As Tuhiwai Smith proposed in 1999,

When indigenous peoples became the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently, and people participate on different terms (193).

This was made evident by the enthusiasm and interest during the participant recruitment process at which time I made known the focus of my research and what participation would entail. Without exception, *las seis mujeres del valle* communicated a sense of excitement and honor to be making a contribution to the further understanding of a specific psychosocial experience and participating in research being conducted by “someone from the valley.” Ruth Behar believes “when you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably” (1996, 16). I believe that to ask vulnerably leads to a vulnerable response; which is what happened. Most powerful for me was the support communicated by each of *las mujeres* to

help move *esta mujer* toward completion of her doctorate. They intuitively knew it was about *nosotras*.

I visited South Texas in September of 2008 to collect preliminary data and further familiarize myself with multiple geographical, social, and cultural spaces in the region. That trip resulted in the identification of a number of potential participants. I initiated contact and secured potential participation from a number of women with diverse occupations. The group initially included a traditional medicine practitioner, the director of a regional women's organization, a real estate broker, an artist, a museum staff person, a prison guard, an advocate for migrant workers, and a self-identified housewife. This initial trip to the Lower Rio Grande Valley was fruitful.

Prior to securing participants for this project, I completed the Human Research Protections Office, Internal Review Board, application process. This included a summary of the research project, submission of CITI (Collaborative IRB Training Initiative) certification, informed consent documents, recruitment methods, and interview methods. I received approval for one year.

The process of finding and securing participants for this project resulted from social networking. In a strict sense, I made little effort to secure a representative group of women. The selection was random, and determined by those encountered in the process of social networking. I met participants in-person, by phone, and/or e-mail communication. This process found me venturing into social and cultural spaces such as museums, art openings, and a film festival; all in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The participants, *las seis mujeres del valle*, fall within the criteria set forth at the time of initial design of this project.

Those criteria included: participants had been born in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, currently live in the same geographical area, range in age between fifty and sixty-five, and of Mexican heritage. Other than possessing these four vital commonalities, there were many variables within the life experiences of *las mujeres*. Potential differences included their economic status, educational experience, occupational status, sexual orientation, class status, partnership status, religion/spiritual activities, level of political involvement, health status, and family relationships. My research topic, to determine the nature of borderpsychosocial development, was enthusiastically received by all with an opportunity to hear about it. It was only the restrictions of time and money that kept the number of participants to six.

Once *las seis mujeres del valle* were identified, I made arrangements to travel to the Lower Rio Grande Valley and begin individual interviews. *Las mujeres* and I determined site selection after thoughtful consideration, given that sites for gathering narratives are more than a backdrop or setting, but serve to set the content and context of the narrative (Smith and Watson 2001, 56-58). Careful planning helped assure privacy. *Las seis mujeres del valle* received an opportunity to review and question the Consent document (App. B) before signing it. They also received multiple opportunities to withdraw consent during and after collection of the *cuentos*.¹⁰ The participants were not offered monetary compensation for their participation. While participants reviewed the four-page informed consent document, I began the process of setting up and testing the equipment necessary for audio and visual recording of the *pláticas*.

Upon completion of the informed consent process, I administered the Self and Family Questionnaire (App. C). A cover sheet provided instructions and I was available for questions. This written response questionnaire included twenty questions designed to collect demographic information. This data included, but was limited to, birthplace, language use, ethnic/cultural identification, class, relationship status, and sexual orientation. Following the questions, I requested that *las mujeres* draw a diagram, a visual depiction, of at least three generations of their family; I provided an example. Completion time ranged between ten to twenty minutes.

I then introduced a second semi-structured written response questionnaire titled Things I Learned Growing Up (App. D). Again, a cover sheet accompanied the questionnaire and provided both explanation and purpose. This questionnaire elicited memories of messages the *mujeres* heard others say about them and others during childhood and adolescence. I provided multiple group categories to elicit messages heard about specific groups of people. I also provided multiple source categories to stimulate memories of the source of messages heard. Group categories included racial, ethnic, and gender groups. Source categories included family, friends, and teachers; television, movies, books and magazines; and religious practice, leaders, and texts. Completion of this questionnaire was challenging to most of *las mujeres*. There was significant difficulty recalling some memories. This inability to recall a memory became significant to *las mujeres* when I explained that the absence of message also has implications. Completion time for this questionnaire ranged from ten to twenty minutes.

The third and final information-gathering method was an individual, video and audio taped interview consisting of twenty-five open-ended questions (App. E). I designed the questions to hear the subjective quality, conditions, and experiences of the lives of *las seis mujeres del valle*. The objective of the interviews was to provide visual and audio documentation of both the verbal and non-verbal responses of *las mujeres*. The questions asked covered a wide range of issues related to their life experience and specific psychosocial development including issues of identity, community, and culture, along with experiences of struggle, coping, survival, and success. There were no time restrictions placed on the response to any questions. The interviews took on the feel of a “*plática*” (Blea 1995, 36)¹¹ and ranged in time from thirty to ninety minutes. All of the original documentation was later provided to *las mujeres* for their own personal use.

I chose the mode of face-to-face conversations as it seemed a more personal and mindful way to solicit such intimate information. Creating the space for participant observation “allows those living the life to render what their own reality is...” (Blea 1995, 39). This also provided an opportunity to develop rapport with participants. In addition, I knew that simply taking notes or compiling process notes following the *pláticas* would not capture the experience of the *plática* and therefore not capture the *cuento*. Having the video/audio tapes to review many times added to my experience of *las mujeres* and provided an opportunity for a comprehensive transcription of the recording.¹²

Las Mujeres del Valle

Compiled from their response to the above mentioned questionnaires, the following is a brief introduction to each of the six women who participated in this research. All the

names used are pseudonyms and are presented in alphabetical order; Alma, Carmen, Marta, Sofia, Sylvia, and Teresa.

Alma

Alma identified herself as a woman who is “Mexican”, 62 years old and heterosexual. She was born and grew up in Mercedes, Texas and currently lives in Donna, Texas. Alma moved away from *el valle* as an adult. She returned in 1980 because she wanted to “be close to other family members.” Her visual depiction of four generations of *familia* show both sides originate from Mexico. The paternal side hails from the city of Saltillo in the Mexican state of Coahuila and the maternal side comes from the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon, both of which border Texas. Alma was the third born in a family of six children. She has two older brothers who were born in Mexico. One brother is deceased. Alma was the first born in Mercedes, Texas. She was followed by a sister and two younger brothers; all four were born in Mercedes. She identified as being “*más morena*” than her sister and was nicknamed “*la prieta*.”

Alma is married to an “Anglo” and has two adult male children also born in *el valle* in the cities of Weslaco and McAllen. The elder son is married to a *Mexicana*, from Matamoros, Mexico.

Alma’s parents are identified as “Mexican.” She recalls that in her childhood home, members spoke “Spanish”, and when she started school in the Mercedes and Progreso area, she spoke only “Spanish.” Alma completed her high school education with a GED and subsequently completed college with an Associate’s Degree.

As a child, Alma attended Catholic Church. She did not have a *quinceañera*.¹³

Alma identified the socioeconomic status of her family at that time as “poor - working class poor.” She identifies her current status as “middle-class.”

Alma currently serves as the director of an organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life for migrant farm workers.

Carmen

Carmen identifies as a “Hispanic/Mexican American” woman who is 56 years old and heterosexual. She was born in Harlingen, Texas, grew up there, and moved away as a young adult. Carmen returned to the Valley in 1990 to “work – opened [an] office in Valley.” Her visual depiction of four generations of family show’s that the maternal side of the family comes from Mexico and the paternal side from *el valle* with only one exception; her paternal grandmother also originates from Mexico. Carmen was born the middle child between two older and two younger siblings. She had one older brother, now deceased. She has one older and two younger sisters. Her brother was born in Mercedes, Texas. Carmen and all three sisters were born in Harlingen, Texas.

Carmen has been married once to a “Hispanic/Mexican American” from Harlingen whom she divorced, and she is currently single. She has one son who is now 27 years old and currently lives in San Antonio where he attends college.

In her childhood home, she recalls speaking both “Spanish and English” and entered Catholic School speaking “both.” Carmen attended Incarnate Word and Trinity University, both in San Antonio, and graduated from the University of Texas Pan American with a B.A. in Biochemistry. She declined acceptance into a doctoral program on the west coast.

In her childhood, Carmen attended “Catholic” church, but there is no indication that she currently attends church on a regular basis. Carmen did not have a *quinceañera*.

Carmen identified her childhood economic status as “middle-class” and currently identifies herself as being “upper-middle class.” She is a successful commercial real estate broker, conducting business on both sides of the USA – Mexico border.

Marta

Marta identified herself as an “American” woman, 54 years old and heterosexual. She was born in Raymondville, Texas and lived there for only one year with her parents and older brother. The family’s move to San Benito, Texas – further south and closer to the USA-Mexico border – remained an important re-location for Marta, as she has lived in San Benito ever since. She experienced minimal travel out of *el valle* since the family moved to San Benito. Marta also reported her family identified as “American.”

Marta’s visual depiction of four generations of her family shows that all her family members were born in *el valle* except for her maternal grandmother and sister-in-law who were both from Mexico. Marta was the second of two children and has an older brother. She married once to an “American” man from Lyford, Texas. She was married for 17 years, divorced in 1995 and has been single ever since. Marta gave birth to three daughters now age 26, 24, and 21. The two youngest live with her in San Benito and the oldest daughter lives with a partner in San Antonio.

While Spanish was the primary language spoken in the home, when entering the public school system in San Benito, Marta recalls speaking only English at school. Marta

graduated from high school, and many years later, completed a one-year “college degree” at a *valle* technical school.

Although Marta identifies as a Catholic and reports currently attending church, she does not recall attending church as a child. Marta reports not having a *quinceañera*.

Marta grew up in a “middle-class” home, and she currently identifies as “lower middle class.” She currently works part-time as a “bookkeeper” at the technical school from which she graduated.

Sofia

Sofia identified as a “Mexican American” heterosexual woman born in 1948 in the small town of Rios, Texas; where she also grew up. She has moved several times, and lived in Bakersfield, California for a number of years before returning to *el valle* in 2003 to help care for her elderly parents. When interviewed, she had been living in Edinburg, Texas, for five years and was making plans to move to San Antonio. A visual depiction of four generations of Sofia’s *familia* shows both maternal and paternal sides of the family born in South Texas, and in particular, Duval County. She is the fourth of five children. She has an older brother, two older sisters and a younger brother. Sofia was married twice to “Mexican American” men. She was widowed once, divorced once, and is currently single. Her two adult children were born in Bakersfield, California and currently live in the Bay Area.

Sofia grew up in a home where family members spoke both “English and Spanish.” When she began public school, in Premont, Texas, she was bi-lingual. She graduated from high school and completed one year of college.

Sofia grew up in a family that identified as “Mexican American” and “Catholic” and attended church on a regular basis. Sofia’s family celebrated her 15th birthday with the traditional *quinceañera* celebration.

She recalls her family’s socioeconomic status as “middle-class” and continues to maintain identification as “middle-class” herself. Sofia successfully retired from a career as an administrator a number of years ago. Most recently, she has accepted temporary work that she finds intellectually stimulating, as evidenced by her recent work at a local historical museum.

Sylvia

Sylvia identifies as a “Mexican” woman, 59 years old and heterosexual. Born in Raymondville, Texas, she lived there with her family until the age of five. Her family moved to Detroit, Michigan in 1955. In 1984, Sylvia moved back to the valley because her relationship ended, she was pregnant, and wanted to be close to her mother. She has remained in the valley since and currently lives in La Feria where she owns her home.

Sylvia’s visual depiction of four generations of her family shows her paternal side from *el valle* and the maternal side from *México*. She is the first born of five children, followed by another sister and two brothers, also born in the *valle*. The youngest sister was born in Detroit. Sylvia married three times to men she identified as “Jewish, Anglo,” and she is currently single. She has one daughter, 25 years old, who lives in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area.

Sylvia recalls the languages spoken in her childhood home as “Spanish and English.” By the time she started Catholic school in Detroit she reported speaking “English and Spanish.” In 1969 Sylvia graduated from high school in Detroit.

As a child, Sylvia attended Catholic Church. She was baptized and made First Communion and Confirmation in the Catholic Church. She “changed to Baptist” as a teenager. Currently, Sylvia does not attend any particular church, but reports that she does pray daily. Sylvia did not experience a *quinceañera*; nor was it ever mentioned in her home.

Sylvia identified her family as being “working-class” when growing up and continues to identify herself as “working-class.” Sylvia is currently a corrections officer at a local state prison.

Teresa

Teresa identified herself as a “Mexican” woman, 50 years old and heterosexual. Although she was born in Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico she currently lives in Brownsville, Texas, just across the Río Grande from Matamoros, Mexico. Teresa has traveled extensively. She is the third of eight children. There are two older sisters, Teresa, and a younger sister, followed by three younger brothers. Both the maternal and paternal sides of her family were born in *México* as were Teresa and her siblings.¹⁴ She has been married twice, and both times to men who are “Anglo.” The first marriage was when she was 14 years old and ended in divorce. She has two daughters. The first daughter was born in Arkansas and the second daughter was born in Texas. Teresa is currently married to an “Anglo” man born in Brownsville, Texas. Teresa and her husband currently share their life with their eight year old son.

Teresa grew up in a Spanish-speaking country, home, and school environment. She completed 7th grade in the Mexican public school system¹⁵ and attended a Catholic Church. She did not have a *quinceañera*. She grew up in a family she describes as “poor” and currently places herself in the “upper-middle class” category.

Teresa is currently a prolific artist and spends her days in her studio/gallery being creative. She does not use her given name either personally or professionally.

These are *las seis mujeres del valle* whose voices will join mine and those of Chicana@ scholars, to bring forth evidence of the notion of borderpsychosocial development.

I began this section with the notion of bricolage and bricoleur from Denzin and Lincoln and I bring it to a close with these final words from them:

The work of self-narration is to produce this sense of continuity: to make a life that sometimes seems to be falling apart come together again, by retelling and restorying the events of one’s life....personal narrative is part of the human, existential struggle to move life forward...why should we be ashamed if our work has therapeutic or personal value?...I became a social scientist because I thought it was a way to address deep and troubling questions about how to live a meaningful, useful, and ethical life...the narrative rises or falls on its capacity to provoke readers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on their own experiences, enter empathically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints encountered (2003, 199-125).

Through qualitative and feminist methodology, epistemology, and methods, the borderpsychosocial development project aspires to these viable objectives and thoughtful premises put forth by Denzin and Lincoln.

Key Terms

As a brief introduction to several key terms that will be further contextualized throughout this study, the following are most pertinent to my project.

I use the word “border” in two different ways. Border is used to identify the geographical area of the USA-Mexico border that is located at the southernmost tip of Texas and is known as the Lower Río Grande Valley (fig. 1). Specifically, this area includes such towns and cities as Brownsville, San Benito, La Feria, Raymondville, San Juan, Mercedes, Edinburg, and Harlingen. Border, following Gloria Anzaldúa’s now famous appraisal, is also used to identify the point at which there is a psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, linguistic, and/or class demarcation of difference.

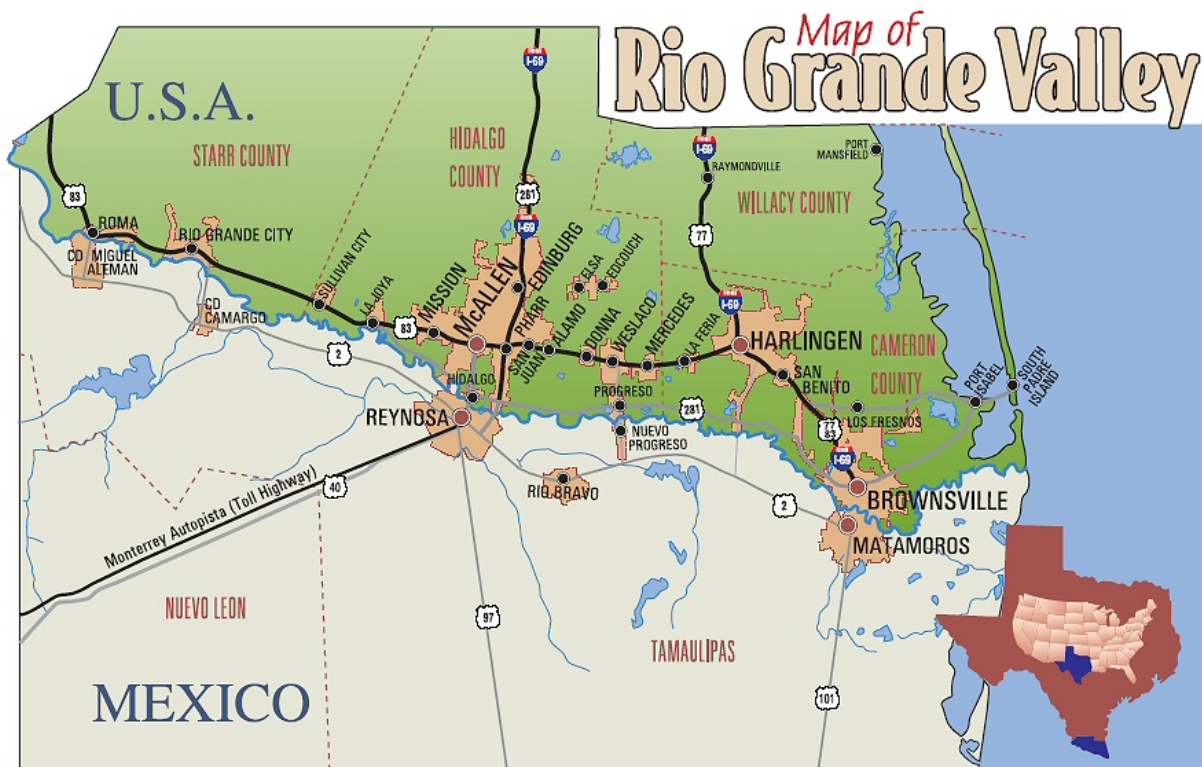


Figure 1: Map of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas – *El Valle*.

The word “borderlands” refers to those spaces where these demarcations function and where one experiences (knowingly or not) a negotiation between self and the existing social constructs and systems that impact our development. As Anzaldúa stated in 1987,

...the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (Preface).

This negotiation often leads to a possible, potential, and often predictable conscious or unconscious dilemma which I will refer to as a border-based dilemma. Borderlands also refers to the USA-Mexico geographical region mentioned above.

I have affixed the word “border” to the common psychological term “psychosocial” that falls within the nomenclature of the social and behavioral sciences and denotes the relationship between social and psychological aspects of development. I added this, in order to disrupt the reading and thus the reception of the word psychosocial by drawing attention to a purposely-placed term that both questions the meaning of the word, and implies a sense of distinction by adding a new dimension. This neologism, borderpsychosocial, gives a name to a concept that is the central concern of this study. The exploration of borderpsychosocial experiences and development is a theoretical move toward the expansion of current mainstream thinking about psychosocial development; a move that draws from a specific social experience historically marginalized. This study of borderpsychosocial development is infused with the voices of border women and borderlands research; that is, it offers the articulation of a different way of experiencing the everyday. The purpose of the neologism is to both draw attention to the convergence of theories and border and borderland experiences, and the impact of these experiences on a specific psychosocial developmental process that occurs within an identifiable geographical area and within a particular strand of the population.

I use “*las seis mujeres del valle*” to refer to the specific cohort of women from the border and borderlands of the Lower Río Grande Valley of South Texas that participated in this project. *Las seis mujeres del valle* live on the Texas side of the USA-Mexico border, are of Mexican heritage, and range in age between fifty to sixty-five years old. The interviews of these six women provide the narratives collected for this research.

Key Questions

This study is about the conscious and/or unconscious impact of social encounters, decision-making, and thus choosing the *caminos*/pathways for our lives. Some key questions arise and inspire my exploration of borderpsychosocial development. Among them are: What has been the emotional and psychological impact of our social encounters, and how has the impact of these experiences influenced our *camino* in life? What guides or compels us onto a particular *camino* in life? Why is one *camino* taken when there are multiple *caminos* from which to choose? Are we aware of such choices? If not, when and how does this awareness emerge? What happens, or not, after we become aware? What occurs at the crossroads of these *caminos* that influence movement or change? What is the process of changing *caminos*? When or how are we able to make such a change? What types of interruptions or disruptions create opportunities for expansion of awareness? In other words, what factors are related to our experiences of struggle? What strategies for coping, survival, and success have been employed? What other strategies exist? And, how do we define and experience success?

This research is, in part, the ongoing process of answering these questions. This borderpsychosocial project, this recovery, remembering, and redefining project, took me

“home” in a number of ways. Home to the geographical, cultural, and social borderlands of South Texas where I was born, and home to socially and culturally connect with *las seis mujeres del valle*. My interest lies in looking for both the distinguishable similarities and differences in social experiences and about *caminos* taken, but just as importantly about *caminos* averted. Although we understand that our similarities and sameness bring us together, I suggest we also recognize that it will be our differences that teach us the most important of all lessons. It is important to understand the significant benefit of embracing our differences as a means to create an inclusive community in which we can all contribute and share. I believe that by providing an explanation of the personal, professional, and academic process undergone in arriving at the notion of borderpsychosocial development will establish its social validity¹⁶ and suggest a new *camino* leading toward a nuanced expression and understanding of self and others in a particular way. This, I propose, will contribute to the collective goal of the development of effective social and clinical interventions for the diverse population of our country. To further explore borders and borderlands and their psychosocial interstices is to draw these spaces into our awareness and thus into our conversation. This is fundamental.

Overview

I entered into this study aware that it builds on my personal, professional, and academic experiences, interests, and formation. I have designed this study to further explore a specific psychosocial experience with the intention of, and as a means to, expanding existing theory by introducing the notion of borderpsychosocial development; and to contribute to border and borderlands discourse in multiple fields of study. My

cuento weaves throughout this dissertation, and it is my hope that our personal stories will not only reveal the life trajectories of *las mujeres*, but my own as well. I, too, am *una de las mujeres del valle*.

In Chapter Two, I bring forth, through my *cuento*, the scholarship and experience that contribute to the formation, contextualization, and construction of the conceptual framework that gives shape and definition to the notion of borderpsychosocial development. This interdisciplinary project draws selectively from multiple fields of study and their respective theories and methods. I present diverse content that moves within and ultimately toward a feminist epistemological framework.¹⁷ This review will include streams of scholarship from psychology, social work, feminism, history, and cultural studies.

The contribution to this project from psychology includes a historical overview of selective concepts from personality and identity developmental theories that are salient to borderpsychosocial development. Many theories that continue to dominate our training and understanding in the field of psychology are often limited due to the highly complex and subjective experience of the traditional theorists along with the historical moment in which the theories were conceptualized. Although I do not embrace these theories in toto, they cannot be excluded from my formation and from my theorizing about borderpsychosocial development, but rather require selective gleaning of helpful and viable concepts.

The primary contribution from social work comes from the expansion of the understanding and re-imagining of self within a social context. It is during my social work studies that I was exposed to, and participated in the work of, experiential learning. This

mode of learning became a significant personal and educational experience. The knowledge gained through experience remains indispensable as a means toward further understanding self and others.

In addition, calling forth feminist theorizing of the last few decades will bring border and borderland issues into view as psychosocial issues that include, but are not limited to those of power, language, identity, spirituality, and intimacy located within the discourse of feminist writing and theory-making.

Within the process of psychosocial development, the cultural, personal, and historical is interrelated as well as overlapping. People and events that draw through the narratives impacted shaping of identity, culture, and community in the lived borderlands. To historicize means to see and consider change in individual, family, and group norms and expectations; to highlight the development of the lives of women within the context of their struggle, coping, survival, and experiences of success and agency; and, finally to analyze the trajectory and impact of the production of popular culture on the identified community. For purposes of this dissertation, focus is placed on the specific geographical space located at the southern-most part of the Texas border – at the end of the Río Grande. But, just like in other parts of the USA, the residents of this region are affected by the various media to which they are exposed, and to which they contribute. Thus, drawing on cultural production will provide insight into the shaping of a border consciousness. The impact of film, music, art, and television cannot be eliminated from the conversation. Both positive and negative factors relate to representation and education via cultural production.

Chapters Three and Four feature the *resultados* of the study. Chapter Three centers on the words of *las mujeres del valle* which have been drawn directly from the transcripts, reveal their significant borderpsychosocial experiences, and fall within the four themes of religion/spirituality, education, language, and traditional medicine/healing. While *las mujeres del valle* populate their *cuentos* by recalling memories and events, they also disclose personal border and borderland experiences. By making known their *cuentos* about struggle, coping, survival, and success, *las mujeres del valle* provide evidence of a specific psychosocial consciousness that frames development for border women.

Chapter Four features the voices of Chican@ scholars that further validate the significance of the four themes of religion/spirituality, education, language, and traditional medicine/healing within the context of border and borderland experiences. This chapter concludes with an imagined clinical intervention drawn directly from the borderland theorizing of Gloria Anzaldúa.

Chapter Five brings this project to its conclusion and puts forth a summary of findings, recommendations, and implications for future studies in multiple fields including academic, clinical, and community work. Diversity must be embedded into all theory and praxis; it is our reality. The conclusion reviews limitations of the research methods and theoretical framework as well as make recommendations for further study. Moreover, the dissertation will add to the ongoing expansion of a reality based model of culturally responsive and inclusive psychosocial development that will contribute to further research and cultural understanding in our community, our nation, and our world. As a complex way of thinking and seeing, culture continually evolves just as we do.

Selected findings include: Identification of border-based dilemmas, the limitations of my foundational work in the field of psychology and social work, the value of looking at what lies in the margins of the psychosocial experience, and Anzaldúan interventions that are applicable to a borderpsychosocial clinical intervention and assist in the understanding of border-based dilemmas.

Intención

My research intends to identify specificities within the universal process of psychosocial development among a particular group of women, in this case, *las seis mujeres del valle*, in order to reinforce the viability of a specific psychosocial consciousness that frames development for border women, a borderpsychosocial experience and the dilemmas associated with this experience. Another intention of this study is to engage in the process of using qualitative and Chicana feminist methodology, epistemology, and methods that would further connect me to, and provide an opportunity to find my place in, the geographical/social/cultural space into which I was born and from which I was disconnected. Finally, it was also my *intención* to provide *las seis mujeres del valle* an opportunity to not only review events that have contributed to shaping their way of knowing and being in the world, but also to provide them with the documentation of this process for their own personal use.

This borderpsychosocial project focuses on struggle, coping, survival, and success, and offers a counter narrative to the significant discourse on failure within our communities.

¹ Translation: There are so many borders that divide the people, but for every border there also exists a bridge. Valdéz in Anzaldúa, 1999, 107. Also see Appendix A - Glossary for all Spanish to English translations.

² I use USA-Mexico rather than the commonly used US-Mexico to refer to the border I am writing about. I do this specifically because of the commonality of the words “United States” in the title of both countries which is often overlooked and used only when identifying the United States of America.

³ Cantú and Hurtado note that the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas is commonly referred to as “El Valle...by most Mexican Americans living in the area.” See Anzaldúa 2012, 4.

⁴ Gaspar de Alba, oral presentation at First International Conference on the Life and Work of Gloria Anzaldúa, University of Texas, San Antonio, May 16, 2009.

⁵ I am referring to geographical, cultural and social borders. Also see Key Terms in this chapter.

⁶ I use the word Latino as a general term (which is personally preferable to Hispanic, the term most often used) and is one of many terms used to generalize or categorize a diverse group of people that have similarities but also significant differences.

⁷ See Moraga, Anzaldúa, 1981, 1983; Gómez, Moraga and Romo-Carmona, 1983; and Azuela, 1929, 2006.

⁸ See Vila, 2003.

⁹ The Rio Grande River is often referred to as the *Río Bravo* by many who live near, or are culturally connected to, Mexico.

¹⁰ A copy of their signed consent form was delivered to each participant within a few days.

¹¹ Blea defines *platica* as “...intensive interviewing or talking...”

¹² Tapes were later sent to *las mujeres*.

¹³ A traditional Mexican cultural marker and coming of age celebration, for 15 year old females.

¹⁴ Teresa differs from all the other participants as she was the only one born in *México*. Her participation was agreed upon given her initial “yes” response to the question of being from the Rio Grande Valley.

¹⁵ The Mexican public school system requires enrollment through the 6th year of school which is identified as *Primaria*. *La Secundaria* includes 7th through 9th grade and is not required.

¹⁶ A concept introduced in 1978 by Montrose M. Wolf “in discussing the acceptability of interventions with different communities and populations.” In Borrego, Jr., 2008, 6.

¹⁷ See Dolores Delgado Bernal, 1998.

Chapter Two

Salones de Sabiduría – Building Bridges

...her first step is to take inventory...

Gloria Anzaldúa¹

Introduction

No one theoretical concept, method, or model will suffice in an endeavor to understand and explore the complexity found in a life process of any one person or cohort. No single stream of scholarship or discourse can attempt to be sufficient in a project that sets out to further explain and articulate how and why the lives of some *mujeres* vary from the lives of other *mujeres*, nor in understanding the value of knowing these variations both personally and professionally. *Se necesita lo que se sabe, lo que se llevo a saber, y la sabiduría que nos espera.* (We need what we know, what we have come to know, and the knowledge that awaits us.)

The following *cuento* serves as the interdisciplinary review and synthesis of multiple strands of theory, voice, and scholarship that provide a view of the *camino* I have taken, and insight into the process in which I have been engaged while reimagining psychosocial development.² I hope that this method of explanation facilitates an understanding and validation of the complex and multifaceted foundation, framework, and contextualization of my contribution to the ongoing understanding of diversity issues embedded within and amongst us. Traveling on this *camino* for fifty-nine years, I have been personally, professionally, and academically exposed to lived and imagined experiences that compelled me to explore and develop the notion of a borderpsychosocial perspective.

This chapter includes a review of selected literature from psychology, social work, feminist, cultural studies, and history, all related to the study of community, culture, and identity also known as American Studies. An emphasis is placed on the work of Dr. Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, one, if not the most, influential Chicana Feminist scholars in academia and in the ongoing Chicana and Feminist movements. It is Anzaldúa's early theorizing about the borderlands that inspired and compelled me to pursue this borderpsychosocial project. It is ultimately Anzaldúa's "personal integrity, inclusionary politics, and expansive theorizing" (Keating 2006, 5) demonstrated and revealed by her life's work that was the *guía* throughout this project. This chapter concludes with a focus on the geographical location selected for this project; *el valle*.

As we look at the upcoming literature that contributed to my imagining of the notion of borderpsychosocial development, I hope that you will see this notion emerge and take shape as I have.

Cruzando Puentes

The intention of psychology has been dominated by a search for universals...

we know that the social world is constructed...

and that social scientists are among those who do the constructing.

Julian Rappaport³

The notions of cultural sophistication, cultural competency, and cultural responsiveness are placed on the surface of current psychology and clinical social work rhetoric. However, in my experience, both academically and as a practicing psychotherapist, I have witnessed that these notions are more often pushed to the margins of research,

pedagogy, and praxis. Even so, the theoretical conceptualization of the borderpsychosocial development project would not remain possible without the consideration and selective use of foundational concepts embedded within white, Eurocentric, and hegemonic theories and models historically used in psychology and clinical social work pedagogy, research, and praxis. From my early training in psychology, and subsequent training in social work, I bring ideas and notions that resonated with me then and now. The following is an overview of salient concepts drawn from both my study of psychology and social work, and my professional experience as a clinical social worker. I found these psychological and social concepts relevant to my formation and they weave through the process of my conceptualization of borderpsychosocial development.

It happened in Houston, Texas, where I earned my GED. It was there, in Texas, where I found myself at the threshold of higher education. I sat in my car in the parking lot of my daughter's high school – crying and scared. It was the first day of my first college class. I made it through and graduated with my Associate's Degree, the first in the family to accomplish this. I then found myself at another threshold – scared again - and moving on to a four year college. The semester started and I found myself sitting in the front row of class when I noticed that my professor was a priest. How did I manage to find myself back in a Catholic school after having “survived” as they say, Catholic school as a child in Detroit? I later realized I chose to attend a catholic university not only for the academic challenge, but for the opportunity to place myself in a situation where I could take a look and resolve my historical issues with priests and nuns. I did. In the process, I picked up and brought with me useful and thought-provoking ideas about development.

Among the volumes of psychological theory I was taught, accepted, and found useful in my formation and theorizing are the following notions: the existence of a conscious, pre-conscious, and unconscious⁴; the benefit of being socially embedded⁵; the value of symbols and spiritual activity in one's life⁶; the usefulness of seeing development in stages and the significance of crisis resolution⁷; and the awareness of the profound impact of male domination of women.⁸ In addition, the motivational value of finding meaning in experiences and events⁹; the consideration of cultural forces existing at a particular moment in history in order to understand behavior¹⁰; the acquisition, maintenance, and modification of behavior can be learned¹¹; the significant probability of engaging in imitation of behavior, the impact of modeling¹²; and one's belief about the source of their success or failure being internal or external.¹³ Other notions include: the need to understand our natural drive to move forward and the benefit of identifying barriers to meeting the needs of individuals and groups¹⁴; the need to explore the subjective perceptions and thoughts to understand self¹⁵; and the need for understanding one's interpretation and organization of life experiences and events that come to define them.¹⁶

As I was finishing my undergraduate degree in psychology, I was excited to share my *intención* to attend graduate school with one of my professors. Without hesitation, my white, male professor said to me, "Ah, forget it. You're too old." Was I looking for, or did I need and want his approval or support? Looking for? Yes. Want? Yes. Need? At that particular time, yes; now, no. May he rest in peace.

We made the geographical move from Houston to St. Louis to attend graduate school. I brought these ideas and experiences with me. I had been offered the Cesar Chávez Memorial Scholarship. I was so excited! We settled in. The semester began.

Shortly thereafter, I stood looking out from the bedroom window of the upstairs carriage house into which we moved by way of exchange of residence for services. I said out loud to myself, "What am I doing here? Why did I leave my home to relocate to this place where I feel isolated? There's got to be somebody who can help me – I feel so alone and disconnected." I cried. I thought I was going to go crazy. I hopped on the shuttle and went to campus. I walked into the office of an administrator who had recruited me to this ivy-league school. She had assured me I would receive the support I needed to connect with my Mexican community both on and off campus. I asked, "Please, I'd like to get a list of the previous recipients of the César Chávez Memorial Scholarship. I need to connect with the others." She smiled, stood up, picked up a couple of books from her desk, turned her back, and as she placed the books onto the bookshelf she said to me, "Oh, that's just some money we put a name to." Then, I really thought I was going to go crazy. She asked if I had signed up to "test out" of the required human diversity class. I said, "No, and don't plan to." I would later find out that this experience would fall within the notion of "recruit and abandon."¹⁷ I left the administrator's office to figure out my next move.

In the required human diversity class (the one I did not test-out of) I came face-to-face with what were startling facts such as: "the most salient image of the concept of diversity during the early part of the twentieth century involved the notion that diversity meant deviance from the norm, and deviance meant inferiority" (Trickett et al. 1994, 10-

11). According to Joyce A. Lander, “deviance is the invention of a group that uses its own standards as the ideal by which others are to be judged” (in Harding 1987, 75). Although other voices from people of color existed, they were marginalized. The “...most dominant image of diversity by psychology in the early years was one that supported the notion that to be different was to be inferior” (Trickett et al. 1994, 12). To realize that my chosen field for undergraduate study, psychology, “was inextricably linked to a specific sociopolitical agenda supportive of ethnocentrism, racism, and sexism” was disturbing news. No wonder I thought I was going to go crazy. I think I may have had a sense of this all along – *la facultad?*¹⁸

Another *puente* presented itself. My immersion into the practice of experiential learning outside of the academy brought the concepts of oppression and privilege to the fore. Through my work with the National Conference of Christians and Jews (later renamed The National Conference for Community and Justice), I explored the systems of oppression, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism, through experiential activities and debriefing discussions. This practice led to feeling both powerful and powerless; the latter being the most familiar to me.

My Master of Social Work (MSW) degree focused on clinical work using two models. The first, psychosocial casework and the notion of person-in-environment, includes the person, the situation or environment, including other people, and the interactions between the two (Woods and Hollis 1990, 326). The second, family therapy, evolved from the notion that “family is more than a collection of separate individuals; it is a system” (Nichols and Schwartz 1998, 8). It then seemed a practical idea to think about a family system existing

and functioning within and outside of a set of social systems and constructions. My interest was drawn toward the impact on families of our culture's attitudes towards differences. Just as it became unacceptable for me to consider an individual out of the context of family, it also became "no longer valid to consider a family in isolation from patriarchy, racism, homophobia, classism, poverty, crime, work pressures, and materialism" (Nichols and Schwartz 1998, 136). I was nearing the completion of my MSW still feeling I needed more.

Just a few weeks before graduation, I received a call from the dean. He asked if I would consider serving as Marshall at the commencement ceremony. At first, I felt overwhelmed imagining having to volunteer to hold the door during the graduation, given that my *familia* was coming to St. Louis from South Texas. He laughed and explained to me the honor being bestowed upon me. I was surprised. I accepted the honor of Marshall at commencement. The doors of the campus chapel closed as the department graduation ceremony began. While I performed for the audience, my mother sat outside the chapel – there was no room for my mother inside. I learned of this later; after the ceremony. Later still, I would wish I had volunteered to hold the door.

The next *punte* was a fellowship invitation to a prestigious school of psychiatry. I accepted. Although an institution founded on psychoanalytic theory, at the time I arrived for my Post-MSW Clinical Fellowship at a time when models for intervention expanded beyond the psychoanalytic.

The majority of seminars, interdisciplinary in nature, included psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. Interdisciplinary faculty mostly consisting of practicing psychoanalysts, or those involved in a psychoanalytic process in the past, trained the

fellows. Early on in the fellowship, we attended a seminar on relaxation techniques. Included were guided visualizations. As we began our first, and only, guided visualization, the facilitator asked us to close our eyes and sit comfortably. With a soft voice, she began the exercise. She asked us to recall, and sit with, the feeling that arose as we looked back at our experience of the summer after graduating from high school, and as we prepared to go to college. “You know,” she said, “the excitement about your new adventure [pause] how much fun you had that summer [pause] deciding what you would take with you and what you would leave behind [pause].” Hummm, wait a minute; I did not have that experience. I kept my eyes closed and continued to listen – from my standpoint.

Afterward, I went up to her and suggested that she might want to consider changing the script for the visualization, as some of us did not have the memories upon which she had asked us to draw. She just looked at me and smiled. I do not remember hearing any response at all. I think I smiled back, and then quietly, and alone, left the room. It was never mentioned again. Did I mention I was the only Mexican in the room?

It was shortly after this experience that I sought help in connecting with Latina¹⁹ resources. I was directed to “a leader” in the field of family therapy “who would know.” I recall receiving very little support from this “leader.” I again felt isolated. I was, however, provided another name; that of Dr. Yvette Flores-Ortiz from the Chicana/o Studies Department at the University of California, Davis. To my great surprise and joy, Dr. Flores-Ortiz responded to my e-mail immediately. Even through the two dimensional message, I could sense her enthusiasm and felt a *conexión*. That very same day, she sent me several issues of *Voces: A Journal of Chicana/Latina Studies*.²⁰ However, given the academic

requirements of my clinical training, the content of supervision, and the required provision of services, it would be a quite a while before I could fully grasp the significance of the thoughtful and supportive gesture by Dr. Flores-Ortiz. I set the journals aside. It was never mentioned it again.

During this fellowship, I was exposed to feminism by two of my fellow fellows who identified as feminists – they were both white women and younger than I. They educated me about the Women’s Movement. My timely exposure to a feminist perspective in psychotherapy, the “feminist-inspired challenges to the grand theories” (Harding 1987, 10), and the ongoing persistence in the expansion of theory fit quite nicely. I was also introduced to the narrative metaphor in psychology. Narrative therapy focuses on how experience creates expectations and how expectations shape experience through the creation of stories/narratives (Nichols and Schwartz 1998, 324-325).²¹ I instantly connected to these new, for me, ideas and was quite stunned when a clinical supervisor suggested that my clinical work “was feminist.” It made me wonder, were those ideas really new to me?

The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities...

we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.

Aristotle²²

White feminists pointed out that patriarchy permeates the psychology and clinical social work pedagogy, research, and praxis and we have historically been habituated not to notice,

and how to react when we do notice.

Nichols and Schwartz²³

Theory flourishes in disturbing times.

Ann R. Cacoullos²⁴

In her critique of developmental theories, Carol Gilligan claims that we must take a look at the dominant theories and “begin to notice how accustomed we have become to seeing life through men’s eyes.” Gilligan’s feminist critique of the adoption of male life as a norm within developmental theories made a significant impact on the field of psychology (1982, 5-6). Gilligan’s goal was to “expand the understanding of human development by using the group left out in the construction of theory” (1982, 4). Was I part of that group?

Judith V. Jordan acknowledged the consistency in psychological models which claim the desired end-point of development and maturity should be seen as the independence of the individual. Jordan suggested that rather than “movement away from and out of relationship,” women benefit from the “growth through and toward relationship” (Jordan et al. 1991, 81). Connection is a protective factor and isolation is the “glue that holds oppression in place.” The feminist scholars at the Stone Center, at Wellesley College, view the source of human suffering as disconnection (Jordan 1997, 3). The need for connection, yes, it seems to have been an ongoing task for me.

Time passed, I finished my fellowship, and accepted a clinical position in a community based children’s therapeutic daycare center where I spent time with many families. It was difficult to disconnect from them, but the call to be geographically closer to my daughter drew me further west. Although we initially decided on Arizona as our destination, *no me sentía agusto* in Arizona. We headed back across the border to New Mexico and found the place I had, so many years earlier, imagined. I accepted a clinical

position in a community-based child and adolescent outpatient clinic. It was not long before I heard from a supervisor, “Maria, you’re not in Kansas anymore.” I began to look for the next *puente*.

As I considered departmental options for the pursuit of my doctorate, I wished to find a place and space that would contribute to the expansion of my knowledge base and inform my clinical work. I was emotionally drawn to my first class - Chicanas and the Politics of Gender in the Department of Women’s Studies. For the first time in my academic experience, I was exposed to *los libros, el arte, las presentaciones, las obras, las películas, y las Chicanas*. I use the Spanish words for books, art, presentations, plays, films, and my peers because that is how I experienced the class.

Los libros included *Living Chicana Theory* (1998), *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999), *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe* (1996), and *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture* (1997). For the first time in my academic experience, I read literature written and critiqued by Chicana women. Within and throughout the pages I found and experienced connection, understanding, appreciation, and validation of self.

El arte included exposure to Chicana visual artist Yolanda López,²⁵ Chicana photographer Laura Aguilar,²⁶ Chicana installation artist Amalia Mesa-Bains,²⁷ Alma Lopez,²⁸ and Ester Hernández.²⁹ The visual and emotional impact of *Liberdad* by Hernández was intense. (fig. 2) *Estas artistas* profoundly expanded the space that art held in my consciousness previously filled exclusively by white artists with only one exception, Frida Kahlo. The work of narrative artist Carmen Lomas Garza³⁰ is especially evocative as it

captures scenes of our common Mexican childhood memories such as birthday parties with *piñatas*, healing rituals, and family activities such as making *tamales*.



Figure 2: Libertad, 1976 etching by Ester Hernández.

Reproduced by permission of the artist.

Las presentaciones included Andrea Quijada's *Coatlicue: Constructs of a Chicana Paradigm*³¹ and Melinda Zepeda's³² analysis of the fiction of Michele Serros.³³ Listening to these young Chicanas speak so eloquently about their cultural interests and insights inspired me. Quijada introduced me to *Coatlicue*, the mother figure in Aztec cosmology, who would become a prominent image in my life and thought and compel me to visit the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* in Mexico City to see for myself this iconic sculpture and learn more about the mythology. Zepeda introduced me to an analysis of Chicana fiction that emphasized the need to focus on historical resistance to machismo, challenging language, and static definitions and images of Chicanas.

Las obras included María Elena Fernández's *Confessions of a Cha Cha Feminist*.³⁴ The performance of her identity formation not only moved me, but also reinforced the value and power of personal narrative to connect with another through common cultural experiences.

Las películas included *The Salt of the Earth* (1953),³⁵ *Selena* (1997),³⁶ starring Jennifer Lopez, *Corpus: A Home Video for Selena* (1999),³⁷ *Zoot Suit* (1981),³⁸ starring Edward James Olmos, *Mi Vida Loca* (1993),³⁹ *María Candelaria* (1944),⁴⁰ starring Dolores del Río, *Que Viva México* (1930),⁴¹ *El Jardín del Eden* (1994),⁴² and *Enamorada* (1945),⁴³ starring María Félix. I was personally touched by each of the films. *Las películas* exposed me to historical events, expressive culture, introduced me to iconic *artistas* and I recognized parts of me within their celluloid stories.

I was introduced to *Las Chicanas*, the group of *mujeres* that included Chicana writers, filmmakers, artists, and performers. Then, there was *las otras mujeres* – my

professor and *las mujeres* who participated in the class with me. All of these *mujeres* inspired me and were essential in creating my experience of being part of the group. This was the first time in my adult life that I participated in a group, let alone a classroom, consisting of *mujeres* like me. Up to this point, my life experience was filled, for the most part, with men and women who were not like me. In other words, my social and academic encounters were primarily with white men and white women. At that moment, I found myself among a group of *mujeres* who identified as either *méxicana*, *mestiza*, Chicana, *tejana*, Latina, *Nueva Méxicana*, and/or Mexican American; *mujeres* drawn to learning from Chicanas – each other. I was deeply moved by my experience and my connection to the content and the context of the class. My awareness of things Chicana expanded in a way that felt fresh and inviting. I also felt a sense of familiarity and comfort. Most importantly, I felt I was not alone, and certainly not at the margins. At that moment, I felt centered. I was eager to move forward with my search to find my place within the academy – I knew then that it was in the realm of possibilities. The impulse to continue expanding my personal and professional knowledge base that inspires and informs my psychotherapy practice, and the promise of interdisciplinary scholarship, drew me to American Studies.

Colleagues, friends, and family asked me what the field of American Studies offers to anyone in my profession. While my response often varied, it always included the fact that the field of American Studies has historically offered the framework for the interdisciplinary study of culture and people. As described by Susan J. Kilgore, at its core it espouses a commitment to the “exploration of the diversity of American experience and exposition of its essential unity” (47). Because lived experience in this country is complex and

multifaceted, it follows that my exposure to the intricacies of the historical and social constructions of power, race/ethnicity, and gender would continue the ongoing process of advancing my clinical skills as related to providing culturally informed and responsive services. As a consequence, I have been drawn further away from the often normalized objective and categorical understanding of the people that seek out psychotherapeutic services, and toward a subjective and sociocultural understanding of them. Every child, adolescent, and adult that walks into my office brings with them a world of internalized beliefs about self and others that in some way have dis/interrupted their lives; whatever their developmental state. From an often painful, confusing, and isolated place on their *camino*, they seek support and guidance toward a *camino* that will promote self-healing and the opportunity to engage, or re-engage, in the world to pursue their natural desire to move forward, live without fear, be healthy, live peacefully, and most importantly, feel connected to others and each other. Interdisciplinarity remains necessary when seeking out a fuller awareness of community, identity, and culture. It also provides a space that nurtures and values the diversity, innovation, and creativity needed in the contemporary psychotherapeutic profession.

*At its most visionary, it [theory] will emerge from
individuals who have knowledge of both margin and center.*

bell hooks⁴⁴

I took the opportunity of interdisciplinarity and found *puentes* leading to further understanding of feminism, popular culture, history, and borderlands texts relevant to

borderpsychosocial development. I no longer felt restricted to the margins, but rather experienced a feeling of freedom to move from here to there and back again.

Women of color have long challenged the hegemony of feminisms constructed primarily around the lives of white middle-class women.

Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill⁴⁵

Women of color feminists made significant contributions to the expansion of social and psychological knowledge, and as they did, they fractured the structure of white feminism, just as white feminism's emergence fractured the preceding circumscribed notions of social and psychological theory. Cubana, Oliva M. Espín claimed that the "curse of the privileged... [is that]...they do not see anything that does not have to do with themselves... [and]...believe that what they see is universal truth" (Espín 1997, 129).⁴⁶

Beverly Green, an African American woman, emphasized concern about the acceptance in the mental health field of distorted "objective science" even as this science continued to support oppressive practices. Greene feels more disturbed with the acceptance of such "objective science" by people of color (1995, 123). This is not a surprise to many who are aware that the mental health profession did not "develop apart from this culture; rather, the profession is representative of the cultural norms and values of the dominant culture" (Hall and Greene 1994, 24).

Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart-Jordan, a member of the Lakota Tribe, developed the term historical trauma and makes the connection between the historical trauma of a group of people and the impact on their psychological processes throughout and beyond their lifetime (1995, 5).

Gail Pheterson strongly asserts that “genocidal persecution is not required to elicit psyche defense; daily mundane humiliation will do” and that “racist violence and ideology undoubtedly scar psychic development” (1995, 190, 185).

Yvette Flores-Ortiz offers up the notion that it may be during midlife that Chicanas recreate themselves. Though Flores-Ortiz assists women in the process of finding their voice within the context of the therapeutic process, Flores-Ortiz insists that this process of recreation can also take place outside the therapeutic environment (1995).

Aída Hurtado points out that ethnic identity and self-labeling changes throughout the course of our lives – the way we thought of ourselves as teenagers - can be very different from our self-image as older adults (2004). Hurtado also claimed that “Chicanas have collective bootstraps” and clearly illustrates the difference between the western notion of “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” and the Chicanas mutuality and relational context (2003, 269).

In answering the “are men welcome” question, Laura S. Brown owns the evolution of her position from no to yes, and explains that “Women were so used to privileging anything said in a man’s voice that there was a need to remove those voices from the discourse for a bit so that women could become accustomed to hearing their own voices” (2006, 21).

Although not seen on many a syllabi, since 1967 Manuel Ramirez III has contributed to the field of psychology. His work fits within feminist theorizing. It’s interesting to note that both Ramirez and Anzaldúa were influenced by José Vasconcellos.⁴⁷ In 1998, Ramirez introduces “*mestizo* perspectives” to the field of psychology that represented a culmination

of his work since 1967 (1999, ix-x). His “multicultural perspective” model lists the goal to develop a “multicultural orientation to life” that is, to “develop a multicultural identity, have a strong, lifelong commitment to their groups of origin as well as to other cultures and groups” (1999, 215).

To “undo and redo deeply entrenched practices” must remain the goal of current and future training in the field of psychology and clinical social work (Hardy and McGoldrick 2008, 443). Otherwise, we are destined to maintain the status quo of homogeneity rather than diversity and risk the historical training of future “GEMM” therapists, that is, therapists that “become Good, Effective, Mainstream, Minority family therapists” (Hardy 2008, 463). It is training institutions and the supervisors of practice that must take up this responsibility and be held accountable.

Feminist Theorizing by Women of Color

*It has never been as threatening to the powerful when powerless people are seen
as when they are heard.*

Shulamit Reinbarz⁴⁸

As a result of the historical marginalization and silencing of women of color, the natural desire to be seen and heard has taken many forms. The “gendered articulations” (Saldívar-Hull in Anzaldúa 1999, 1) that set the tone and foundation for the expansion of Chicana feminist thought and discourse were, and continue to be, vital in our ongoing effort to expand understanding of self and other. In *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, Alma M. García brings together an anthology that records the historical evolution of Chicana feminist writings beginning in the late 1960s through the mid 1970s

which she identifies as the “heyday of the Chicano movement” (1997, 9). Within the text, García defines major themes ranging from the emerging Chicana feminist consciousness to the voicing of the new consciousness. While immersed in the Chicano Movement, Chicanas became aware they were being marginalized and silenced as women. Although “cautioned to wait and fight her cause at a later time for fear of dividing the Chicano movement,” Chicana *feministas* refused to be silenced (Gomez 1997, 87).

The sounds and silences of women’s voices, and the told and untold stories of struggle, coping, survival, success, and the navigation and negotiation of identity, community, culture, intimacy, and agency remain at the heart of this project. These voices and stories take up self-created space within a number of anthologies edited by women such as Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa 1981; Gloria Anzaldúa 1990; Susan Cahill 1994; Roberta Fernandez 1994; Alma García 1997; Carla Trujillo 1998; Alma Gómez, Cherríe Moraga and Mariana Romo-Carmona 1983; Gabriela F. Arredondo, Aída Hurtado, Norma Klahn, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, and Patricia Zavella 2003; Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim 2003; Robyn Moreno and Michelle Herrera Mulligan 2004; Angie Chabram-Dernersesian and Adela de la Torre 2008; and Norma E. Cantu and Christina L. Gutierrez 2009. Feminist voices are also found in stand-alone stories such as those by authors Maxine Hong Kingston 1975; Stephanie Elizando Griest 2008; Leslie Marmon Silko 1977; Cherríe L. Moraga 2011; Clara Lomas 1994; Lynn Stephen 1994; Elena Avila 2000; Ana Castillo 1994 & 1996; Norma Quiñonez 2005; Norma Cantú 1995; and Zaragoza Vargas 1997.

What is considered theory in the dominant community is not necessarily what counts as theory for women-of-color. Theory produces effects that change people and the way they perceive the world. Thus we need teorías that will enable us to interpret

what happens in the world, that will reflect what goes on between inner, outer and peripheral...teorías that will point out ways to maneuver between our particular experiences and the necessity of forming our own categories and theoretical models for the patterns we uncover...if we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by teorías.

Gloria Anzaldúa⁴⁹

You don't have anything if you don't have the stories.

Leslie Marmon Silko⁵⁰

Locating and hearing the voices in the writing of women of color was crucial to the conceptualization of the borderpsychosocial development project. This form of writing arose from what Chela Sandoval named “tactical subjectivity” and established a safe space for thinking and theorizing (1991, 14). The space and place that the notion of borderpsychosocial development emerged from remains within the spaces and places identified and articulated by Chicana feminists; the stories, the narratives, the *cuentos*, the scholarship. The validation of these spaces and places is evidenced by the significant body of Chicana feminist literature that now exists and continues to be produced. It is the work of Chicana feminists that has nourished this project.

As Emma Perez took on the task of “deconstructing systems of thought and the manner in which they frame Chicana stories” this project takes on the task of exploring the interaction between the social and psychological systems and how this impacts the stories of a particular cohort of women and how they view their subjective histories. As Perez sets out to write Chicanas into history, I set out to facilitate the storytelling of a particular cohort of women. Perez’ conceptualization of “the decolonial imaginary” as a “theoretical tool for the uncovering the hidden voices of Chicanas that have been relegated to silences” defines

and provides a space to travel within while engaged with *las seis mujeres del valle*. Given the fact that Perez insists that “third space feminist practice...can occur only within the decolonial imaginary” what she describes as the space between colonial and postcolonial, it makes sense that engaging in this space is not only helpful in the process of the project, but necessary (1999, xiii-xvi).

Drawn from the work of Chela Sandoval are two concepts that create space for this project. First, the notion of “differential consciousness” that Sandoval claims is the actualization of a “new subject position” and allows us to engage and function “within yet beyond the demands of dominant ideology.” Sandoval argues that this “form of oppositional consciousness has been enacted in the practice of U.S. third world feminism since the 1960s,” but “remained largely unaccounted for within the structure of the hegemonic feminist theories of the 1980s” (1991, 3-2). The second concept drawn from Sandoval is that of “love in the postmodern world” and the conceptualization of “love as a hermeneutics of social change...love as breaking through whatever controls in order to find understanding and community...it is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political *movidas* – revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being” (2000, 135-140). It is in this space of imagining “decolonized being” that provides a sense of freedom and authority which allows for the enactment of theorizing.

Essential guiding principles exist, along with creating space for theorizing. Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman suggest theory-making should:

- 1) enable us to see how parts of our life fit together;

- 2) help us locate ourselves concretely in the world, rather than add to the mystification of the world and one's location in it;
- 3) enable us to think about the extent to which one is responsible or not for being in that location – help women sort out just what is and is not due to themselves and their own activities as opposed to those who have power over them;
- 4) provide criteria for change and make suggestions for modes of resistance that don't merely reflect the situation and values of the theorizer; and
- 5) have a connection to resistance and change (1983, 502-504).

It is reasonable, logical, and necessary to carefully consider these recommendations in order to emerge with a mindful *teoría*.

Gloria Anzaldúa

As I began to read, my heart seemed to skip a beat and that beat found its way to my throat. I experienced both an emotional and visceral reaction unlike any other I could recall. I read the first page, the acknowledgements page, of Gloria Anzaldúa's

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. Anzaldúa wrote:

To you who walked with me upon my path and who held out a hand when I stumbled;
to you who have brushed past me at crossroads never to touch me again;
to you who I never chanced to meet but who inhabit borderlands similar to mine;
to you for whom the borderlands is unknown territory....(1987, i).

I did not know her, but she somehow managed to acknowledge me that day. Throughout my entire life, I had never experienced acknowledgement nor being seen, like this before.

My sense of self and the world around me seemed to somehow shift that day. That day, a bridge presented itself and made a different *camino* accessible to me. My natural desire to

move toward further understanding of self and other and to be nourished by her *palabras* called me. As I began to explore Anzaldúa's borderlands, my borderlands, *mi frontera*, began to populate in a different, yet familiar fashion.

The genesis of this project emerged from the convergence of self-reflective personal, academic, and professional experience and the discursive scholarship on identity, community, and culture found within interdisciplinary study. The scholarship of Dr. Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa (1942-2004) remains central to this project. Anzaldúa experienced, identified, and theorized the sexual, spiritual, cultural, geographical, and psychological spaces she named the *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa's exploration and explanation of the extraordinary excavation of her subjective experience brought to conscious awareness the unconscious and unspoken experiences of many women – including myself. I was immediately drawn into this space; the borderlands, *la frontera*. With me, I brought my life experience and feelings of both excitement and fear. Although I was aware of being born on the geographical borderlands, I was unaware that even though I lived there for only a few years as a child, I had lived in the social and cultural borderlands all of my life. I experienced a profound shift in the process of self understanding. I made a deliberate decision to take the *camino* into the borderlands with conscious awareness. While the sounds, sights, feelings, smells, and tastes of this *camino* were familiar, it quickly became obvious to me that it was also quite different.

*Anzaldúa's many concepts evolved from an astute awareness
of what it meant to live in between worlds.*

Emma Pérez⁵¹

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* opened with this powerful statement:

The actual physical borderlands that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (1987, preface).

It is within this text that Anzaldúa further explains the elements that contribute to her overarching theory of *New Mestiza Consciousness*. Anzaldúa's theorizing falls outside traditional and dominant psychological theorizing methods and processes for gaining knowledge. Anzaldúa's "ways of knowing" are experiential, interpretive, intuitive, subjective, and thus qualitative. These alternative ways of knowing and of evaluating what is "worth knowing" have not been valued within the purview of traditional and dominant theorizing (Schriver 2011, 59). I, too, am one of the "other Chicana academics" referred to by Sonia Saldívar-Hull who "found myself compelled to engage its *New Mestiza* hermeneutics" (Anzaldúa 1999, 2). What follows are key concepts from Anzaldúa's borderland's theorizing that inform this project.

Mestiza Consciousness

Mestiza Consciousness is seen as a way of functioning in the world. An important function of this mode of consciousness serves as a cultural, meaningful place and space that assists in making sense of the self, others, and the world. Within this mode of consciousness one "refuses a static notion of self" while profoundly validating self and viewing "alterity as power." This level of understanding self makes way for the work of

breaking down “dualities that serve to imprison women.” For Anzaldúa, the New Mestiza Consciousness is a “recovery project that leads to political and social awareness (Saldívar-Hull in Anzaldúa 1999, 5-8) ...*una conciencia de mujer*...a consciousness of the borderlands” (1987, 77). To work at understanding and practicing a culturally specific way of functioning in the world is congruent with our natural desire to engage in adaptive functioning in the world.

Nepantla

This is a *Nahuatl*⁵² word meaning “torn between ways.” One is neither here nor there, this or that, but rather in the process of changing. Anzaldúa describes this experience as “mental and emotional states of perplexity” that result from being “sandwiched between two cultures...and their value systems” which produce a multitude of messages that conflict with each other and with our own process of knowing self. Anzaldúa identifies this conflict as “*un choque*, a cultural collision.” Those who occupy this space are “subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders.” The coping skill required to manage this space is the ability to develop a “tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (1987, 78-79). This space and place is uncomfortable, temporary, but reoccurring. Most importantly, it is an experience that is necessary for further understanding that leads to change.

Coatlicue State

Coatlicue is the Aztec representation of “The mountain, the Earth Mother who conceived all celestial beings out of her cavernous womb” (fig. 3). The *Coatlicue* state is fearful period of confusion that results from “suspecting that something is wrong with us”

and we drive this fear underground and out of consciousness. We resist, refuse and/or are unable to acknowledge the fearfulness and thus are drawn into, held, and contained in what Anzaldúa imagined and named the *Coatlicue* state. Anzaldúa describes this state as a disruption of the “complacency of life” and provides the energy that will “propel the soul to do its work.” In this state, we have an opportunity to understand our confusing and painful experiences and process the change needed. Anzaldúa makes clear that the “*Coatlicue* state can be a way station or it can be a way of life” (1987, 45-46).⁵³ The *camino* leading out of this state “to something else” is found in the meanings we make of our experiences. Learning to live with *Coatlicue* “transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience” (1987, 73). It is then that we feel unafraid, empowered and continue our journey.



Figure 3: Coatlicue – Mother of Gods. *Museo Nacional de Antropología, Ciudad de México.*

La Facultad

Anzaldúa defined La Facultad as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface...it is an instant sensing, a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning” (1987, 38). This sense is often developed by those who feel physically or psychologically unsafe in the world – those who feel different. Anzaldúa proposes that *la facultad*, “is latent in all of us” (1987, 48). *La facultad* is intuitiveness, a shift in perception that helps one survive within and amongst the social, psychological, and physical challenges we encounter on a daily basis.

Coyolxauhqui State

This is the condition one is in after being psychologically and emotionally injured. *Coyolxauhqui* is the Aztec Moon Goddess who was dismembered by her brother *Huitzilopochtli* – the God of War (Anzaldúa 1999, 238) (fig. 4). For Anzaldúa, *Coyolxauhqui* is symbolic of the state of being within the *Coatlicue* state and provides an extraordinary visual depiction of the state of being psychologically and emotionally torn apart, dismembered. The process of identifying parts of oneself and putting them back together anew is the process of re-covering, re-membering, and re-defining of self. *Coyolxauhqui* represents the wish to repair and heal the soul and spirit of self.



Figure 4: Coyolxauhqui – Moon Goddess. *Museo Nacional de Antropología*, Ciudad de México.

Shadow Beast

Anzaldúa described the shadow beast as “the rebel” in all of us. It is the part of us that refuses to be victimized, imposed upon, oppressed, marginalized, and constrained by anyone, even if we happen to do it to ourselves. While this rebel can manifest as “the unsavory aspects of ourselves,” our awareness of the shadow beast can be helpful in understanding and making meaning out of our experiences. It is a necessary awareness for coping, survival, and success (1987, 16, 37).

The overarching *teoría* of Mestiza Consciousness contains these five concepts - Nephantla, Coatlicue State, La Facultad, Coyolxauhqui State, and Shadow Beast. These revolutionary concepts made their way into multiple social and academic spaces, and were embraced by Chicana feminist academics and theorists (e.g., Chela Sandoval, Emma Pérez, Aida Hurtado, Norma Cantú, AnaLouise Keating, Lara Medina, and Norma Alarcon, etc.) and the many fortunate to have access and exposure to the Anzaldúa’s work, both in and outside of the academy.

The exploration of this borderpsychosocial project benefits significantly from the Anzaldúa theorizing. Considering and understanding the complex and competing socio/cultural, political and historical forces that shape our experience is vital to understanding self and others. There is no doubt that one of the characteristics of, on, and in, the psychosocial, and geographical borderlands is change. The lack of awareness and understanding of the dynamics of and on the borderlands are sure to lead us into confusion, the possible acceptance of hegemonic ideological positions, imbue our consciousness and/or unconsciousness, and shape us into what Pablo Villa refers to as both “border

crossers and border reinforcers” (2000). As Anzaldúa made clear, “ignorance splits people, creates prejudices. A misinformed people is a subjugated people” (1987, 108). What we see and experience from within the borderlands in combination with knowledge about border and borderland spaces provide us with an increased capacity to travel the *caminos* that will teach us coping skills and survival strategies needed to feel safe, experience agency, and express love.

What eventually emerged from Anzaldúa’s experience living on and within the borderlands and the ongoing exploration and development of Mestiza Consciousness is her concept of *conocimiento*.⁵⁴ Anzaldúa stated that *conocimiento* is “that aspect of consciousness urging you to act on the knowledge gained” (2002, 577). In an interview with Ines Hernandez-Avila in 1991, Anzaldúa explained *conocimiento* as:

...my term for an overarching theory of consciousness, of how the mind works. It’s an epistemology that tries to encompass all the dimensions of life, both inner - mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spritual, bodily realms – and outer – social, political, lived experiences...*conocimiento* is a theory of composition, of how a work of art gets composed...how reality itself is constructed, and how identity is constructed. When you watch yourself and observe your mind at work you find that behind your acts and your temporary senses of self (identities) is a state of awareness that, if you allow it, keeps you from getting completely caught up in that particular identity or emotional state. This awareness sees through it (Keating 2000, 177).

When asked to describe some of the issues related to *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa responded, “How do we know? How do we perceive? How do we make meaning? Who produces knowledge and who is kept from producing it? Who distributes and passes it on? Who has access to it and who doesn’t? Is there such a thing as counterknowledge, and if so who constructs it and how?” (Keating 2000, 178). These issues remain pertinent to the

borderpsychosocial project and lead to the exploration of cultural production which contributes to what Chela Sandoval calls “a developed subjectivity” (Leon 2004, 58).

Cultural Studies - *La Cultura Cura*⁵⁵ y Más

Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.

Raymond Williams⁵⁶

In my role as a mental health professional, I believe it is very important to understand the concept of *la cultura cura* – that culture cures. The overarching question of this study – Is there a specific psychosocial consciousness that frames development for border women? - seeks further understanding of the notion of *la cultura cura* because while I believe culture can be curative, I also believe that its impact can also be injurious and lead to misperceptions and confusion. The following *cuéntito* is an example.

I heard my dad shout, “Gloria!” I quickly took off the black patent-leather tap shoes that he bought me at the Salvation Army Thrift Store, and ran down the long flight of stairs from the upstairs flat we were renting. I recall thinking it was so close to the Ambassador Bridge⁵⁷ that it seemed like we were right underneath it! As I got to the front porch, I heard my dad say, “*párate allá.*” Click, went the Kodak camera. *Apá* took the picture. I had on my little black shoes with white ankle socks, a little pleated skirt with a matching blouse, and a bow in my naturally wavy, dark brown, chin length hair. What I wore was only a part of what was captured in the black and white picture; another part was my pose. A big smile, hands on hips, a slight tilt of my head to the right, and my right leg extended out with the heel of my shoe touching the sidewalk and my toe pointed up to the sky. The picture was of the seven, almost eight, year old little Mexican girl who lived in an upstairs flat, on West

Lafayette Street near the Detroit River. It also captured another part, that only I would be able to articulate, that is, the little girl's belief about herself...myself. I believed I was going to grow up to be just like Shirley Temple.

Culture is the lens through which people perceive reality.

Culture forms the beliefs and values which are transmitted through language, the arts, and behavior; culture contextualizes individual psychology.

Yvette G. Flores-Ortiz⁵⁸

The impact of cultural production must not be underestimated in the formation of identity. Unfortunately, many of us were taught "what to believe and not how to think."⁵⁹ It is clear that historically, cultural production has and continues to be a powerful social force that has a profound influence on individual and group thinking, behavior, and identity formation. The variability of the exposure to film, television, music, dance, and art play a role in the construction and variability of identity and the understanding of self and other. The process of impact begins at birth and continues throughout the lifespan. In order to free ourselves from psychological, historical, and social forces that keep some of us (some or all of the time) confined to a myopic view of the world and our role in it, we must become aware of the process and impact of cultural production. This remains crucial given the impact is at the level of the conscious, preconscious, and/or unconscious. To seek out information that both subverts and critiques injurious negative representations creates a space for counter representations and knowledge that empower and engender agency. Thus, exploration of the role of cultural production in the conceptualization of borderpsychosocial development remains vital.

Películas

Our artistic productions should subvert dominant ideology rather than reproduce it.

Rosa Linda Fregoso⁶⁰

Many of us were not exposed to scholars who have historically continued to subvert, critique, and question the constructed truth about us. Therefore, we have actually, knowingly or not, gleaned and most likely internalized constructed representations of and about us from the messages historically provided both overtly and covertly, by way of the cultural production that manifests as film.

From the beginning of film making history in 1894, we, the audience, have been impacted by the images we see that have been constructed. This impact includes subjective value which cannot be generalized as each individual has his or her own historical context by which they view celluloid images. One cannot underestimate the role of film in the construction and maintenance of subjectivities.

Basta de gritar contra el viento - toda palabra es ruido si no está acompañada de acción.

Gloria Anzaldúa⁶¹

Rosa Linda Fregoso's analysis of film places the focus on the "emergence of a film culture by, about, and for Chicanas and Chicanos" and how these film projects produced in the 1960s and 1970s were oppositional cinema and a direct outcome of the Chicano Movement (1993, xiv). The intention of Chican@ film production since the late 1960s is the result of an effort to create an alternative to what Chican@s identified as "six decades of abusive stereotypes" (Noriega 1993, xix). Beyond centered stereotypes, at the margins

stood *voces feministas*. In response, there emerged the groundbreaking film *Chicana* (1979) by filmmaker Sylvia Morales.

Often referred to as the first historical film about Chicanas, Sylvia Morales said about her film, "...there is no doubt that after seeing this film, people will be asking themselves "Why didn't I know this before? and Tell me more!" and this was absolutely the response (Morales in Noriega 1993, 309). Morales recovered the role of the *Chicana* and *Méxicana* from a male dominated interpretation of historical stories and re-defined and re-constructed a female history. *Chicana* is a film that emerged from the resistance of Chicanas to the "dominant as well as Chicano (male) oppressive ideologies" (Fregoso 1993, 3) during the Chicano Movement and in response to *Yo Soy Joaquín*.⁶² Morales created the space to see the faces, and hear the voices, and the screams of agony from a women's perspective in opposition to the male perspective. Morales introduced many of us to women such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,⁶³ Lucy González Parsons,⁶⁴ and Emma Tenayuca.⁶⁵ These women, for many of us, were left in the interstitial and unknown spaces of our histories. Out of the montage created by Morales emerged a visual depiction of coping, survival, and success for us as well as her.⁶⁶

The importance of impact analysis that is "the images that ultimately take root in the minds of viewers as they read and absorb film" is explored in by Carlos E. Cortés in Noriega. Cortés states that "viewers may react consciously by analytically considering the film's treatment of ethnic characters. Far more often, they react unconsciously, since people usually go see feature films to be entertained, not to be educated about ethnicity" or anything else for that matter. Many film producers "generally claim that they make

fictional media merely to entertain, reject responsibility for what their films might incidentally or unintentionally teach, and at times even deny their teaching potential.”

Given the view that many of us were taught what to believe and not how to think, it makes sense to consider the powerful potential of media and the notion of “hypodermic needle effect” that is based on the assumption of a direct “...link between media and the development of individual, group, and national attitudes and behavior.” In his synthesis of psychological and communications reception theories, Cortéz points out the following:

If a depiction coincides with already-held beliefs, it tends to reinforce them. In contrast, if that depiction directly challenges a viewer’s beliefs, particularly if these are deep and emotional, the viewer tends to reject, modify, or mute that film’s portrayals as a source of generalizable knowledge. However, if a depiction falls only marginally outside of the viewer’s perceptual framework, without directly challenging it, these new images will more likely penetrate and modify the viewer’s belief system, add to the pool of knowledge, and influence personal ideational schema. In particular, if a movie portrays an ethnic group or nation about which the viewer knows little or has no deep feelings, that *information* is most likely to become part of the viewer’s personal intercultural *encyclopedia*.

This understanding of impact remains crucial given the implications for social construction and reinforcement and imposition of negative stereotypes upon those born into a specific cultural, geographic, and ethnic context and may not have been exposed to media that depicts agency, but rather to the media constructed in a racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic manner. No doubt, “movies teach... [and construct]...a powerful public textbook” (Cortez in Noriega 1993, 88-91). The historical and ongoing effort by some Chicana@ filmmakers and film critics intend to destabilize ethnic stereotyping and generalizations by offering complex depictions of border and borderland experiences.⁶⁷

Televisión

Cultural domination has real effects...

Stuart Hall⁶⁸

For many of us, in our 50s and 60s, going to the movies, for the most part, was and in some cases continues to be, a special event. Going out of the home to interact with cultural production is one thing; bringing the cultural production into the home is another. The impact of television was, and continues to be, enormous. In their book, *The Revolution Wasn't Televised* (1997), Spigel and Curtin centered their analysis on television programming and production from the 1960s in the context of larger political, social, and cultural forces in an attempt to understand the struggle that took place over representation on television (2).⁶⁹ By 1960, eighty-nine percent of the population owned a television and watched it an average of five hours a day. The shaping of program content reflected the larger social, political and cultural forces of the time and often used as a tool for silencing vocal minorities (9). Woven throughout the texts and cultural studies discourse is Antonio Gramsci's insights regarding hegemony, coercion, and consent. Gramsci conceptualized hegemony as:

...process whereby the subordinate are led to consent to the system that subordinates them. This is achieved when they 'consent' to view the social system and its everyday embodiments as 'common sense' [or as] self-evidently natural (Gramsci in Spigel and Curtin 1997, 306).

An analysis of television production and promotion is extensive and beyond the scope of this project. However, it is important to note the poignant effort made toward psychological market research of teenage girls (Lockett in Spigel and Curtin 1997); the

representation of power structures and gender roles within family systems (Jenkins in Spigel and Curtin 1997); that entertainment was produced for specific audiences including a category identified as “simple people” (Johnson in Spigel and Curtin 1997, 271); and that the broadcast airways were used as a site for “generational and ideological battles over the Vietnam War, the psychedelic drug culture, and other aspects of antiestablishment youth dissent” (Brodughkozy in Spigel and Curtin 1997, 202) during a period of political and social instability. Given the ubiquitous nature of television, we can safely assume that we invited powerful social and political messages into our homes for consumption. We, those in our 50s and 60s, were the first “television generation” (Bodroghkozy 2001, 17). All programming has had and continues to have a role in constructing culture and has an impact on constructing our image and expectations of self and others.

Música y Baile

The cultural production of music, and of course dance, play a role in social and psychological development. What one listens and moves to and how this changes over time, or not, remains worthy of consideration given the powerful emotional experiences and images that we connect to music. We all possess our own playlist for different emotional states and some of us even have our playlist for our memorial. As with other forms of popular culture, “...music expresses profoundly the values, spirituality, sentiments, joys, tragedies, and struggles of a people” (Tatum 2001, 14).⁷⁰ We could each construct a musical score that would possibly contain similarities, but it would be without a doubt specific to our own subjective experiences in the world. For all who live on the borders and in the borderlands, the music score encompasses a wide range of style and lyric.

Obviously, the playlist, the musical score, and the *baile* are all connected to what we have been exposed to, but what about what has remained unknown or lies hidden within our unconsciousness? George Lipsitz suggests that popular culture has played an important role in our disconnection from the past and creates a “crisis of memory” (Lipsitz 1990, vii). On the other hand, he also suggests that popular culture has been a way to express both loss and hope for reconnection to the past (12). There can be no doubt about the value of the past in the process of psychosocial development. Lipsitz reminds us that living in a world that is always in the process of evolving and changing “...the past becomes ever more precious the more it disappears...” and the longer we live, “...many feel the sting of disconnection from the past” (257). Whether a conscious or unconscious “sting” it remains there nonetheless. Recovering the past is important in order to contextualize the present. *Música y baile* is a part of our past that holds significant cultural meaning for many of us.

Arte

As another vehicle for cultural production, art’s significance and value in the shaping of self lies first in whether or not we were, or are, exposed to art and if so by what means, by whom and whose art. In this study, the interest lies in the exposure and familiarity with art in general and Mexicano/a, Chicana/o art in particular. When a person’s life is void of the visual or performing arts, knowingly or not, there is an empty space that exists. This space is not solely void of the visual experience of art, but also the emotional and often visceral experience that accompanies subjective engagement and connection with art. A reflective value becomes known and finds its way into cultural identity spaces.

The discourse emerging from the textual, historical, audience and production analysis of art by scholars from multiple disciplines has advanced our understanding and appreciation of art by us and for us. As an example, in September of 1990, the first major national art show organized by Chican@s in collaboration with mainstream art institutions represented, as Alicia Gaspar de Alba identified, a "...historic, cultural and political event...[and] ...text about the life-practices of an *Other* American Culture..." - *CARA - Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* opened in UCLA's Wight Art Gallery and featured 128 pieces of art and 54 mural images by some 140 Chicano and about 40 Chicana artists (Gaspar de Alba 1998, 7). The exhibits that include Chican@, Latin@, Mestiz@ art exposed situated selves and subjective experience. Those who were exposed historically, or have been exposed recently, to Gaspar de Alba's work, find the addition of these visual depictions helpful in filling our spaces that shape understanding of self.

Although all art has value and is important to the further understanding of self and other, the Chicana feminist artists were of most interest to this project. As art became a mode of expression for the Chican@ community it had its roots in support of Chicano ideology. However, in the 1970s Chicanas began to question *el movimiento* as it was not meeting their needs. Chicanas researched their history, engaged in conversations, took great risks and produced a body of art that expressed their philosophy, theory, and belief of the social, political, and economic rights of women along with the sacredness, power, wisdom and strength of Chicanas from the past to the present and into the future.

El Valle

El valle is no Dallas. It has no national championship sports teams, no famous presidential events, no mega-highways and no J.R. Ewing.⁷¹ *El valle* is no Houston. It has no world-renowned performance theatres, art museums, Astrodome, or an international livestock show and rodeo. *El valle* is no El Paso. It has no mountain range⁷² or elevation from which you can see *el otro lado*, nor any monuments to infamous conquistadors. *El valle* is no Austin. It has no internationally known music scene or wild rivers to throw your tube in or launch your canoe and go for a smooth cruise or a swift ride over the rapids. *El valle* is no San Antonio. It has no iconic structures such as the Alamo, nor does it have a river walk along the *Río Grande*. *El valle* is no Corpus Christi. It is not the birth and resting place of a Latina superstar, nor are there beachfront homes for weekend getaways.

Neither is *el valle* a Monterey, Coahuila, Matamoros, Progreso, or Reynosa; all cities and towns in *México* on or near the southern bank of the *Río Grande*. On the opposite bank, the northern bank of the *Río Grande* sits the Lower *Río Grande* Valley – *el valle*. To many on the southern side of the *Río Grande*, it not only seems, but actually is, a world away.

In reality, the towns and cities of *el valle* are like no other city or town north or south of *el valle*. Yet, *el valle* is like some other cities and towns and it is like all other cities and towns mentioned. It is like other cities and towns because of some similarities in demographics, linguistics, foods, shared histories, traditions and celebrations, religious/spiritual practices, just to name a few. However, it is the differences that make the towns and cities of *el valle* so unique.

In Texas, and the USA, it is the southernmost geographical border. A walk or drive across the bridge into *México* has been a natural part of living in *el valle* (fig. 5). Over a million people come from all over the world to visit the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan *del Valle* (figs. 6, 7, 8). San Juan is also the home of La Unión del Pueblo Entero (LUPE), a social service and community organizing center founded in 1989 by César Chavez to advocate for families living in the *colonias* (fig. 9). *El valle* is a haven for over 500 species of birds; including snowbirds.⁷³ *El valle* is in close proximity to South Padre Island (SPI). SPI has been a destination for many spring breakers. But more importantly it has remained, for the most part open to the public and a destination for the people from both sides of the border. San Benito is the home of the Narciso Martinez Cultural Arts Center where The Texas Conjunto Hall of Fame (fig. 10) has been established. As San Benito is the hometown and resting place of singer/songwriter/actor Freddy Fender, a place of memorial and remembrance has been established for him within the cultural arts center (fig. 11). Also, the city water tower has a portrait of Freddy Fender and announces San Benito as his hometown. In Edinberg, you can find (if you are persistent as I) the Walk of Fame which includes memorial plaques to *Tejanas* such as Selena Quintanilla (fig. 12) and Lydia Mendoza (fig. 13). There are no casinos in *el valle*, so bingo night happens at the local VFW or American Legion Hall on a regular basis. High school sports provide entertainment for both the young and old on Friday nights and homecoming is quite the annual event. Weddings, *quinceañeras*, Baptisms, Holy Communion, Confirmation, and funeral ceremonies and rituals are important social events. Residents celebrate *El Diez y Seis*, also known as *El Grito de Dolores*, every September 16th to mark the beginning of the 1810 Mexican War of

Independence. In Brownsville, folks have celebrated *Charro* Days every February for over 73 years. This event honors the friendship and relationship between two border towns, Brownsville and Matamoros, and two nations, United States of American and United States of Mexico.⁷⁴ Established in 2008, the Valley International Poetry Festival, an annual collaborative community event, brings the voices of valley poets to the public as the only poetry festival that has concurrent readings in two countries – throughout *el valle* and Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico⁷⁵. The annual CineSol Film Festival, establish in 1993, is the first Texas Border Region film festival⁷⁶ (fig. 14). Mexican healer Don Pedrito Jaramillo (1829-1907) made his home in Los Olmos and there remains a shrine in his honor that continues to receive visitors who come to request healing and miracles (Leon 2004, 139-142) (figs. 15, 16).



Figure 5: Harvest season on the border. Author photo.



Figure 6: Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle National Shrine. *Patrona de la Frontera*. Author photo.



Figure 7: Alter in the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle National Shrine. Author photo.



Figure 8: Exterior mosaic wall of the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle National Shrine. Author photo.



Figure 9: LUPE, *La Union del Pueblo Entero*. Author photo.



Figure 10: *Conjunto* Hall of Fame in the Narciso Martinez Cultural Center, San Benito, Texas. Author photo.



Figure 11: Freddy Fender Memorial in the Narciso Martinez Cultural Center, San Benito, Texas. Author photo.



Figure 12: Selena Quintanilla Star on the Tejano Walk of Fame, Edinberg, Texas. Author photo.



Figure 13: Lydia Mendoza Star on the *Tejano* Walk of Fame, Edinberg, Texas. Author photo.



Figure 14: CineSol 2008. El Rey Theatre, McAllen, Texas. Author photo.



Figure 15: Don Pedrito Jaramillo Shrine, Los Olmos, Texas. Author photo.



Figure 16: Lighting of candles at Don Pedrito Jaramillo Shrine, Los Olmos, Texas. Author photo.

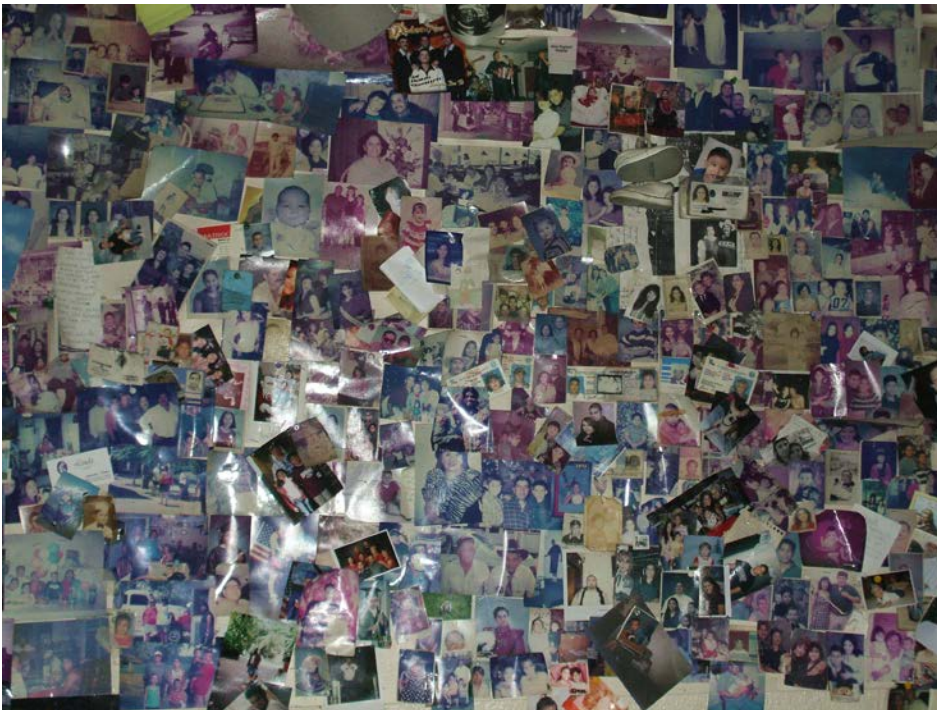


Figure 17: Requesting prayers and offering promises at Don Pedrito Jaramillo Shrine, Los Olmos, Texas. Author photo.

Then there is Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa. She was born in Raymondville, Texas, in Willacy County; my home town. She grew up in Hargill and came home to *el valle* to be laid to rest at *El Valle de Paz Cimiterio* (fig. 18). Her headstone leaves us these words: (on one side) “May we seize the arrogance to create outrageously. *Sonar* wildly – for the world becomes as we dreamed it” (and on the other) “*Sabemos que podemos transformar este mundo* filled with hunger, pain and war into a sanctuary of beauty, redemption and possibility. [and, below that] *Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar*. Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds one as one walks.” (fig. 19).



Figure 18: *El Valle de Paz Cimiterio*, Hargill, Texas. Author photo.



Figure 19: Gloria Anzaldúa's headstone at *El Valle de Paz Cenmenterio*, Hargill, Texas.

Author photo.

The Lower Río Grande Valley of South Texas, the geographical borderland area and the focus of this study, has a robust and unique social, cultural, and political history. Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy counties comprise this region. According to the 2008 US Census, the percentage of Hispanics in each of these counties was: 86% in both Willacy and Cameron counties and 97% in both Starr and Hidalgo counties. This in and of itself makes *el valle* a unique region of Texas and of this country.

Historically, scholarship related to *el valle* exists very sparsely. In *Dancing with the Devil* (1994) and *American Encounters* (1998) José E. Limón provides ethnographic and autoethnographic work by, as Limón himself would say, a *mexicano de este lado*. I appreciate the way Limón interweaves his personal narratives into his discourse. Limón examines the ways in which social, economic, and cultural power are negotiated and appropriated by residents of South Texas. His perspective as a man from South Texas is important. However, I must agree with Fregoso's challenge to Limón regarding his reading of both text and film. Fregoso declares that what is at stake in the difference of interpretation of texts is much more than just opposing view – it is a missing voice (2003, xiii). I believe that an autoethnographic exploration of *mujeres* by a *mexicana de este lado*, and from *el valle* in particular, will bring something new to the conversation.

In *Coming of Age in the Borderlands*, Isabel Valiela takes a look at the development of borderland adolescents in the 1950s and 1960s. Valiela's analysis illustrates how "political, economic, and social facts, within the historical framework represented, had an impact on the lives of people who belong to different U.S. Latino groups" (2002-2003, 102). Using Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of borderlands to conceptualize the lives of adolescents,

Valiela demonstrates how given the “constant clash of voices and contradictions” they, as children must “learn to navigate the turbulent waters of displacement” (103). I believe that what they learn may or may not be adaptive ways of coping and surviving the experience of displacement and marginalization. However, I also believe that as an adult, skills developed during adolescence can be reexamined and redefined.

A Brief History of the Lower Río Grande Valley

Historical truth is the least of our concerns.

Sigmund Freud⁷⁷

We can be sure, the historical ebb and flow of social, political, economic, and cultural events and movements occur and we may, or may not, be aware of such happenings. Some of us participate at various levels in these events and movements and others do not. And although direct participation was not required to benefit from progress that results from such events or movements, some do not benefit from such progress for a variety of reasons.⁷⁸ Either way, they happen and whatever the outcome, there is an impact on all of us. They shape our lives and will either connect us to or disconnect us from one another.

The list of historians is endless and continues to grow. As we are aware the victors traditionally wrote history. I am thankful to have lived long enough to see people of color writing history which situates them not as victors, but as a community of voices from the margins responding to the dominant, ethnocentric, and hegemonic stories. Everyone has a *cuento*.

Because the Spanish protected widows' rights, Doña Rosa María Hinojosa de Ballí (1752-1803) inherited land from her father and husband after their deaths. She continued to acquire land until she owned one-third of what is present-day Lower Río Grande Valley; over one million acres. The separation of Mexico from Texas came in 1836 as a result of the Texas War of Independence. The Annexation of Texas by the United States of America came in 1845. The Mexican American War was declared on May 11, 1846. The United States of America declares war against Mexico as the USA attempts to move the USA-Mexico border from Nueces River to the Río Grande. The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war on February 2, 1848. The Anglo settlers headed south. They were either marrying into money, cheating, unfairly taxing, threatening, and even murdering for land held by Mexican Americans (Acosta and Winegarten 2003, 16-19). Around 1874, the *ranches* came to the borderlands. The Texas Rangers are legendary. Their brutal methods are not, but should be.⁷⁹ By the early 1900s, many *tejano* families living in South Texas lost their land and "took up life on Anglo-owned ranches" (Acosta and Winegarten 2003, 95).

When people ask me from where I'm from, and they hear the Lower Río Grande Valley, they often ask me if I know so-and-so. Almost 100% of the time, so-and-so has an Anglo surname. I always feel uncomfortable not knowing so-and-so.

I was born in the mid-1900s. Our family lived in my father's hometown of Raymondville, Texas in Willacy County until I was about four years old. My mother tells the story about what happened after my father came back to the States from serving in the Korean Conflict; "*se fue al norte*" she told us, "*para buscar trabajo*" (fig. 20). It was in 1951 when an event occurred in Edna, Texas, in Hidalgo County, that brought about the

Hernandez v. Texas case. The case was taken all the way to the Supreme Court, where a group of Mexican American lawyers challenged Jim Crow-style discrimination against Mexican Americans.⁸⁰ It seems reasonable to believe that my family wanted to leave *el valle* so my father could find work, but it also seems reasonable to consider the unspoken, unnamed, normalized impact of racism as a factor related to the decision to move.



Figure 20: Apá, Noe Torres Munguía (1926-1986), US Army,

Private First Class. Munguía family photo.

Many flags have flown over the Lower Río Grande of South Texas. They include the Crown of Spain, the Republic of *México*, the Republic of Texas, the Confederate States of

American, and the United States of America (Chance in Kearney, Knopp and Zavaleta 2005, 75). And then there is the United Farm Workers flag. The 60s and 70s were turbulent years in *el valle*. It was during the late 60s that I spent a year in *el valle*.

I was 15 when I spent one year in Raymondville with my paternal grandparents. I did not fit in with the white kids or the Mexican kids – not even my extended family. It was a sad time for me and I was quite isolated – feeling marginalized. But even after that experience, I always looked forward to going back every year to visit *familia*; and still do. Now there stands a physical manifestation of border spaces that have always existed; the border wall (fig. 21). As Anzaldúa noted, “How I love this tragic valley of South Texas...” (1987, 90); so do I.



Figure 21: Border Wall under construction at Brownsville, Texas and Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Author photo.

There is a *dicho* that says *cada cabeza es un mundo* – every head is its own unique world. There are however, common themes and issues in the developmental experience of *las seis mujeres del valle* – border women. These themes are many and include experience with political engagement, historical trauma, social stressors, diversity in religion, phenotype and class distinctions and perceptions, patriarchy, identity confusion and diffusion, education, cultural production (music, dance, film, television and art), family systems, language issues, process of assimilation/acculturation, traditional medicine and healing practices, and variations in historical and cultural knowledge and traditions. Although there are common themes, there also exists variability of experience by each of *las mujeres*. This project concerns itself with four specific themes related to experiences with: education, religion/spirituality, language, and traditional medicine and healing. However, woven throughout the *cuentos* are all the themes noted in this chapter. So let us now turn to *las seis mujeres del valle*, listen to their *cuentos* and hear evidence in support of the meaning of borderpsychosocial experience while we keep in mind that “culture is the lens through which people perceive reality” (Flores-Ortiz in Adleman and Enguídanos 1995, 252).

It is clear that the result of social impact – whether we are aware of it or not – shapes, reinforces, and drives our behavior, choices, and thoughts about self, others, and constructs meaning. These borderpsychosocial aspects of development illicit change in emotions, motivations, and behavior while also simultaneously creating change in social relations with others.

To properly understand and conceptualize multicultural and multiracial processes – what is required are research perspectives and methods that are representative of both

European and Mestizo worldviews.

Ramírez⁸¹

¹ Anzaldúa, 1987, 82.

² This chapter would traditionally be a “standard” literature review and appear in a particular format. This is not the case here given that I am offering portions of my own developmental *cuento*; my process.

³ Rappaport in Trickett, Watts and Birman, 1994, 359 & 362.

⁴ Psychodynamic Theory - Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).

⁵ Individual Psychology Theory - Alfred Adler (1870-1937).

⁶ Analytical Psychology - Carl Jung (1875-1961).

⁷ Psychosocial Theory - Erick Erickson (1902-1994).

⁸ Sociocultural Psychoanalytic Theory - Karen Horney (1885-1952). Horney found herself marginalized and then eventually expelled from the male-dominated psychoanalytic school of thought. See Larry A. Hjelle and Daniel J. Ziegler, Personality Theories: Basic Assumptions, Research and Applications. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), 229.

⁹ Existential Analysis - Victor E. Frankl. See Man’s Search for Meaning. 3rd ed. (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984).

¹⁰ Humanistic Psychoanalytic Theory - Erick Fromm (1900-1980).

¹¹ Behaviorist-Learning Theory - B.F. Skinner (1904 – 1990).

¹² Social Cognitive Learning Theory - Albert Bandura (1925-).

¹³ Social Learning Theory - Julian Rotter (1916 -).

¹⁴ Humanistic Theory - Abraham Maslow (1908 – 1970).

¹⁵ Phenomenological Theory - Carl Rogers (1902-1987).

¹⁶ Personal Construct Theory - George Kelly (1905 – 1906).

¹⁷ Personal communication with Roberto Chené, Director, Intercultural Leadership Training and Conflict Resolution, Albuquerque, 2000.

¹⁸ As defined by Gloria Anzaldúa, “*La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities” in *Borderlands* 1987, 38.

¹⁹ The term “Latino” was used in this region of the country at this time and was new to me.

²⁰ The Journal of MALCS (*Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*), University of California, Davis. See www.malcs.org/chicanalatina-studies-the-journal-of-malcs/

²¹ Interesting to note that primary credit for the development of narrative therapy model goes to two white men. It was actually the wife of one of the men that introduced the metaphor to them.

²² In de Beauvoir, 33.

²³ Nichols and Schwartz 1998, 327-328.

²⁴ Statement made by Professor Ann R. Cacoullos during a lecture in a Feminist Theory class at University of New Mexico, Fall 2006.

²⁵ See Karen Mary Dávalos. Yolanda M. Lopez. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

²⁶ See www.cla.purdue.edu/waaw/corinne/aguilarbio.htm.

²⁷ Famous for her alter creations. See http://upa.csumb.edu/facultry/mesa_bains.htm.

²⁸ Chicana visual artist famous for her “Our Lady” collage. See www.almalopez.net and Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Alma Lopez, eds. Our Lady of Controversy: Alma Lopez’s Irreverent Apparition. San Antonio: University of Texas Press (Chicana Matters Series), Fall 2010.

²⁹ See www.esterhernandez.com. Included in the Imagination Section of the American Treasures of the Library of Congress at www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures

³⁰ Chicana narrative artist. See www.clg.com.

³¹ Presentation of Master’s Thesis by Andrea Quijada at University of New Mexico, Women’s Studies. February 25, 2002.

³² Guest Lecturer, Melinda Zepeda on the fiction of Michele Serros at University of New Mexico, Women’s Studies. March 18, 2002.

³³ See Chicana Falsa: And Other Stories of Death, Identity and Oxnard. Culver City, CA: Lalo Press, 1993 and How to be a Chicana Role Model. New York: Riverhead Books, 2000. www.muhamichele.com

³⁴ One woman show at the Kimo Theatre, Albuquerque, NM, February 28, 2002.

³⁵ Salt of the Earth. Produced by Paul Jarrico and directed by Herbert J. Biberman. 1 hr. 34 min. Independent Productions Corporation, the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers and Voyager Company, 1953.

See James J. Lorence, The Suppression of Salt of the Earth: How Hollywood, big labor, and politicians blacklisted a movie in Cold War America. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999.

³⁶ Selena. Produced by Gregory Nava and Moctezuma Esparza and directed by Gregory Nava. 2 hrs. 7 min. 1997. See Charles M. Tatum, Chicano Popular Culture: Que Hable el Pueblo. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2001), 75.

³⁷ Corpus: A Home Video for Selena. Directed by Lourdes Portillo, 1999. 47 min. See www.wmm.com.

³⁸ Zoot Suit. Directed by Luis Valdez. 1 hr. 44 min. Universal Studios, 1981. See Fregoso, 1993.

³⁹ Mi Vida Loca. Directed by Allison Anders. 1 hr. 32 min. Channel Four Films, 1993.

⁴⁰ Maria Candelaria. Directed by Emilio Fernández and written by Mauricio Magdaneno. 1 hr. 30 min. b&w. Spanish with English subtitles. Mexico, 1943.

⁴¹ Que Viva México! Produced and edited by Grigori Aleksandrov and Nikita Orlov and directed by Sergei Eisenstein. 1 hr. 25 min. Spanish with English subtitles. Soviet Union, 1979. Footage shot in 1930.

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- ⁴² *El Jardín del Edén*. Directed by María Novaro and written by Beatriz Novaro and María Novaro. 1 hr. 44 min. color. Spanish with English subtitles. Mexico, Canada, France, 1994.
- ⁴³ *Enamorada*. Directed and written by Emilio Fernández. 1 hr. 27 min. b&w. Spanish with English subtitles. Mexico, 1945.
- ⁴⁴ bell hooks. *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*. 2nd ed. (Boston: South End Press, 2000), xvii.
- ⁴⁵ Zinn and Dill in McCann and Kim, 2003, 353.
- ⁴⁶ Also see Oliva M. Espin. *Latina Realities: Essays on Healing, Migration, and Sexuality*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997.)
- ⁴⁷ José Vasconcellos became known as the intellectual of the Mexican Revolution. Among his most influential work is the 1925, *La Raza Cosmica: Mision de la raza iberoamericana*. (The Cosmic Race: Mission of the Iberoamerican Race). Mexico, D.F.: Espasa-Calpe Mexicana S.A., 1976.
- ⁴⁸ Shulamit Reinharz in Trickett, Watts and Birman, eds. (1994), 184.
- ⁴⁹ Anzaldúa 1990, xxv-xxvi.
- ⁵⁰ Silko 1977, 2.
- ⁵¹ Pérez, 2005, 4.
- ⁵² Nahuatl is the indigenous language of the Aztec.
- ⁵³ For further physical description of *Coatlicue* see Anzaldúa, 69.
- ⁵⁴ Anzaldúa states “conocimiento derives from *cognoscera*, a Latin verb meaning to know and is the Spanish word for knowledge and skill” (2002, 577).
- ⁵⁵ This researcher first heard this phrase in the Lourdes Portillo and Susana Muñoz film *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead*, 1988. Also used by many Chicana Feminists including Aida Hurtado, 2003, 284.
- ⁵⁶ Williams 1985, 87-93.
- ⁵⁷ The Ambassador Bridge was built over the Detroit River and connected the borders of the USA and Canada. I found interesting how I had been born in one geographical borderlands and raised in another.
- ⁵⁸ Flores-Ortiz in Adleman and Enguíanos 1995, 252.
- ⁵⁹ I first heard this idea during a presentation at the University of New Mexico by a founding member of the Black Panther Party as he spoke of why the Black Panther’s decided to start schools of their own. For further insight into the Black Pather Party from a woman’s perspective, see Brown 1994.
- ⁶⁰ Fregoso in Berg 1999, 96.
- ⁶¹ Anzaldúa in Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, iv.
- ⁶² *Yo Soy Joaquín*, a film directed by Luis Valdez is a visual depiction of the poem written in 1967 by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales during the Chicano Movement. See <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/latinos/joaquin.htm>
- ⁶³ Sor Juana was a *Mexicana* who was a self-taught scholar and poet. She joined the convent and became a nun in order to pursue her scholarly interests. As a Mexican intellectual, she set precedents for the notion of feminism. (1648-1695) See www.biography.com/articles/Sor-Juana-Inés-de-la-cruz-38178

⁶⁴ *Tejana* labor activist (1853-1942). See www.lucyparsonspj.org

⁶⁵ A *Tejana* labor organizer best known for pecan sheller's strike of 1938. (1916-1999). See Acosta and Weingarten, 141-145.

⁶⁶ Personal communication with Morales, April 11, 2003.

⁶⁷ For further Chican@ film analysis also see: Christine List. Chicano Images: Refiguring Ethnicity in Mainstream Film. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996.); Clara E. Rodriguez. Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media. (New York: Westview Press, 1997.); Chon Noriega. Shot in America: Television, the State and the Rise of Chicano Cinema. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.); Angharad N. Valdivia. A Latina in the Land of Hollywood and Other Essays on Media Culture. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000.)

⁶⁸ Hall in Raphael and Kegan 1981, 233.

⁶⁹ Also see Spigel and Mann 1992.

⁷⁰ Also see Peña 1985, 1990-1996, 1999.

⁷¹ Male character in a popular primetime soap opera/melodrama that ran from 1978-1991.

⁷² Although this geographical area is named the Río Grande Valley, it is not an actual valley. Technically, it is a delta.

⁷³ This word is used by locals to identify the group of people who come to live temporarily in the *Valle* during the northern winters. This group is also called the "Winter Texans."

⁷⁴ In 2012, local news report footage showed soldiers with M-16s guarding parade participants and audience.

⁷⁵ Poets of note, Lady Mariposa, La Erika, Lauren Espinoza and Daniel García Ordaz. See www.vipf.org

⁷⁶ See www.cinesol.com

⁷⁷ In Pérez 1999, xiii.

⁷⁸ For example, although my father was a veteran, he did not benefit from the educational benefits of the G.I. Bill. I cannot tell you why, just that he did not.

⁷⁹ See Draper 1994.

⁸⁰ See, A Class Apart 2009 and Rechy 1959.

⁸¹ Ramírez 1998, 135.

Chapter Three

Las Mujeres del Valle – Platican desde las Fronteras

We are always fragmented in time, taking a particular or provisional perspective...

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson¹

Resultados

The results of this study are presented in several ways in this, and the following chapter. This chapter is a compilation of border-based experiences and border-based dilemmas drawn from the *cuentos* supplied by *las mujeres del valle*. As I will show, these stories illustrate specific themes in borderpsychosocial development and in the borderpsychosocial condition. I will first provide a brief re-introduction to each of *las seis mujeres del valle* and their impression of being born in the valley. It is at this point that you will notice the normalization of code-switching exemplified by *las mujeres*. This is followed by a brief description of my experience of traveling to and/or being present at the interview site with each of *las mujeres*, this, in order to provide visual cues of both *el valle* landscape and the selected site in which the *pláticas* took place. The third and concluding section of this chapter contains thematic collective-*cuentitos* derived from both the *cuento*-data, that is, *los cuentos de las seis mujeres del valle*, and my lived experience, which provides a glimpse into borderpsychosocial experience and consciousness, and the variations that lie within.

I sorted these *cuentos* by the selected *temas* of life experiences with religion/spirituality, education, language, and traditional medicine, selected from a myriad of themes that emerged from the *cuentos*. These four themes provide exemplars of

borderpsychosocial experiences which demonstrate the borderpsychosocial condition and lead to borderpsychosocial dilemmas. The stories demonstrate how the daily lives of border women are imbued with borderpsychosocial experiences and noticeable patterns emerge.

I was initially reluctant to use excerpts from the interviews rather than the entire transcripts. However, pragmatic considerations led to this choice. The alternative would have made it impossible to include the voices of all six of *las mujeres*. Together, however, they offer evidence of a dynamic and complex experience of the impact of the social on their lives, lived in, and on, the borderlands. Here, I return to the research question that frames this study and provides its analytic exploration: Is there a specific set of psychosocial experiences that constitute the psychosocial development of border women?

Re-Introductions

Marta

Marta is 54 years old and identified as American, Catholic, and lower middle class. Of the last four generations of her family, only two members were born in *México*; everyone else was born in *el valle*. Marta was born in Raymondville and lives in San Benito. She has one older brother. She was married for 17 years, divorced in 1995, and remains single. Marta has three adult daughters; two live in *el valle* and one in San Antonio.

Marta's first and dominant language was Spanish. She learned English in elementary school which then became her dominant language. She graduated from a public high school and many years later completed a one-year bookkeeping certificate at a local technical school; where she now works.

Martha describes being from the valley as,

...well, let me put it this way, since I've never been out of the valley I think it's just a normal way of life. I don't consider it anything different because...I've never been in another town, to live in, you know. Like, I've never lived in another place but San Benito. ...the valley thing is like, normal, quiet. It's not like hurry, hurry, hurry. And you can take your time to drive around and you don't have to honk at everybody, you know? Like, everybody's honking when you're like in San Antonio. *Hombre, cayate la boca*. I go visit, but I can never stay over there. No way Jose, *aquí se mira* like...you can go and sit in the back yard and hear the radio or you can hear birds. I love the sounds...like when I was a young girl in the *rancho*, my grandma and my *tias*, *se oía los pajaritos...turtulitas*, I guess...the *animalitos*, they say (imitates bird) *cua cua*, you know the sound like when you're in the desert *se oíe, cua*. I love to hear those bird sounds. I like all kinds of birds, but there's a certain bird that when you're...you feel like [a] peaceful moment...and it's quiet, and there's nothing wrong with that...

Getting to Marta's home

As I traveled south on Interstate 77, the words and image on the San Benito water tank slowly came into focus. I suddenly recognized the face and read the words "Home of Freddy Fender" (fig. 22). I arrived in San Benito on a typical April day in *el valle* where there exists a constant warm and humid breeze coming from the Gulf of Mexico.



Figure 22: Freddy Fender mural on the San Benito water tower. Author photo.

She was waiting for me on the sidewalk, outside her home, me on my cell phone, she on hers, being lost since I left the *tortillería* just a few blocks away. After securing her large, barking dog outside so that I could be secure inside, she welcomed me into her home.

Marta situated herself at the right edge of an old and tattered overstuffed, high-back couch. She faced forward and leaned back. A small table next to her holds her cell phone and a glass of juice. Behind her, the paneled wall was painted pale yellow and was bare, as were all the walls I could see with only one exception. There was a picture of each

of her three daughters hung next to each other in what seemed to be the dining room. I say seemed to be because there was no furniture to indicate the room was used for such a purpose.

Marta wore a bright yellow dress with a small flower print, a square neckline and short sleeves. Her light brown, beyond-the-shoulder length hair was parted just off center and pulled behind her ears. She wore little dangling earrings and a delicate necklace. Although Marta is not married, she wore a ring resembling a wedding band on the ring finger of her left hand. She appeared somewhat nervous.

Marta glanced over at the television that sat across the room. It remained on throughout our *plática*. Marta's gaze toward the television occurred throughout the *plática*.

Alma

Sixty-two years old, Alma identifies as Mexican, Catholic, and middle-class. She was born and grew up in Mercedes, and now lives in Donna. Four generations of her *familia* are from *México*. She was the first born in the USA. She moved away from *el valle* briefly as a young adult and returned in 1980.

Alma married an Anglo and has two adult son's who were born in *el valle*. She entered public school as a monolingual Spanish-speaking child. Alma earned her GED and an Associate's Degree. She is the director of an organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life for migrant farm workers.

About being from *el valle*, Marta said,

...being born in the valley is to me is being very connected to family, but also being connected to a lot of problems that come with living in the valley. Because the valley has very high income and it also has very low wages. And, it's right by the Mexican border. So, we're so lucky because you never get to far from your family...go[ing] across [the border is]...like going to another city. And that is an experience that...not too many people have when they move further away....so its just like connected. Connected to your family. Connected to your culture. That's what it is being born in the valley...

(fig. 23)



Figure 23: Plaque at center of USA-Mexico international bridge at Matamoros, Tamaulipas and Brownsville, Texas.

Getting to Alma's office

It was a weekday when I exited the freeway at the San Juan exit. I noticed a steady stream of cars with license plates from both sides of the border. The Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle National Shrine was the destination of both the faithful and the tourists.

I, too, would stop on the way back to moisten my face with holy water, buy candles, and place the names of my family in the prayer book inside the Basilica. Alma's office was just a few minutes away.

As I entered her office my attention was immediately drawn to the bright colors of each wall. A computer, a telephone, a large desk-top calendar, and upright files sat on her desk. A bright yellow wall that framed a large window with an open, white mini-blind remained to the left of her desk. A grey sweater was draped over the top of a dark, high-back chair behind her desk. A framed, black and white image of César Chávez remained suspended on the orange wall behind the desk. Looking at the earth ahead of him, Chavez walked through a *labor* and carried several *palas* over his right shoulder. A tall file cabinet against another wall held up a great number of framed pictures and mementos resembling an *altar*.

Alma joined me and situated herself in the tall-back chair. She wore a lavender button-down blouse. On the left collar was a small black lapel pin – it was the Aztec eagle.² She wore small dangling earrings, a watch on her left wrist, a bracelet on the other, and a ring on both ring fingers. Alma flung her long, dark hair behind her shoulders, sniffled, and smiled.

Sylvia

Sylvia is 59 years old and identified as Mexican, Christian, and working-class. She was born in Raymondville and moved with her family to Detroit in 1955. The family returned to *el valle* in the mid 70s; she, in 1984. Multiple generations of the paternal side of her family originate from *el valle*, and the maternal side is from *México*. She is the oldest

of five children. Sylvia married and divorced three times to Anglo men; one of the three was also Jewish. Born in Raymondville, Sylvia's 25 year old daughter lives in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area.

Sylvia's first language was Spanish and she learned English after entering Catholic school at five years old. She was Baptized, made First Communion and Confirmation in the Catholic Church. As a teenager, she became involved with a Baptist church. In 1969, Sylvia graduated from a public high school in Detroit; the first in her family. Sylvia works as a corrections officer at a local state prison. She is a member of the local VFW (Veteran's of Foreign Wars), American Legion, and a local motorcycle club. Sylvia's provided a brief response to the question of what it meant to be from *el valle*. She said, "It's where I was from." I was curious about her use of the word "was."

Being with Sylvia in her home

The view from Sylvia's kitchen window used to be peaceful, and postcard beautiful. Where there used to be open land covered with regional plants such as cactus, mesquite trees, and wild grasses framed by a rusted barbwire fence on mesquite posts, over which the valley sun would set, now sits a cinder-block manufacturing factory. The unsightly building spews cement dust and the jarring noise from the loading and unloading trucks disrupt the valley's peacefulness. Piles of reject concrete blocks obstruct the view of what still remains a beautiful sunset.

The sun set in *el valle*. Sylvia works the third shift at the prison. Officer briefing starts at 9:45PM and her shift starts at 10PM. At 6AM the next morning, she is relieved by an officer from first shift. Sylvia sat on a cushioned, wooden chair at one end of the kitchen

table waiting quietly while I set-up the recording equipment. She sat with her left side toward the camera and looked directly ahead. All three of the other chairs were occupied by objects on the seats, and hanging on the chair backs. As I looked through the camera lens I saw Sylvia framed by a collage of mementos. On the wall behind her were multiple framed bulletin boards and around her a variety of containers and wicker baskets filled with assorted items. Countless pictures of family and friends, name tags, buttons, patches, necklaces, and a variety of memorabilia completely covered all the bulletin boards.

Sylvia wore a long-sleeved plaid shirt that blended with her long, light brown hair that she pulled- back. She wore no jewelry. She appeared tired. The harsh glare from the light fixture that hung over the small kitchen table caused her to squint. The rest of the room was dim.

She took a deep breath and appeared nervous. Sylvia seemed aware of her tendency to slump as she pulled her shoulders back only to find herself, within moments, again slumped. She placed her hands with laced fingers on the tabletop front and center. During a sound check she smiled for a few moments. I noticed she looked over her left shoulder to check the time on the round kitchen clock; then she checked again.

Sofia

Sofia is 61 years old and identified as Mexican American, Catholic, and middle-class. She is the only one of *las seis mujeres* who had a traditional *quinceañera*. Sofia was born and raised in Rios. After she married, she moved to California and returned to Edinburg in 2003 to help care for her elderly parents. Both sides of her *familia* were born in South Texas. She is the fourth of five children. Sofia was married twice to Mexican American

men. She was widowed once, divorced once, and is currently single. Her two adult children were born in Bakersfield and now live in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Sofia entered elementary public school as a bilingual child. She graduated from high school and completed one year of college. Sofia retired from a career as an administrator in California and has since assumed temporary positions she finds interesting, most recently at a local museum.

Sofia's thoughts about her birthplace,

...to me, it was the best upbringing in the world...I always told my friends it was Mayberry RFD³, cuz it was the perfect little town. And yes it was integrated. There were a lot of *gringos* because of the culture of the city...I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. It was like the best thing that ever happened to me...

On time to Sofia's

I walked up the paved pathway to the front porch and rang the doorbell. Sofia opened the door and greeted me wearing work-out clothes; having just arrived home from the gym. I was not surprised because when we made arrangements to meet, she was clear about her busy schedule. She invited me in and walked me over to a bookshelf in her living room. We immediately engaged in a conversation about her books. She left me there to browse, as she freshened up. (fig. 24)



Figure 24: Sofia's books. Author photo.

She reappeared a few minutes later and began talking as she guided me toward the dining room. I followed and found my place across from her at the large dining room table. She situated herself on a chair between the table and a tall, white, dining room hutch which stood behind her and against a lemon colored wall. She scooted the chair close to the table, placed her elbows on the tabletop and leaned forward. Sofia wore a red tank top, no jewelry, her long nails were painted red, and her dark, chin-length hair was pulled off her face and behind her ears. As I looked through the view finder of the camera, I saw Sofia's face framed by two lovely plates displayed on small easels on the hutch behind her. She

looked comfortable and continued to chitchat as I finished setting up and testing the video equipment. She was eager to begin.

Carmen

Carmen is 56 years old and identified as Hispanic/Mexican American, Catholic, and upper middle-class. She was born and grew up in Harlingen, moved away as a young adult, and returned to the valley in 1990. Four generations of the maternal side of her family are from *México* and the paternal side originates from *el valle* with only one exception; her paternal grandmother is from *México*. Carmen was born the middle child of five. Her older brother was killed in Vietnam. She entered Catholic School as a bilingual child. Carmen attended Incarnate Word and Trinity University, both in San Antonio, and graduated from the University of Texas Pan American with a B.A. in Biochemistry.

Carmen married and divorced a Hispanic/Mexican American man from Harlingen. She is currently single. She has a 27 year old son who lives in San Antonio where he attends college. Carmen is a successful commercial real estate broker doing business on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border. Carmen paused as she thought about what it meant, to her, to have been born in the valley.

...I don't know anything else...I think there's a lot of advantages for me, being born in the valley, by knowing both cultures, but this is all that I know. I don't know any one culture. Now I've been exposed to other cultures, obviously, I mean a lot of different cultures, but I don't know those cultures like I know the valley, ya know...

Late to Carmen's

I got lost, again, and was running a bit late, but I stopped to pick up a cup of coffee for Carmen at a local breakfast place that stood on a corner across the street from her

office. As I walked in, the smell of *chorizo* caught my attention. What a familiar smell. I paid for the coffee, went out the door, and that familiar South Texas breeze met me. I crossed the street and went up in the elevator to her office, where she greeted me with a big smile. She led me into a conference room to setup. She joined me moments later. Carmen sat down on the opposite side of the large conference table and took a sip of her coffee. She was framed by a bright yellow wall. Behind her hung a black-framed magnetic bulletin board that held, among other things, architectural floor plans. Everything was neatly placed including a staff tracking board.

Carmen made herself comfortable in a dark, low-back chair. A colorful braided headband held back her brown, chin-length hair off her face. She wore a short-sleeved, light blue, oxford type top, small dangly earrings, eyeglasses, a watch on her left wrist, and no rings. She sat up, leaned forward, placed her arms on the conference table with her hands front and center with fingers laced. She seemed quite comfortable and excited.

Teresa

Fifty year old Teresa identifies as *mexicana*, and Catholic. Although she was born in Acuña, Coahuila, *México* she currently lives in the bordertown of Brownsville, just across the *Río Grande* and the Mexican bordertown of Matamoros. She is the third of eight children. All family members were born in *México*. She completed 7th grade in the Mexican public school system.⁴

She married twice, to Anglo men. Her first marriage, at 14 years old, ended in divorce. She has two daughters from this marriage; the first born in Arkansas and the second in Texas. Teresa is currently married to an Anglo born in Brownsville. They share

their life with their eight year old son. Teresa grew up in poverty and currently identifies as upper-middle class. She is a prolific artist and spends her days in her studio/gallery making art. She does not use her given name either personally nor professionally.

Teresa said about *el valle*,

What does it mean to be in *la Frontera*? In *la frontera con Estados Unidos*, whoa! It was very exciting to live on the border, because I was really influenced [by] the English language that I really so much wanted to learn. So it was very exciting living on the border, growing up on the border was very exciting...

Teresa in her studio/gallery

I exited off Interstate 77 near the Brownsville Visitor's Center. I felt compelled to stop in, as I always do. Back on the road, I passed a Starbuck's and suddenly the set of buildings I was looking for came into view. I pulled in the drive and parked the small pickup truck with the cracked windshield that I borrowed from my mother. When I opened the door, a familiar hot and humid gust of wind, and the sound of rustling palm tree branches overhead met me. Yes, I was definitely in *el valle*, just a few minutes' drive from the International Bridge into *México*.

I walked up to, and stood at, the glass door of the gallery/studio and waited for a response to my ring. No one responded. I gazed in through the window and saw hundreds of paintings, some on canvas, some on tile, some complete and some in process. Most of the paintings included faces of women, women who looked similar, but there was always a sense of a slight difference in each. (fig. 25)



Figure 25: Teresa's art. Author photo.

Suddenly, there she was walking through the courtyard in all her distinctiveness and exuberant energy. She unlocked the door and we walked into the glass walled gallery/studio. She fluttered about while I setup the camera.

Teresa reappeared with a glass of sparkling champagne. She placed the fluted glass on the large desk in front of her and situated herself in a purple, high-back chair as she carefully tucked a small red and white flowered pillow behind her lower back. She was surrounded by hundreds of objects. The bright yellow walls held up drawings and sketches, some framed, some not, photographs, newspaper articles. A large arrangement of colorful artificial flowers in a vase that was just as colorful sat on a pedestal in front of her desk. I

noticed a large carved cross above and to her right. Suspended from a scone was what appeared to be a string of wooden beads; a rosary, maybe?

Teresa wore a necklace with three silver crosses, her dark hair up in a twist. She wore long dangling earrings, two large rings - one on each second finger of both hands - a bracelet on her right wrist and another bracelet and a watch on the left wrist. She wore a pale pink blouse on which she had painted the face of one of the familiar women found in much of her art. As she swept back a lock of hair from the left side of her face, I confirmed that we were ready to start. “*Órale!*” she said.

Yo También

Sí, yo soy del valle. I was born and lived in the geographical borderlands several years of my childhood. My father was discharged from the Army in the early 50s. His decision to go to Detroit with several of his cousins on a reconnaissance mission led to the subsequent move of my entire family from the small town of Raymondville, *a’el norte*. I never moved back; they did. We identified as Mexican, Catholic, and working-class. I spoke only Spanish when I entered kindergarten in a Catholic school.

Travel from Detroit to *el valle* to visit the paternal side of my *familia*, and to *México* to visit the maternal side, remained infrequent and brief, but nonetheless meaningful. I was able to maintain a sense of connection. Although the connection with all things of the border and borderlands was minimal at best, the connection existed and was kept in a safe and hidden space – *en mi alma*. There it would survive until it was safe to come out.⁵

I have been married to three men who are white; I divorced twice. I have one daughter and two grandsons who live in Arizona. I am the only member of my family who did not return to the valley.

I came to understand the significance of being born in *el valle* which includes many of the impressions and perceptions mentioned by *las mujeres*. Like Marta, I appreciate the peacefulness *del valle*. Like Alma, it is about being connected to *familia* and feeling lucky to be so close to *México*. I used to feel like Sylvia; not giving it much thought. Like Sofia, I also felt some familiarity with the constructed version of a small town portrayed in the television show *Mayberry RFD*. As Carmen does, I too value knowing both cultures. And finally, like Teresa, I too had the experience as a child of the excitement by being exposed to all things American.

Temas

Religion/spirituality, language, education, and traditional medicine/healing/*curanderismo* comprise the four themes explored in this section. The collective *cuéntitos* are examples of individual borderpsychosocial experiences that provide some insight about *caminos* taken or averted along with furthering the understanding as to how the impact of experience and encounter in the changing sociocultural worlds in which we interact lay a firm foundation and contribute to the lifelong process of our formation and our psychological development.

Religion/Spirituality

All Mexicans regardless of their racial descent or political affiliations are essentially Catholic. And this is true of all, whether in Mexico or Texas.

Jovita González, 1930⁶

I continue to identify as a 'cultural Catholic,'

as one who appreciates many of the popular religious expressions of Mexican Catholicism.

Lara Medina, 1998⁷

Marta

...I didn't know anything about church until I got married...I would see people doing it and I'd say 'I think that's beautiful'...I didn't know a lot of things. I never learned the Spanish prayers...I feel like *no le garro*...I'm trying to understand what they're saying...but I don't. I'm learning now as [an] adult, but between the ages ten years old to high school, no religion conversations...I started going as soon as I got my divorce...I decided I wanna learn about Jesus...because there's a reason for everything and I realized that he's the one who saved my life...I say sometimes a person learns more as they're getting older...it doesn't hurt to learn at anytime of your life either. I've discovered that...

As a child, I attended both Catholic Church and school, but I never married in a church, as Marta did. It seemed important for her to be married in the church, but did not seem to be as important to attend church. Marta returned after she was divorced. It seemed more a behavioral norm or religious obligation rather than a commitment to Catholicism. As she matured and realized the need to end the marriage, she returned to the church and learned what religion had to offer her. In this case, it "saved" her life.

Like Marta, I did not learn prayers in Spanish either. However, it was for a different reason; speaking Spanish was not allowed. I never felt that "Jesus saved my life" - although, when I was 12 years old, I did get "saved" at the Fundamental Baptist Temple in Detroit.

Alma

...very, Mexican traditional beliefs. Catholic. Believing in the daily praying of the rosary. Keeping all of the different events and celebrations of the church...May was the month of *la Virgen de Guadalupe y la Virgen María*, so it had to be rosary every

afternoon... in the *colonia* I grew up in, we were very lucky there was a Catholic chapel. And it was so beautiful because every afternoon...mainly the mom's and the girls for some reason...we could go pick beautiful flowers...the mother's would carry the rosary and we would carry the flowers. It's a beautiful walk to the chapel every single day in May. And now, I'm amazed that we don't even have time to go. I mean we go on a weekly basis, right, but it used to be every single day. It was so beautiful to just see everybody come from their homes...and start walking to the chapel...it was like we were all Catholic. It's not the case now, but back then we were all [Catholic], at least in my mind as a young girl...[its] what I saw. And Lent was another big thing...like no meat, and penance...you couldn't miss your rosaries...and you had to have *pescado*...and *capirotada*...and, of course, *nopales*...very traditional foods that go with Lent...no meat on Wednesdays...none on Friday, through the whole forty days...and the whole family choosing what to do without for those forty days...we still do it, even our children know that at least for those forty days we need to [give up] whatever is your favorite thing...we still celebrate that...because my mom, who's 88, still lives with us...I'm hoping (hand on heart) I have it in me, too. That we will continue even after she's gone...still observing the Holy Week, the Holy Days...

For the first few years, after moving to Detroit from *el valle*, my family practiced what we understood as the traditions of being Catholic. However, once we moved out of the inner-city, our *barrio*, and away from the Catholic Church that we had been attending since we arrived, we all stopped going to church. In the church environment, there was a sense of feeling uncomfortable, not welcomed, and being different – we were the only Mexicans. After that, very little was ever said about confession, communion, or the Catholic Church.

I couldn't help but notice how Alma spoke of celebration for both *la Virgen de Guadalupe* and *la Virgen de María*, thereby representing the mother of Jesus from both sides of the border. As a child, I was taught only about the Virgin Mary.

Sylvia

...raised Catholic tradition I guess, ah, culture...but later on converted to a Baptist....Well, I'm still Baptist. I consider myself Christian. But I don't go to church like I should. But I still pray every night. And I have my beliefs...

Like Sylvia, I too became involved with the Baptist Church as an adolescent. One summer, I even won a trophy for recruiting the most kids to Vacation Bible School! As an adult, I also participated in other religious and spiritual practices. I married into a Christian Science family. My involvement with Jehovah Witness' was difficult for my daughter, given beliefs related to holidays. I was "saved" and "born again" several times, Baptized Catholic and Baptist, and for a while, a member of what was then known as a Christian cult. My daughter and I joined Unity Church during her early teens. We both found comfort there; individually and together.

Sylvia did not seem to want to share much about her beliefs with me, or for that matter, with anyone else. She did not say why.

It was interesting that Sylvia did not mention her experience with religion while married to a man who was Jewish; only that the marriage ceremony was performed by both a priest and a rabbi. She divorced him because of domestic violence.

Sofia

...Catholic, for all generations, so very strict morals. Very strict upbringing. It was like dad was the ultimate leader and his word was God's word. And you had to obey what dad said. And the church basically went along with that. It's that dad has a certain position, mom has a certain position, extremely defined and you don't deviate from that...[it was] ingrained in you that this is the way it should be. It has to be. I'm still a Catholic, but, more liberal. It's like I call myself a cafeteria Catholic...I pick and choose what I want or what I like or dislike...I disagree with a lot of things about the Catholic church, but I don't think I'll ever leave...marriage is [an] institution that was ingrained in me and I did get married, and I did raise my

family...I've ingrained that in my children...but at this stage in my life, I don't need to be married. It's like I'd love to have a partner, but somebody to share things with and not just because the church says you're sinning...that's my cafeteria Catholicism right there. It's like, God still loves me.

Sofia first learned about the acceptability and normalization of patriarchy, as many of us did, from a combination of our early religious training and family functioning. We were taught that noncompliance was a sin and there would be a consequence. My fearfulness about noncompliance came from the priests and nuns, rather than from my parents. However, I do recall hearing my mother say many times over "*Vas a ver, Dios te va castigar*" or "*Vas a ver cuando llegue tu papá*" as a way of managing my behavior. The impact of this use of power was imbedded in both my conscious and unconscious understanding of being good – or bad. As a child, I too questioned, as Sofia must have, will God love me eventhough?

Carmen

...very traditional...Catholicism with a mix of Christianity where you practice the Catholic rituals and rights and going to church and holy days of obligation, to that of practicing a Christian life, and that meant that it was not bad that you didn't go to church...it was how you treated people that was important...when I was young I probably leaned more so to the Catholic way of life. As I become older, I've disagreed with a lot of things that Catholicism has...they're very subjective...it's okay to do this here, under this diocese, but, if you move to a different diocese then they're stricter...I want everything kinda black and white...I'll give you an example. I'm divorced. In Catholicism that's bad. I'm not supposed to go and have Communion any more, but I can go to a church that has maybe [a] Franciscan priest or Jesuit priest as leaders of the parish...[and] its fine. But if I go to a different Catholic Church and it's some other religious sector...then it's not okay. And I'm going how can it be okay in one and not okay in the other and that drives me absolutely bonkers! So, consequently, while I still have...[a] very strong, strict, Catholic background, I have that Christianity background...my father's family was very Catholic, strict. My mother's family was not...so I had both of those worlds as a child...I have some deep conversations about this with my sisters, because one of my sisters is incredibly very true to the Catholicism and I'm just not. And, I don't know

whether I will be. But it's still there and there's a lot of things I like about the structure and the traditions and there's a lot of those things that are very important. Even in bringing up my own child...I made sure that he received the sacraments that he needed to receive and I made sure that I set the example...sometimes I feel like going to church, so I'll go to church, it just depends...the reason why Christ was placed on this earth was to give us an example of how to lead a good life, a Christian life....

It seems quite clear that Carmen wanted to make sure she set a good example for her son, but she also struggled with her experience of inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambiguities of practice of the Catholic Church in *el valle* and the Christian values she learned from her mother. She continues to struggle with feelings of ambivalence and implies this when she says she likes thing to be "black and white." Carmen also seems clear about some issues such as divorce – "In Catholicism that's bad." It is interesting to note that all but one of the *seis mujeres del valle* have been divorced, including myself.

There are multiple structural, cultural, and traditional aspects of Catholicism that Carmen holds dear; that we, *las mujeres del valle*, all hold dear. Some of the questions that arise from such a borderpsychosocial dilemma, for many, if not all of us, may be 'Are we Catholic enough?' or 'Are we good enough Catholics?' These questions impact our decisions about our religious and spiritual practice. Ultimately, we seek out the experience of feeling welcome, and at peace, rather than one of being shamed and marginalized.

Teresa

...It was a great feeling of peace because my parents, they wanted me to go to church...they didn't really instill me to really learn the Bible or anything...one thing that it was really kinda bother me from my mother that its she used to always say that the world was going to end. I don't know how many people say that to their children, but that was kinda one of the scariest thing...but when we were growing it was just the parents were the only ones that were allowed to speak. It was kind of a shame...but that's how they grew up maybe...I have respect for my parents no

matter what they did because that's what they knew...[now] nothing but bad experiences really with religion because it's a topic that if you bring it up in the middle of a group of people, it ends up being a fight, you know. It's like, you belong to that church, forget it if you don't belong to mine, you know...or why do you belong to that...it's why I'm very confused...the Pope says that you can't use contraceptives and then you have the kids and you can't give them food and then you let them go hungry. You're sorry because you couldn't feed 'em and then you can't use contraceptives because the Pope said you couldn't and then people say you have to be married and when you marry you stay married and so if...the husband being abusive to you, you have to feel forced to stay...so all this is very confusing...all this people that I grew up [with] my parents saying to me, you know, you have to be respectful to the priest because of this and that...since the 70s I grow up and finding all these terrible things happening in the church...all this abuse and things and how much damage you know that must be going on even right now as we speak and I'm suppose to go to this church...and feel peace and being faithful and pray and all that...I don't want to be a fool I guess...it makes me feel ashamed for all these people...so, it kind of keeps me away from church. So I pray alone in my house when I watch the beautiful trees and the beautiful sky. Like today is a beautiful day, and hear the birds sing, and see family photographs and then I pray and thank God that I have what I have and God is with me...I don't know what other people are doing...but I'd rather keep it to myself. It's safer...

Teresa struggles with the contradictions she has come to know and experience about what she was taught to believe and respect about religion. It causes confusion and shame. As much as she has sought out connection through participation in organized religion, at this point in her life she chooses to practice her beliefs in her own way and in the privacy of her own home given her understanding that it is "safer."

I agree, indeed, it is safer. Practicing my own rituals in the privacy of my own home has provided a shelter from the humiliation I experienced in the past when I chose to share my practices with others. I, like Teresa, feel safe and comfortable in my own home. After many years of isolation, I recently found a spiritual community where I feel comfortable. However, I continue to feel most safe in my own home.

Vicki Ruiz reminds us that in 1971, at the first national Chicana conference held in Houston, Texas, *La Conferencia de Mujeres Por La Raza*, the feminist platform included calling for the “acknowledgement of the Catholic Church as an instrument of oppression” (1998, 108). *Las mujeres del valle* have provided examples of both the oppressive and the supportive experiences of the practice of Catholicism and how this has shaped their current level of understanding, acceptance, and practice. The borderpsychosocial dilemma of being drawn to and/or away from the variations of the practice of Catholicism along with the impact of a variety of Christian practices leads to difference in resolution, and for some, if not most of *las mujeres*, this resolution accompanies an ongoing uncertainty.

It was also 1971, and in Houston, Texas, where a group of about fifty religious, and primarily Chicana women gathered to talk about the implications of the Chicano movement for the Catholic Church. What emerged from this meeting was what would become known as the “roots of *Las Hermanas*, a national religious-political organization of Chicana/Latina feminist Catholics...their distinct arena, the sanctified patriarchy of the Catholic Church, made them keenly aware of the forces of male domination” (Medina, 2004, 2). One can only wonder what a difference it would have made in the lives of a number of *las mujeres del valle* to have had knowledge of *Las Hermanas*⁸ and of their spiritual basis combined with its feminist consciousness. It may have been, and may still be, a way, for some, to manage or further understand some of their religious and spiritual borderpsychosocial dilemmas.

Educational Experiences

It is evident...that wetbacks present many problems and difficulties for the school.

Their presence involves added trouble and expense to the school.

Many of their peculiarities drive some teachers almost to madness.

Emilia Schunior Ramirez (1951)⁹

The statement above was made in the context of a Master's of Education thesis titled "'Wetback' Children in South Texas." The data was collected during the late 40s and early 50s at the Texas-Mexico borderlands and included the Lower Río Grande Valley; where *las mujeres* were born. As will be evidenced by their *cuentitos*, the multigenerational transmission of the notion of being a "problem" had an impact on each and every one of them.

I asked, *las mujeres*, only a few questions directly related to education, school, and their learning experience. I asked about feeling left out in the school environment, books read, discussing education in their homes, and asked them to recall an important memory from school. Many border-based issues and border-based dilemmas emerged as they talked about their learning and socialization experience within school systems.

Marta

Marta attended San Benito public schools. She graduated from high school and many years later would complete a one-year "college degree" at a *valle* technical school.

...everything was in English. The normal history stuff...*cómo se dice la* word, the things of the United States...American history...because I had a style of life different from the school campus...when it comes to school, I was always left out. I'm being honest, I used to feel like I wish I could have been like a cheerleader. But I didn't have the potentials...I always wanted to hang around people like them...I felt, they see me different...you get to explode...they jump, they have fun, and [doing] what they like to do. I didn't have that style of life. I would have like[d] to be even in the band...I got involved with tennis in school and I had fun...things like that would take money and my parents would say 'Well we don't have money for that stuff' or 'No, that's too much money to get involved with.' That was the subject - money...when I was in 6th grade I was in choir and I entered [what] I felt was a happy moment...In

high school the only program that I did get [involved with] was FFA [Future Farmers of America]...my daughters were in band...and in organizations in school from freshman to senior...that[’s] why I say [to them], you all got involved in things that were fun and I didn’t have a chance to do things like that at all...music would be at [dances] after the football games. They called it sock hops and we would go right after the football games. *Todos andábamos allí brinque, brinque, cómo unos locos!* I would dance a lot.

That Marta’s immediate response was “everything was in English” clearly indicates the dilemma of only speaking Spanish upon entering school. She did not elaborate, but my experience of this dilemma was one of feeling confused and afraid. The “normal stuff” of school was “American” for us both. That left us wanting to be, what else, but American.

There was sadness that accompanied “being left out” socially in the school environment. Very early on, Marta received the message that she was different. Add to this the low economic status of her family, and access to and participation in extracurricular activities could only be imagined; they were out of her reach. She is grateful to watch her children participate. In the end, Marta was able to engage enough to also have some positive memories that bring her joy to this day. Marta didn’t fit in one space, but she was able to find another.

My joyful memories of school are but a few. The most vivid is learning, in English, how to sing “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” and entertaining students with my performance. I was six years old. Graduating from high school was something Marta always knew she would accomplish. It was her own internal drive that led her to succeed and one she works to pass on to her daughters.

...it’s [education] an important source in my subjects...I’m very grateful that Lara and Barbara went into college. Now, *me falta* Dela. If everything goes right that she passes her GED I’m going to tell her to get involved with TSTC [Texas State Technical

College] ...that's where I got my bookkeeping certificate...it was a happy moment...[I graduated] at the year 2006...I tell my daughters, 'never think you can't do nothing...you have freedoms that I never had...I never was able to go to college' ...the truth, my mom...I never was able to accomplish what I wanted to, because she had wrong comments. Like when I wanted to go to college she said that college is not for a women...that I shouldn't try...plus, she said the comment to me that if I would go to college I would probably come home pregnant... I'm not going to deny it, I had boyfriends when I was in high school...but, when they have to make points in the bed, heck no! I didn't believe in that. I never wanted nobody to touch me. It makes me feel proud of myself when I've done that...

I did not share Marta's experience of discouragement from her mother. Actually, college was never a topic of discussion in our household. As Marta has made the experience of education different for her daughters, I too have made it very different for my daughter and grandsons.

Marta's entry into college changed her life...as it did mine.

...when I was at TSTC I learned like...when you study the people, it was a subject to learn about yourself...psychology - learning about me. And I discovered that things I said to myself...I never paid attention to me, until then. I said to myself, finally I'm beginning to know who I am. Not too long ago, I realized, I never knew who I was until now. But now I understand why. Because like when people brainwash you, you don't realize you're in there...

The "brain washing" that Marta speaks to refers to how we fill ourselves up with what we are taught about who we should be rather than who we are. I too began to focus on myself when I took my first psychology class. I am still in the process of emptying myself of what I was taught to believe and filling myself with what I think. Understanding and realizing myself is the most important task I have.

Alma

Alma's public school educational experience began in the borderlands of Mercedes, Texas and Progreso, *México* – she spoke only Spanish. She did not graduate from high

school and eventually earned her GED and an Associate's Degree. She spoke with sadness about being left out in school.

...yeah, there's so many. It's hard to pick one. Sometimes you wish you could forget those things. But sometimes I'm very glad that I can't. That I won't. Maybe it's our age, but growing up you were left out. There was not one occasion when you were left out. You were completely left out. You may, I may, have been in the classroom, but I wasn't there...in the eyes of the people who mattered at that time...the teachers...but within the school system, the school board, they really didn't care, whether we were there or not, or whether you were left out or not. And I shouldn't generalize it to say they, but when I look back I can only find very few that might have cared. In the end, it really doesn't matter that they were there, because they were really outnumbered...we were always left out...if you look at the books...we were left out...in school you have to remember all of those paintings, the famous ones. I remember the one with the old man and the old lady and the fork....and the music there at school and the band, but it wasn't for us. It was mainly the white people that belonged to that...we were not considered...it was very unfair...because we had so much to offer...they weren't only hurting the Mexican children, but I think they were hurting themselves and their children by not being open minded enough to share such a rich history that Mexican people have. So, I think that, especially in the early years. Not so much in college...I got to college really late, and when I did I found some excellent Chicano professors. And I said, ayyy, where were you? I admire people my age that now have Master's or Doctorates...I really admire the ones in my age group, because if they went that far, they are extraordinary cuz it was against all odds. At least if they were from this area. I don't know about the other areas, but if they were from this area, oh my goodness, my total respects...I'm still angry, I guess that I wasn't strong enough to be able to continue the way that I would have wanted...learning English...that was the most important...

Like Alma, I too felt invisible. I was there, but didn't feel present except when my name was called as attendance was being taken. I would raise my hand and say "here." That was about the only time I heard my own voice. I have no memory of anyone noticing that I stopped going to school in the 10th grade. As Alma reflects on her experience, she realizes how unfair it was that no one realized what we had to offer. She seems to continue to carry the notion that somehow she is responsible for not being "strong enough," which directs the anger about the injustice toward self. We often do think we are to blame...we

learned that. What else we learned was English. I agree with Alma, this “was the most important” thing we learned.

Alma recalled how education was spoken of by her parents.

...it was a strong topic because they saw it as a form of [how to] survive. We had to get out of the fields and in order to get out of the fields you had to go to school...even if it was part-time...we had to leave early and we came back late cuz we had to go work in the fields...it was more like a scolding, you know, *tienes que*, you have to; *regañones*, right? *Si no haces esto en la escuela*, you know, if you don't do well in school, then look at what you have to look forward to...but, a lot of it too was for the guys more than for the girls. And that was sad...when I look back, most of my cousins [and] I didn't finish high school...I got a GED and then went on to college, but they didn't because it was mainly for the guys...it was important for both, but it was really critical that the guys go to school...in my home [now]...we spoke of college before they started kindergarten...

Although education was deemed important in Alma's family, it was clear that it was most important for the “guys.” Neither of my brothers finished school, nor did they work in the fields. I did, in the onion fields, but it was only for one year while I lived in *el valle* when I was fifteen years old. Like Alma, I also got a GED. In my family, college was never mentioned. Priority was placed on survival by working and work was not equated with a formal education.

Alma continues,

...when you compare me to my cousins...they really were hard working people. Like if we were clipping onions or whatever we were doing, I was always in the back...I didn't want to accept it and I knew that I wasn't going to accept it....I'd rather daydream. And if you ask anybody in the family they'll go 'Alma? Oh, Alma, yeah, she liked to dream and be the translator, and, get into all kinds of situations and hang out in the back.' Me and my baby brother, Jose Mario, we were the lazy ones. We would love to talk about history. We would stay in the back and say, 'Who can name the most states? And who can name the most capitals? And who can name the most presidents? And who can....I feel sorry now that we didn't help more...

Here, again, Alma speaks to feelings of guilt. She was a dreamer. She was proud of what she had learned, and experienced the joy of learning. Yet, somehow she came to understand these activities are indicative of laziness; even now. The border experience for Alma's family included migrant work. What one needed to do and what one wanted to do was a conflict for her. What was valued, what was not, and for who was another. Alma worked her way through the powerful messaging.

Sylvia

Sylvia's educational experience began in a Catholic school in Detroit. After a few years, she moved into public schools and graduated from high school in 1969. There was no mention of her Catholic school experience, but while in public schools, she too felt left out.

...like third, fourth grades...I would look forward going to gym because we had square dancing...and then you could match up with a partner. But I always felt I didn't get the right partner, you know? I was like left out...growing up, well mom used to help us with the homework. But she taught us the way she learned [in *México*] and that wasn't always the correct way...even though it came out to the same answer, but it was [the] wrong method. But, still, it wasn't pushed as you should have been pushed, you know...saying that it's important in your life to get school, good grades and all that. So, it wasn't emphasized enough...[now] I think about it a lot. I would love to go to school, but I feel like I'm too old for that. I feel really dumb going to school...I used to doddle a lot. I'm not a good artist, but I just would draw some things. I kept a couple...I always wanted to learn how to draw or paint, or tattoo. I did a little bit of that, but you have to go to school for that. I just never did...yeah, [my] mom and dad never said anything about college. All I knew was that college was for rich people...

It was in elementary school that Sylvia first felt she never got "the right partner." After three marriages and other unsuccessful relationships, she continues to seek out an authentic connection with someone.

Sylvia sought out the help of her mother, who did help, but because she was from Mexico, crossing the academic borderlands caused confusion for teachers and discouraged Sylvia. Even then, she did not understand why it was not “good enough” to get the right answer using a different process. What she did come to understand is that there is one right way to do things and her mother did not know “that” way.

Sylvia’s internalized negative messages about being “dumb” and now “being too old” have kept her from pursuing further education and some of her creative interests. She has always been capable of learning. Sylvia often ranks at the top of her class on annual testing required for recertification of her employment credentials – including target practice.

Sofia

Sofia was bilingual when she entered public school. She graduated from high school and completed one year of college.

...I was fortunate...I had an English teacher who was an excellent English teacher and...he taught us Charles Dickens and all of the classics. He knew we didn’t have access to bookstores...so he had his own library...a little store for us. He had all the paperbacks and we bought them for like a quarter...I was lucky enough to read all the classics, and basically that’s about all I read when I was growing up. I kept them all for my children, but unfortunately my children were not as interested...

Yes, I agree with Sofia’s declaration that she was fortunate, but not so much about being filled with the “classics” she was assigned to read. Rather, I would say Sofia learned at a young age to love to read and surround herself with books. The day she let go of “the classics” she made room for Mexican American historical novels and scholarship that currently fill her book shelves.

I, unfortunately, did not have that same early experience as Sofia. I do not recall owning a single book. A few years ago my mother gave me the prayer book I was given when I made my First Holy Communion. She had stored it away for many years. So, yes, I suppose you could say I did have one.

Sofia continues,

...no...I never felt left out because I was always...an overachiever...I always made it a point to never be embarrassed of how smart I was...so I was always in the top of my classes...nobody ever tried to put me down that I can recall. And if they did, I didn't allow it because that was taught in my family...I remember my older brother always said, 'don't ever pass anybody and not give them a smile'...'you never cast your eyes down'...that was ingrained from me from the time I was little...why I remember this I don't know, I remember for a while that speaking Spanish was kind of downgraded and I just spoke more English. Until I got a little bit older and it's like wow be proud of yourself, you're bilingual...you're stronger than the *gringos* because you can speak Spanish and they can't...I have a very positive memory of school...[for] my parents, it was like, you will get an education, you must be educated...there was no choice...my father was a high school graduate, he graduated in 1933 which was not very common back then...because he was a high school graduate [and] they had two homes, one in the city, one in the country...I think that's where I get it from, it's like, you don't put me down. You may be a *gringo* and I am, may be, a Mexican American, but in my eyes we're equal...he went to an integrated high school in Alice, Texas, when there was a wrong side and a right side of the tracks...he was a football player...so, I think, that's where we get it from...no, no, no, they're *gringos* [but] that doesn't make any difference. You're just the same. In fact you're better than they are because we were here'...that's what's been ingrained in me...

My formal education came much later, but like Sofia, I became an overachiever.

There was no familial modeling of educational achievement and I certainly did not think or feel that I was in any way, shape, or form, better or stronger than anyone. On the contrary, at one point in my life I actually held the belief and uttered the words, "I think it's the white part of me that pursues education."

Sofia continues,

...the most important thing that happened to me [in school] was a negative and that's when I became pregnant...of the five children I am the only one that didn't finish college...I was always a leader...I was in the top 10% of my class...I had the highest ACT score in my graduating class. I had a scholarship to TWU [Texas Women's University], but I messed it up by getting pregnant... because growing up in the 60s, again, which is not an excuse, but the culture at the time...I guess I've always been a rebel, in a nice way. Not an in your face kind of a rebel, but more as like 'I wanna do what I wanna do' kind of a thing. And it got me in trouble...I wasn't even allowed to cross the stage with my graduating class...I wasn't allowed to take the senior trip with my class because it was a stigma...back in the 60s, it's not like today...I had so many positives up to that point. I was...very popular, and [on] student counsel and played basketball for three years...everything was wonderful up until that point...I was made an example. 'This is what's going to happen to you girls if you do this'... I got married when I was still a senior in high school and went to California; didn't finish my education. That's the one regret I have in life...

Like Sofia, I too was a child of the 60s and I too got pregnant. However, my experience was very different. School was not an issue because I stopped going before anyone knew. Sofia emphasized the stigma in school and the consequences imposed. For me, it was the experience of *vergüenza* I felt because I disgraced my *familia*. Sofia did not speak of *vergüenza*.

She continued,

...I thank God every day...i'm financial secure even without the education that my siblings, and my other family members have achieved. I don't feel any less and in a lot of ways I've superseded a lot of what they've done, just on my own...I just feel like...I've achieved everything you guys have achieved and even more because...they've never left South Texas...but I've been able to leave the area, especially going to California. So I have, I think, a broader picture of what's out there, where theirs is very limited to this area. That's part of why I'm ready to leave the valley, because a lot of people here are so limited in their scope of what the world is like. It's hard for them to accept ideas...sometimes they don't understand me, it's like 'what are you talking about?' It's like, 'I can't explain it to you guys, you just have to have experienced it'...it is experience, and a lot of times that's why I feel I don't have the piece of paper they have, but my life experiences have taught me more than they learned by just going to four years of college...

Sofia has made meaning of her move to California. In fact, she feels it was to her benefit that she leave the valley and that is precisely why she plans to leave again. As much as she is proud of her heritage she at times does not feel understood...somehow she is different.

I understand. Years ago, during my visits to the valley to see my *familia*, I would often hear “*se cree muy americana.*” I was confused and uncomfortable with the cognitive dissonance I experienced. Yes, I wanted to be American, but somehow that separated me from them. Yes, I wanted to be Mexican, but somehow, that too, separated me from others.

Carmen

Carmen attended Catholic schools through college. She left the valley to attend Incarnate Word and Trinity University, both in San Antonio. Carmen returned to the valley and graduated from the University of Texas, Pan American in McAllen, with a B.A. in Biochemistry. Carmen originates from a family of high achievers.

...I can't really recall a time when I was left out in a school environment, because generally, in school I was just one of the achievers...hum, there was two occasions...I wasn't really left out, it was just me, I was ostracized by the teacher for having gotten into a fight. And I deserved it. But, I wasn't treated any differently...but I will not forget that...[it] was really a simple deal, where you go in, and where.... [What] I did was I had lent some money to a little girl that was richer than my family so I expected to get my money back that following Friday and when I didn't I got in a fight with her...so, both of us got punished, but I think I got punished more so than her...she was a white Mexican and I was a brown Mexican. So, yes, maybe, that happened in school. Let me see, the other time...didn't have anything to do with the difference there, of being white or *mexicana*, but that was more of your typical classroom and you raise your hand, teacher's not paying attention and you call her mother, but I said it in Spanish, *amá*. And, (snaps fingers) man I got sent to the principal for saying that word because we weren't suppose to speak Spanish in the school....I'll never forget that...I was non-conformist...my parents were involved in

the school; my mother in particular. So I had all the right elements going into school to where I wouldn't [have] been treated indifferently...

Even as a high achiever and having parental engagement in school, Carmen did not escape encounters with racialization. She attributes blame to herself, and greater consequences for her behavior because she was a "brown Mexican." I had always felt "lucky" that I was born a light-skinned Mexican with freckles; light enough to "pass." It "helped" that as I was growing up, my family called me Gloria, my middle name, rather than María, my first name. But even so, nothing kept me free of similar experiences such as those Carmen encountered. I had to wonder why she paused and did not complete her *cuento* about what happened after she arrived at the principal's office to face the consequences of her behavior.

I recall very clearly an event that occurred as a result of my behavior while in Catholic school. At the designated time, we walked, as a class, to the lavatory in a single file, our hands in the prayer position and we were to maintain complete silence. There was always an appointed student monitor while we were in the lavatory. I remember feeling compelled and excited to use an English word I knew and so I smiled and whispered "hi" to the monitor. She did not respond.

We walked back to the classroom. A few moments after taking our seats, Sister dragged her big wooden chair from behind her large wooden desk. She placed the chair in front of the desk, facing the class. She called my name and asked me to come to her. I obeyed. Without saying another word, she put her hands under my arms and pulled me face down across her lap. She pulled up my dress, my panties down, and spanked me - in

front of everyone. That is all I remember. I must have psychologically dissociated in order to cope.

Just as Carmen “slipped” when she called out “*amá*” she also “slipped” when she used the word “indifferently.” She actually was not treated indifferently, but rather, differently.

She continues,

...I went to college when I was sixteen...and I was involved in this biomedical research program...there was a bunch of us that were going to a symposium in New Orleans...so I was the youngest one in the group and the Dean, Sister Mary Margaret asked me to be the Dean of the group...I was going to be the Dean of Women...there wasn't that many [of us], but I was going to be the head honcho. And I was the youngest, I kinda went, 'wow, how did I get this job, wow, this is pretty cool'...I was sorta like a little leader there. I was always like creating, making things happen there...it was the late 60s, early 70s we were very politically organized and charged up with what was happening with a the Vietnam War [and] what was happening politically in women's rights...the Sissy Farenthold, the George McGovern, the Raza Unida, the Catholic Youth Organization...whether it be organizations and social clubs in school, I was very involved...they tried to offer me a job to stay there...I should have stayed there, at school...I had been accepted into an MD/PhD program in Irvine, California, in La Jolla...

Carmen's educational experience also provided positive reinforcement of her capacity to lead and as well as become politically engaged. For some reason, that Carmen did not disclose, she did not move toward the MD/PhD program – she seems to regret that.

She continues,

...in school, I was a straight A kid; except for reading. I mean, well, English and reading. I always had a hard time...even in college...first of all I was taking too many hours my freshman year...I had a problem with the English teacher...they didn't quite understand what I was trying to decipher in a poem. It's as simple as that...my thinking was different. Maybe it had a lot to do with where I came from, and they didn't take that into consideration. Maybe I didn't even realize that...no, and that's why it's so important that we tell our stories, that we write our stories, that we give people the opportunity to do that without ridicule. That we embrace those

differences and that we appreciate it for what it is and that's just now starting to happen.

Carmen speaks to the border-based experiences of many of *las mujeres* in the social and academic environment. Whether in *el valle*, San Antonio, Detroit, or wherever we find ourselves, the social borderlands exist wherever we are.

Teresa

Teresa is from *el otro lado*, the other side. She was born in *México* and completed 7th grade in the Mexican public school system.

... my parents were not educated you know, so it was difficult to learn from someone who wasn't educated... they just wanted [us to] go to school, you gotta learn something...my mother would come out with this thing that is like 'oh you know the worlds coming to an end' and I'm like, ahhh, it was depressing...so, I was not real good in school...I just wish that would of never happened, because I would have turned out to be a more educated person...I could have...in that time in my life, I kinda felt left out in a way, not necessarily in school but just as a person. That's why I maybe have great strengths since I discover all these things that I can do...since I'm not waiting to be accepted...I don't know if anybody's really ever asked me that but it's, very emotional, *este*, because I never really felt a part of anything...

This is not to imply that Teresa did not repeatedly try to be a part of something, nor that she is not an educated person. The sadness was palpable.

She continues,

...I remember I had a pencil...one day my mother said, 'hey you know what, that pencil, I didn't buy that pencil for you', because my mother was checking every cent because...we didn't have very much and it's like, ah man, you know ma, I stole it. I think I took it from another kid. She said, 'No, no, no. You give it back. When you get to school give it back because what you have, you have, and what you don't have, you don't have'...my mother didn't have the money for me to go to a special school or to buy more pencils or more whatever, it was short on creating and doing things...I entered the contest of drawing and I ended up, you know, getting second place. And it was transmitted through the radio. It was *control remote de radio...Casa Cuidad, una* beautiful department store. They had there the *el locutor y todos hablando allí*. It was the competition and...I painted something...inspired by

Orozco, a Mexican artist that painted a lot of the war...*las batallas de México*...like a revolution kinda thing and I kinda felt maybe at that time...I was inspired by something I saw...and I thought hey I'm going to go ahead and draw the Indian people, *no se*, I don't even know how I drew it...I'll never forget that...and so since then I kinda like the idea of trying to sketch something that I see or feel...I was in third grade... [in] 1995...I discovered that you know, hey, maybe this is something...So I held it, too many things, for so many years...you can see around you now, there's a lot of pencils...

Teresa seemed happy in school and eager to learn. Teresa held on to her dream of being able to do her art since the third grade. She was inspired by Mexican art and rewarded for her effort. She did not settle for the “not having” that you have while living in poverty.

She continued,

...I was taking classes in the Arizona Community College in Prescott...there was a teacher that everything I said and did...I wrote a story about [how] I lived in Acuña...something about that we had to split like an apple or something because it's pretty much literally what was happening because we didn't have any food. We didn't have any money. My mother was trying to iron other peoples' shirts you know *ajeno para poder sacar*...so my mother had to really work to give us the food. And that lady was pretty much already looking at my story and says 'no, that's unbelievable, that doesn't work.' When you have teachers like that and they don't really see much more, because if they didn't grow up that way, they're not going to understand it...it's why I say you have to live what I lived through so you can understand what I'm saying...

Although she found her place in the school environment in *México*, she felt left out in a general sense in society. Her attempt at re-entering school as an adult was met with a lack of interest from, and marginalization by, her teachers.

I have had similar experiences throughout my educational experience. Unlike Teresa's positive experience with art, my experience in an elementary art class led to trauma that set up a barrier between me and my desire to make art in a concrete way. I

had teachers who did not, or could not, grasp the truth about my reality. I, like Teresa, often wondered if they even wanted to know, if they even cared; and came to the conclusion that they did not.

Language

...one could speak of languages and shifting linguistic practices

as comprising part of a new 'linguascape.'

Yasemin Yildiz (2012)¹⁰

Marta

...concerning...the Spanish talk...I remember one time that I didn't understand a lady cuz she was talking Spanish that I don't...[another] lady says it's cuz she talks different Spanish. I consider it the right talk. And I consider that I don't know the right talk a lot of the times. That's what makes me feel uncomfortable when people say something and I don't understand what they're saying. It bothers me...it makes me feel...like a fool...I consider myself the half-breed because I don't understand Spanish that well. Or talk it right. And the Mexican, Mexican people know what they're saying, I don't. Life is kinda hard when you don't know all the things that the Mexican people know, and you have to learn that you come from there, too. That it's not wrong for you to know things. But, you don't know where to go for the answer. Where do you go?

Marta not only feels uncomfortable with her Spanish speaking skills, she also feels like a "fool." She feels the loss of something that is part of her, and somehow feels incomplete. She even feels lost as to whom or where she can go to for help.

She continues,

...they looked like a perfect family...they both had good jobs and I always felt like I wish I could be like her...she didn't want to hear any bad language in the house. You couldn't curse, you couldn't say bad words...I feel like I remember her talking, she [would] remind me that you don't have to talk like that. You don't have to make yourself look dumb. Just because you're Spanish...the traditions that we have...they wanna, people like to make us look wrong...

Here is another way we are told that we are or look “dumb.” I remember being told, “*no andes con tus maldiciones*” while at the same time hearing words like *chingada* in its various forms such as *chíngate*, *que se vaya* or *vete a la chingada*. I can understand how some may have thought of this “language” as a “tradition” in the sense that these words may be seen as common or normalized in some family – they certainly were in mine. I never saw my parents as being “dumb” because they used these words. I thought of these words as an expression of anger and frustration.

Marta continues,

...we would see Spanish movies¹¹ a lot, but we didn’t know other than that...like Pedro Infante - my style of mus[ic]...English movies¹², *casi not...porque no me pegaban las English movies*. That’s why I don’t consider the thought that I’m really that bad about Spanish. I just don’t know how to speak it well. I like when people talk Spanish words...they sound natural, they sound normal, they sound real and when I talk the Spanish I feel *chueca*. I have to think twice when I’m gonna say it cuz I’m not used to that Spanish, Spanish. Now I’m learning, like I know how to say *un momentito señorita*, or you know, talk like that. *No me salían las palabras antes asina...now I’ve learned a lot of words that I’ve never known before...I didn’t used to talk Spanish so well. Y ‘hora garro la palabras bien, trato de ser las palabras bien*. When I speak ‘em, *cuando yo*, how do I say in Spanish *cuando hablas, verdad, la palabra, hablar?*...when you’re used to something *entra bien*. When you’re not used to [it] I gotta think twice. There’s a lot of people that talk the Spanish so perfect like, *yo me quedo viendo bastante*. Like when (points toward television) especially you see in the Spanish programs, news...they have a smooth talk....they don’t sound crooked and I feel I talk crooked...they don’t show anything Spanish [on TV] like [a] long time ago...the programs *de más antes* [we] would understand the stories. *Pero hora las novelas, no le garro*. I don’t get these stories real well. *Puro novelas ‘stan saliendo*, you know? They’re not movie, movies like *antes* and that’s why I buy ‘em...I say to my daughter, ‘I’m not gonna break the tradition that I love, and I’m going to buy ‘em’...I say it’s because it’s the old stuff that I used to be with. And that’s who I am. *Le digo a my daughter*, I might be from this side of the Valley and we talk English, but part of me says I want to stick to the Spanish...and I don’t want to get it out of my system...I need Spanish in my system...

Marta walks us through the confusion caused by the border-based dilemma of being able to understand Spanish media production at one point in life and not at another. Early on, she struggled with movies in English and now she is completely detached from movies in Spanish, except for the “old stuff” that she became accustomed to in her childhood.

Social encounters and the impact of media have shaped Marta’s experience with both languages. While never absolutely comfortable, she feels compelled to continue recovering her Spanish-speaking skills. She does find comfort in the sounds and feel of Spanish – and knows it’s a part of who she is. It is an ongoing struggle for Marta, but one she embraces; as I did.

Alma

...it had an English name, Beauchamp Subdivision that nobody could pronounce. Because we didn’t have water, we named it *colonia seca*. So people, some people, the older group of us still know it as *colonia seca*. But the younger group now know it as *colonia nueva* because it has water. And it has paved streets. And it has parks. It has everything. But it was because people like my dad and my uncles and other neighbors and friends saw it, and they said how can we not have this, or this, or this? So they organize[d] a *comité*...nobody would sell us water because the city was too far away. I don’t know how they did it, but they did their own water development corporation. Isn’t that incredible?! They were so smart! They figured it out. And everything at that time was in English!

Although there were challenges, they were met with creativity, ingenuity, and determination. Renaming the *colonia* was the only reasonable thing to do just as figuring out how to make things happen for the community. How did they figure things out?

This reminded me of sitting at our kitchen table in Detroit watching my mother make out checks to pay bills. She used an old S&H Greenstamp Catalogue¹³ to figure out how to write out numbers. They always had a way to figure it out; sometimes we knew

how and other times we were just amazed as to how our parents met the challenges within a monolingual context.

Alma continued,

...it was mainly with *rancheras*, *polkas* and *boleros*. Real Mexican kind of music. We grew up with that in our households in *la colonia*. You could sit outside on your porch, or under a tree, and you could hear beautiful music from all the homes. We didn't have a TV...we had a TV, but it was all in English...but your radio, everybody had a little radio! The most wonderful invention was when they did the transistor radios and we could take those to the fields. And you would have them here (demonstrates how the radio hooked onto the waistband)...that's the first thing you would buy is a transistor radio...I hadn't thought about that, but even in the fields you hear this beautiful Mexican music all the time. Now I have an IPOD and I have my Mexican music...I travel a lot. And almost everywhere I go now I can still get Univision, and Telemundo, and TV Azteca. I can still get all that, but I can[']t get Mexican music, unless you're in California...it's like you're in Mexico like in Texas, South Texas anyway. We're in Mexico almost...so we still enjoy that beautiful Mexican music. But, growing up in the 70s and going up north, and having jukeboxes, and spending Sunday's having a hamburger or something...there isn't a lot of Mexican music so I also have English music that I enjoy...the 70s music in English. I have Carole King, James Taylor that's mine. My husband is crazier kind of rock music. Not me. I love my music...now I really like Tracey Chapman. I love her music...

Música remains meaningful and emotional, and we get to give it meaning. Music in two languages gives us an expanded repertoire of not only the music, but also the meaning we attach to it. It remains important to have access to what is meaningful to us.

Oh how I could relate to that transistor radio! That year, the one I spent in Raymondville as a teenager, my green transistor radio saved me. It was my connection to the familiar; in my case and at that time, "American" music; that is, music in English. The little battery compartment on the back that snapped open also came in handy. It was in there that I stashed one cigarette and a match. I would take it with me when I would go to the bathroom, located outside of my grandparent's house. I also slept with my radio right

next to me and would fall asleep to the familiar sounds of Motown that I found so comforting.

Alma continues,

...we're migrants, we traveled...If we were in the Valley it was like Pedro Infante, Flor Silvestre, and just Mexican. Mexican movies that's all we had. Well, that's not all we had, that's what we would go to. And they wouldn't have them too often...so all of us Mexicans would show up that's for sure! It would be another two weeks, or a month, before we got another chance. But when we used to go up north in the summer, growing up, I loved the English movies¹⁴...we didn't have any Mexican movies to go to...so we had to learn to like something else...so, I had to learn to like English stars¹⁵ ...Elvis Presley, Annette Funicello, Frankie Avalon, mainly their movies - real crummy kind of stuff. And then I also saw *Dr. Zhivago*, I don't know how many times...*A Summer Place* with Troy Donahue and Sandra Dee...that's what I used to watch up north...I don't know why my sister...and my cousins...they could do without them. I really immersed myself...every Sunday I would be in line for the movies whether they went or didn't go...they thought I was sorta weird because I wanted to watch the same *Dr. Zhivago* over and over, they gave up on me...they would rather hang out at the park...and I would like to go to the movies or I would like to listen to music. And I also was growing up during the Vietnam era and for some reason, because I like to talk and share, if I did go to the park or even at the movies, and if I met somebody, a young Mexican guy that was gonna go to war, then we would connect. I was always writing letters to them...they were writing back...[my familia would] say, *hay va la loca* cuz I would go everywhere with pencil and paper. And while we ate and put on the jukebox I'd tell them the latest song. The Little Joe or the Sonny and the Sunliners or the Joe Bravo or whatever was on the jukebox. The Red Rubber Ball by, I don't know who...so I had lots of friends that were in Vietnam. And many who passed away...but I would like to write a lot and I was the strange one because I knew English. And I don't know how well I wrote it or how well I spoke it but I would do it anyway. And so, my other cousins, no they didn't pick [it] up. They didn't want to speak English...they could have if they wanted to...so whenever they got into a situation where it had to be English translation they would ask me to do it; and I would. They didn't want the role. And I assumed the role...so growing up I was the translator for the whole labor camp we used to live in. I didn't mind. I didn't like field work very much. They say that I was lazy [because] I didn't like to work in the fields.

Alma witnessed her family struggle due to language issues and seemed determined to not only avoid those issues herself, but to become the interpreter for the group. In the

process, there was a simultaneous distancing between Alma and her family, and connecting them, and self, to others. She mentioned earlier that the most important thing she learned in school was how to speak English. It seems obvious that Alma took every opportunity to work on her language skills. She was not afraid.

I remember my mother telling me that she would shake her head as I walked around the house as a little girl saying “I’m an American.” I suppose I was practicing, too. However, I was much more insecure in public, and I was a reluctant interpreter.

Sylvia

...trying to speak Spanish...the way you pronounce it...people make fun of you by saying, ‘That’s not right. This is the’...but that didn’t happen but maybe a couple of times...I don’t remember, exactly...

Sylvia seemed quite uncomfortable thinking about dual-language experiences. She did not want to recall these encounters; almost as if just wanting to forget them. I understood given my own experience of frequently being corrected when speaking both Spanish and English; and the manner it was usually done. One would learn to avoid such often shameful experiences.

Sylvia mentioned language preference in music,

....[as a child] it was mostly I think Spanish, *tejano* because of my mom and dad...now I like all of it *tejano*, Rock and Roll...that’ll never die...

Sylvia quit speaking Spanish when she didn’t need to anymore, that is, when her parents began to understand English. She spoke to them in English, they responded in Spanish and vice-versa. Whether socializing with family or friends, or at work, she speaks

primarily English. However, she does continue to seek out *tejano* music and has both Mexican and Spanish representations around her.

On the top right hand corner of her refrigerator, Sylvia placed this 2004 *Baldo*¹⁶ comic strip. (figs. 26, 27)

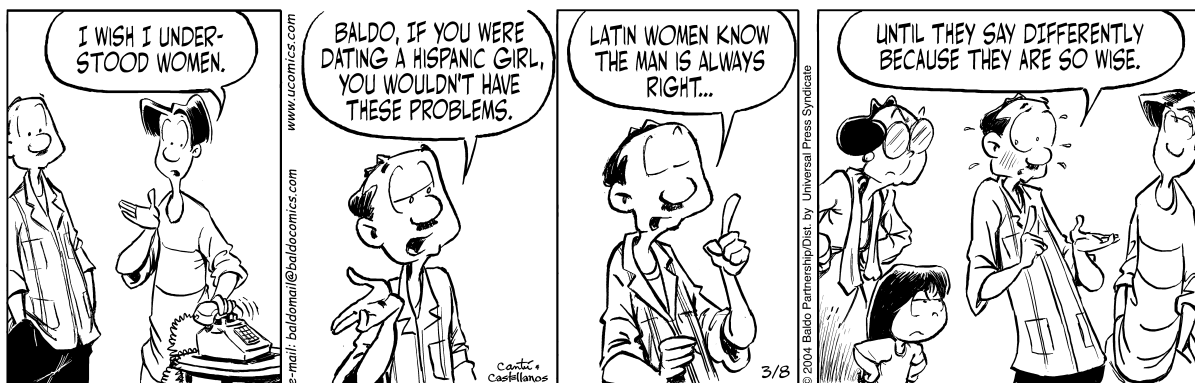


Figure 26: BALDO © 2004 Baldo Partnership. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.



Figure 27: BALDO © 2004 Baldo Partnership. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.

All around her are reminders of her first language. Framed by sequins, there is an *Alacrán* card from the Mexican game of *Lotería*. An image of *La Calavera* denotes *Día de los Muertos*. And on Sylvia's window sill sat a small ceramic piece that read, "un día a la vez."

Sofia

... why I remember this I don't know...speaking Spanish, was kind of downgraded and I just spoke more English...it's just the typical growing up in the 60s in South Texas. You were not allowed to speak Spanish in school...most of our teachers were Anglo...their job was to patrol the hallways between classes...you can't speak Spanish, you have to speak English...chastised, not really punished, but always corrected....we were always...not fearful, but it's like we didn't have the freedom to speak to our *mexicano* friends and relatives in Spanish when we wanted to. We had to be very careful with that...being put down for speaking Spanish...but that's about as far as it went...we did discuss it. It was like, I guess, we understood (face cringed, shook head)...no we didn't understand...it was a negative to us. It's like why are they denying us...why are they telling us we can't speak what we know, and what we want to speak. That was probably one of the only negative things about growing up, is not being able to speak Spanish and not really understanding why. I understand it now. They really did us a favor because we learned very good English...as I got a little bit older, it's like wow, be proud of yourself, you're bilingual...you're stronger than the *gringos* because you can speak Spanish and they can't...

Sofia's dilemma with language issues also arose in the school environment. Contrary to her understanding, this experience was not exclusive to South Texas. There were significant differences in our experiences. She was very confident and very proud of her bilingualism and questioned the injustice of not being able to "speak what we know." Her experience was shaped and reinforced by those whose opinion mattered most; her *familia* and her peers. As for me, I always seemed to be the only Mexican and the only one who spoke Spanish. I had no one to talk to about my dilemma and so I internalized the dominant message – to speak English is good, to speak Spanish was not.

She continues,

...they never took us to a Mexican movie, you know, like a lot of families thrived on all the Mexican westerns and things like that. I've never seen too many Mexican movies and the ones I have seen are mainly on TV...we just didn't go to movies...[now] I love animated funny movies...like *Ice Age*, *Nemo*... [music] *tejano*....a lot of *tejano*...

Tejano music is something else we had in common. I remember that my dad had set-up a set of drums in the basement of our house in Detroit. He loved to accompany *tejano* music. He would play, and play, and play. We thought it was silly then...I miss that now.

Carmen

...in my home there was a rule, if you're going to speak to me in Spanish, speak to me in Spanish. If you're going to speak to me in English, speak to me in English, but don't mix both. So, if we mixed both, then we were ignored...[by] both parents. And then on my mother's side of the family, I had that older cousin of mine who had her PhD in Spanish. Her mother was just horrible. My *tía* Rosa. May she rest in peace. If we went over there to their house, which on occasion we did go, if we spoke Spanish they would be correcting us the entire time. 'Speak correct Spanish!' That is one problem that we have here in the valley. That is, we have different dialects of Spanish even here in the valley...different words and the *span-english* language...but we weren't allowed to say those words. My father did, on occasion he would say words, like *wáchale*...because of work...who he worked with and where he worked...

Carmen used very few Spanish words during our *plática*. She seemed consistent with the "rule" she learned as a child, in both the home and school environment, that you choose which language you will speak and you speak only that language. "Don't mix both" because of a consequence. There also seemed to be a problem when a particular "dialect" was spoken. This seems to be directly related to class status. There seems to be a difference in mother and father's class status, yet Carmen is able to explain away the difference.

In my home, in Detroit, my parents spoke Spanish. We, my siblings and I, understood Spanish, but early on we began to respond to them, and speak, only English. We all understood each other. I do not recall any "correcting" in the home environment at all. They wanted to assimilate; just as much as we did.

Carmen continues,

...we did go to a lot of *Cantinflas* movies...but it was the cartoons and stuff like that...there really wasn't that many good movies for kids. Yeah, if you start thinking about it, most of them were just adult type movies...Teenage years... *2001 Odyssey*, that was kind of a mind blower...early, Steven Spielberg was always pretty good. Here lately...I like *Forrest Gump*...there's one that I really liked, that was independent from Mexico, called *Bienvenido/Welcome* by Gabriel Retes [1994] that has got to be one of my most favorite movies. He also did another one called *El Bulto* [1991]...a Spanish one that I really like...*Pisanos*. Anyway, I like the Spanish films from Spain...there's a good documentary right now on *The Wall*...that I liked. There's a great movie...*The Reels of Pancho Villa*...he actually was filming while he was out in the field...he was a documentarian. People don't realize that...

The "class" differences that emerged in the home environment seem to cross-over into entertainment for Carmen's *familia*. *Cantinflas* is a Mexican comedian and film star who represented poor and working class *mexicanos*.¹⁷ As you will see, *conjunto* music also seems to hold class distinctions for Carmen.

...[and music] it depended [on] where we went...because if we went to the ranch, then, you had *conjunto* music...but when we went to my mother's side their parties were always... *orquestas*...*tríos*, *boleros*...so we had just a real big variety, and you know...I never had an appreciation for the *conjunto* music. It wasn't until...one of the board members from Narciso¹⁸ that taught me about it...in the 60s...my brother exposed us very early on to what was going on in Europe...he went to Texas A&M [university located in College Station, Texas] and...after he graduated he did a tour with the US Army Corp of Engineers...he picked up stuff from the PX [Post Exchange]...I have *Beatles* albums...*Strawberry Alarm Clock*, *Grateful Dead*, *Jethro Tull*, *Jeff Beck*, all the greats...I have *Traffic*, and then of course I got into, I really liked, because of the *bolero* exposure that I had...to a lot of South American *trío* work, which was Brazilian. So you had Jose Antonio Carlos Jobim with *The Girl from Ipanema*...but as I got older, I have an affinity now for just Latino Jazz...that's what I listen to...down here we are so limited with our radio stations...the car that I purchased has *Sirius* radio, so I subscribed to that...but before that there was just nothing here. Public radio was okay...and that's the only station that I listen to that's local, but I know when to listen to it...I've got my times...

What a familiar response – it depends or it depended. If you were here you listen to this and if you were there, you listen to that. And how do we perceive this and that?

Conjunto music, like *Cantinflas* movies, also represented working-class *tejanos*. Carmen seemed to have at some point decided to distance herself from both *Continflas* and *conjunto*. Eventually, she found her way back to *conjunto* music – maybe she will also find her way back to *Cantinflas*. Maybe it was all about the language “rule” and what it implied.

My linguistic borders were swamped by English as I grew up, but as an adult, I made an effort to recover my language. My 84 year old *mexicana* mother shows signs of also having her linguistic borders swamped by English. I remind her to please respond to me in Spanish. During a recent visit, we were in the middle of a conversation when suddenly I could not remember the Spanish word for “curly.” I asked my mom, “*Amá, cómo se dice curly en Español?*” *Amá* responded with “kinky.” We laughed.

Teresa

...they paid a lot of attention to me then which I thought it was really cool...they thought I had a television. And here we couldn't even pay ten dollar rent. But the reason they thought I had a television, it was because...I would close the windows [*las cortinas*] and I would turn the radio in the American station. And then later they found out, and they said, 'hey man, you have a TV, wow, you really, you have it in the English channel.' And it's like, 'Yes I do. I'm learning English.' And that was really great because I thought, (chokes up) hey, you know what, they're looking at, up to this...maybe they wish they could do that. Maybe they're like me...we just wanna to be able to go far...so all the people can see that you are better...

English speaking skills were greatly admired by her peers in *México*. Teresa witnessed the value in bilingualism and relentlessly pursued her desire to learn.

...I'd see some of the tourists coming into Acuña, Coahuila and a lot of English being spoken and things and their hands moving, and their eyes, and pointing this and that, and I was just over there in the background [*pensando*]...'I wonder what they're saying? I like the sound of that word. I think I heard it the other day again. I wonder what that is? Okay, I gotta put two and two together so I can figure out what that is.' *O sea*, just wanting to learn...

This process of learning and curiosity is so familiar to me, except that I was on *este lado* of both the geographical and linguistic borderlands.

She continues,

...my husband and I were..in some fancy private club...membership only...New York City...a lot of the people that were serving were all Mexicans or from South American...and actually I had more conversations with them than anybody...after a while [he] said 'Teresa, you shouldn't be talking to those people, they are the help.' And I said, yeah, I am the help!...my husband is Anglo, French and English...he comes from a different kind of a blueblood...he's the educated one. I'm not...

Teresa and I also share this experience of being "the help." We have both experienced "fancy...membership only" environments, have been drawn to engage with "the help", and been chastised for it. Like Teresa, I too continued to do as I felt moved to, even though there were and may continue to be social consequences.

She continues,

...one of the worst things that happened, the more worst that can happened to anybody...I gave up my kids to my first husband...I tried to work. It was called the Cream Castle. It was (stops speaking, shook her head, began to cry and paused)...I don't know what you call those places that you park...you had to get somebody to come and they would take the order...and I thought ahhhhh I could maybe study my English. I mean I was looking forward to it (tearful) because it was a learning thing for me...it was in Arkansas, and it was 1977, 1978...there were a lot of school kids who came...if I had a gun, at that time, the way I felt humiliated...(touched a cross on her necklace) I probably would have gone back and killed them...God was with me...I'm not a violent person...I think you can only take so much humiliation...it just gets the best of you...that was my experience (wipes tear) at the Cream Castle...I would try...I thought I was going to be real good at it and I could've been...if they had understood what I was trying to do...so I was very humiliated there...so I quit. So I said, well, I don't speak English...I've gotta try to find somebody that I can talk to...I didn't have anybody...I went to the Chaplin at the Air Force base and he couldn't help me. He didn't speak Spanish...so I didn't know what else to do [and] I thought I gotta find some kind of way, divorce...I remember the lawyer said something about...what about the kids and I said well I can't take care of them, I can't get a job. How am I gonna work? I don't speak English. So I have to sign 'here.' So my husband took the kids...to Europe for three years...it was never

written, anywhere that said he could take them away...in my divorce it had like every other weekend I could be with them...I'll never forget when I signed the paper...I never gave them up as a parent. I gave the custody to him because he was able to provide for them, the food, the shelter. I was not giving my signature because I'm giving up as a parent...that's a mistake I didn't make...I didn't do that, it was a mistake created by....

The walls that exist between languages created Teresa's experiences. These walls often served as concrete barriers to social success and justice. Often, the attempt to negotiate these linguistic borderlands came to a quick end and met with little compassion.

Teresa continues,

...en la...cómo se llama?...películas del tiempo de la época de oro... del cine mexicano...I have a movie that I hold close to my heart de la revolución mexicana. Many wars, many revoluciones... So everything that I do hold is because it has some kind of real big meaning. It's about history of life, or where you came from...Terror de la Frontera was another movie that I liked...I really like the title...on TV, when we did happen to get a TV...we always had just a radio. But we were watching Star Trek and the I Dream of Jeanie...it was so exciting about pretending to be them and being in another world. It's kinda transporting you...it's almost like, if you're a kid, you dream about maybe being them or being where they are, so it's kinda great to escape...

For Teresa, the films she holds dear in the Spanish language include those about revolution in *México* and terror on the borderlands. In the English language, her viewing interests turn to the fantasy of escape.

I did not grow up with *el cine mexicano* during *la época de oro*, but have more recently sought out films of that era for my own edification. I too watched with interest the "American" TV shows. Fantasy? Oh, yes. Remember, I thought I was going to grow up to be Shirley Temple and maybe even get to go on "The Good Ship Lollypop!"¹⁹

Teresa talks about music,

...Ah, *las músicas tristes*. My mother, my dad, they grew up with Julio Jaramillo, which I think he was from El Salvador, *hondureño* or from *Honduras yo creo*. Este, ay, Chelo Silva, Juan Salazar...the music from *México*. I mean it's pretty soulful. And *los corridos*... just tragic stories of somebody's life and things...every once in a while it was some kind of a real fun song...*se llamaba El Juarachazo Norteño*, two o'clock in the afternoon. It used to come on the radio right at the time when we were walking home from school. So some of the homes would have the radio station on and we would, *ay, ya empezó! ya empezó, el programa El Juarachazo Norteño* and it was just a whole bunch of classic songs that my mom and dad grew up with...I try really hard not to listen to any of that because...it's not because I want to alienate myself from the real truth of me or my family or what I grew up with or anything, it's just because it brings up a lot of sadness...so, I hear completely the opposite. I burn a lot of CDs of South African music, *colombiano*...every other music except *mexicano*...all these classic songs from my parent's, I have 'em, I hold them very dearly close to my heart, but I try not to hear them because it's almost like I see them at that time that I grew up. It was not happy times. I mean, it was very depressing times. So I don't...

Teresa's experience with language changed in major ways when she crossed to this side of the Texas-Mexican borderlands. The excitement and joy of learning turned into the trauma of learning. As much as she wants to stay connected to all things Mexican, this is often painful. How she constructed being in the United States of America and speaking English was dramatically different when making social contact was live and not in the imagination or on television. What we find nostalgic, she often finds painful.

How Teresa lives her life, now, does seem like what she could have imagined...

Traditional Medicine/Traditional Healing/Curanderismo

My abuelita felt closest to Guadalupe while tending to the marvelous plants of her garden.

These were as sacred as everything else that inhabits la madre tierra.

Yolanda Broyles-Gonzalez, 2002²⁰

Marta

...I never seen that kind of life...when it comes to medicines, you use a regular doctor. I don't know *hierbas*...I've never learned any of 'em...my relatives, everybody would go to a doctor...normally they would...it was not a life-style that we learned...

Marta immediately rejected the notion of the knowledge or practice of traditional medicine/traditional healing/*curanderismo*. Although there was no memory of experience with *hierbitas* she certainly knew the word and seemed at some level to understand the meaning.

Alma

...it was my grandmother. She was the doctor of that whole *colonia*...because she was the oldest...and so people would come at all hours of the day and the night...if they were sick, you know [*mal*] *del ojo*, or if they were *empachados*, or if they were *asustados* and couldn't sleep she had the *hierbitas*...like it was *la ruda* for like *si 'staban*, if they were like *spantados* and they were having problems sleeping because they had been scared or were afraid of something, she would like cover them with this white sheet and she would (gestures sweeping motion from head to toe and back) *barrerlos* with a bunch of *ruda* and say special prayers...and then with an egg...she had different remedies and herbs...like if it was an adult that couldn't sleep she would recommend like *hojas de toronja*...boiled...she had [a *remedio*] for everything. She would just go out in the garden and for whatever ailed you was there and she would cook it. Like right now that I have a cold, a sore throat, she would get the lemon peels and would bake 'em in the oven...no, not in the oven, but on the stove...put the orange peels and a little bit of honey and make some stuff that we would drink and it would make us feel better. If we had headaches she would put stuff on our foreheads with Vicks and some herbs on the sides of our temples. So she was the one that would heal us...when she passed away it was my mother and my aunts, and by then it was like everybody's mom or aunt, they would pick up and they'd know. Even now, when we're sick, my mom knows. She knows what to do and has the herbs to make a tea if it's the *manzanilla* or the *hierbabuena* or the *ruda*, or whatever...I married a biologist and sorta a scientist and they sorta clash in their beliefs. So they don't believe in that, in *el ojo*...but they don't interfere because it's only my husband that's an Anglo American. Everybody else is Mexican. So he's totally outnumbered. He doesn't have to do it, but everybody else, we still do, we believe it.

Although Alma had no problem recalling information, she seemed somewhat unsure about several remedies, recipes, and rituals. No doubt she remains proud of her family's knowledge of traditional healing and being able to trace this practice back to her grandmother. She now depends on her mother, who is now 88 years old, as the healer in the family. Although she and her partner differ in beliefs, she clearly knows where she stands, and why. Will she carry on the tradition? She seems somewhat concerned about that.

I have a similar experience. My mother is the keeper of that knowledge. She shared it with me in a very practical and experiential manner. It was the in-vivo experience of being healed. She took care of all of us kids, my dad, and herself. I recall how she turned a piece of newspaper into a cone, put the narrow end into my ear and lit the other end with a match. I could smell the sulfur. I don't remember being afraid at all. I trusted her. Suddenly, there would be a soft and quiet sound of air going up the cone and fanning the flame. I was all better after that. Many a morning, I woke up and found an egg in a glass of water under my bed. I knew my mother had performed a healing that she somehow knew I needed.

Sylvia

...like herbal tea for achy stomach...currently I try not to take anything. I do take my vitamins...I try to do it with natural things...no prescription drugs...(long pause)...Vicks, for one. That's the first thing that was used for a lot of things. That's the only one that I can relate to other than the teas...

Sylvia identified what seems a common remedy for many *mexicanos* – Vicks

Vaporub.²¹ I also recall Vicks as the first-line treatment for so many things that ailed us. As

a child, I do not remember a single doctor visit. On the other hand, I can recall many a treatment with Vicks. Vicks and aspirin - that was all the medicine in our medicine cabinet. Everything else was in the kitchen. This seemed natural.

Sofia

...it was very important. And of course, back then you didn't have insurance and things like that...we did go, my family had the means if we needed a doctor...but my mom was like a traditional *mexicana*. She always had the *hierbabuena*, she had...I can't remember the names of things, but every little *hierbita* had a function for cough, for fever, for stomach ache...and we always had them at our disposal either growing them at home or going to the *hierbería* or the *tiás* had 'em...they would exchange...and everybody grew up the same way. I still have my mom, so she taught us. And I have one sister who knows everything. So whenever I have a cold or whatever you know... take these *hierbitas*..and I go to the *hierbería* and I buy it. Like for kidney infections its, what do you call it, *los pelitos del maiz*...you boil that and it helps your bladder and your kidneys. And so, I still do both. So, it's the same as when I was growing up...

Sofia also intimates that she wants to keep the healing traditions alive. One reason seems to be that she associates traditional healing as authenticating her mother as a traditional *Méxicana*. Another reason is her profound interest and connection to all things historical and traditional. For Sofia, traditional means both natural healing learned from her family and visits to a doctor.

I too have the same desire to keep healing traditions alive, but we differ in reasoning. I now ask my mother directly about remedies. These are conversations we never had until the last few years. The remedies are not simply recipes that she jots down on a piece of paper for me, but rather *cuentos* of her life in *México*. The remedies themselves are always a combination of *hierbitas* or some other natural ingredient and prayers. For needs or concerns there is often a lighting of a candle of a particular color or of a specific

santo, la Virgen de Guadalupe, or a guardian angel. My mother's practice of natural healing has served her and the rest of my immediate *familia* quite well. The current straying away from natural remedies has only brought about numerous problems. One thing that my mother could not do was heal one of my brothers from his scoliosis. She has never recovered from that.

Carmen

...umm, on my mother's side of the family I saw that more so than on my father's...on my mother's side I can name a couple of occasions where they did the treatment for *mal de ojo*. There was one time when one of my great aunts on my mother's side had died and my mother was asked to go in [and] ...help with the estate. There were big old trunks...I remember opening one of those trunks and my mother...kinda went 'oh my God'...well apparently, that *tía*, who was very educated...she had her own school at her house and had some *hierbas* and some things in jars and my mother was just like petrified over this. The next thing I know she's calling the priest. So, the priest comes over, and of course I was little and I was just kinda watching...the next thing I know is the darn trunk is being taken over to the alley and it's set on fire and the priest is there blessing it. So I kinda figured, you know, this lady must have been into witchcraft or something heavy...that was the first exposure that I saw my mother actually involved in anything weird...[my mother] was familiar with some things...never did that...she had somebody come to the house...[and now] yes, *manzanilla*, *té de anís*, *estrella de anís* thing for your stomach. I remember when my kid was ill. He had a little bit of colic I had star, *estrella de anís*...it's a little seed that's in the shape of a star...I made some tea to control his colic...I would say we did that when we were kids. My paternal grandmother told me that...at the house...you have the mint, you have the *hierbabuena* outside, you have the aloe vera...in my own home, no, but I know I can get it my mom's. Would I probably start growing it if my mom's didn't have any? Probably, but my mom has it.

Again, another example of depending on our mothers to always be there for us. It seems as if we are being nonchalant about that notion. Obviously there are other ways of healing ourselves that we may be being drawn toward.

Carmen used the word “witchcraft” to describe an event related to her aunt. It is not uncommon to join the word “witchcraft” to traditional medicine and healing or curanderismo. For example, when we moved from the downtown “projects” in Detroit, to 14151 Chapel Street, all the neighborhood kids asked if my mom was a witch. I imagine that her slaughtering *cabritos* in our basement might have appeared strange and startled a few kids. My mother learned, in *México*, how to provide meat to feed her *familia*. This was a most natural and normal thing to do in our household. At some point, this way of providing meat for the family ended. I am not sure why. All the neighbor kids, they would all come over and get their ears pierced! That somehow then made my mom cool and not so much a witch.

Teresa

...I don't wanna say. I don't really want to call it curanderismo. I just think that my mother...that's kinda a great topic because what is going on right now people want to search for that. You know that, *la mata* this vegetation found someplace in the, whatever, *los Andes, allá en Lima, Peru* that cures cancer or this or that...all these things are so great that kind of brings me back to earth and my mother because my mother learned that from her parents and my mother is the one who can tell you a better story ...it's too [hard to] remember all these things, my mother's got a better memory than me. Ah, *éste, las malvas*...we used to run around in the dirt all the time and sometimes we'd break out in rashes and she would put *las malvas, son unas plantas verdes, no más puras ojos...son unas plantas verdes que* that she would just soak them in some hot water or some kind of liquid and they would just become kinda like [a] paste and she would put those on our skin and actually your skin would heal...i'm really happy to know that my mother was trying to use as much as possible as just really God on her side. I mean we couldn't afford to go to the doctor my mother was a cleaning lady she was getting paid six dollars a day...it's why maybe my little brother José Angel maybe ended up dying because it was something with *bronquiales* or something. She did take him to a doctor...I really wish that doctor could have saved my brother...then also my grandmother on my father's side in...Concordia...*mi abuelita, la señora Ramona Telles*...she was the one that collected also all these plants...

Teresa also links traditional healing practices to her mother and also finds that she is much less familiar with such practices than both her mother and grandmother. She also connects traditional medicine as the only means to healing due to poverty. She has a great deal of respect for her mother's effort to keep the *familia* healthy.

As much as there seems to be a movement further and further away from these practices, Teresa seems pleased that there is also a move toward seeking out *remedios* that are provided by mother earth – as do I.

While looking at the collective-cuentos of *las mujeres del valle*, we are able to see a variety of border-based experiences, border-based dilemmas, and border-based decisions made within the themes of experience related to religion/spirituality, education, language, and traditional medicine/traditional healing/*curanderismo*. All of these *cuentitos* fit within the framework of borderpsychosocial experiences and demonstrate the borderpsychosocial condition.

¹ Smith and Watson 2001, 47.

² For history of the development of symbol that represents the United Farm Workers, see Bebout 2011, 38-41.

³ The name of a popular television show from the turbulent 60s and 70s that depicted an idyllic rural community.

⁴ The Mexican public school system requires enrollment through the 6th year of school which is identified as *Primaria*. *La Secundaria* includes 7th through 9th grade and is not required.

⁵ The process of “coming out” is synonymous with the GLBT community in reference to being open about sexual orientation and is often connected to a sense of safety. In this case, although I borrowed the metaphor, coming out is not related to sexual identity, but rather ethnic identity and all that that implies.

⁶ González, 2006, 85.

⁷ In Trujillo, 1998, 190.

⁸ For a comprehensive history of Las Hermanas, see Lara Medina, Las Hermanas: Chicana/Latina Religious-Political Activism in the U.S. Catholic Church, 2004.

⁹ Emilia Schunior Ramirez, 1951, 94. Data analysis describes the “problems” presented by children who may or may not have been immigrants, but fit the description. It is interesting to note the numbers reported (or not) by school districts and question how and why such a reporting procedure was found to be acceptable and accurate.

¹⁰ Yasemin Yildiz, 2012, 109. Yildiz coins this term which I found as befitting as a descriptor of the border and borderland spaces created in the Lower Rio Grande Valley – its linguascape.

¹¹ Movies in Spanish.

¹² Movies in English.

¹³ S&H Greenstamps were collectible stamps that were give out by grocery stores and gas stations based on purchases made and were redeemable for items found in the catalogue. Each page had both the numerical number and the number spelled out. One can only wonder why this was the way it was. Little did they know how this helped my mother manage our household.

¹⁴ Movies in English.

¹⁵ Actors who spoke English.

¹⁶ Cantú and Castellanos, first comic strip in syndication (now in its 11th year) that deals specifically with growing up Latino. In 250 daily publications. See <http://baldocomics.com> or www.Facebook.com/Baldocomics

¹⁷ Fortino Mario Alfonso Moreno Reyes (1911-1993) was the Mexican comedian and actor known as *Cantinflas*. See *Cantinflas* in *Que’ es Gramatica* at www.youtube.com/watch?v=jenV19qNNNoA (5:10) as an example of class differences in language and the borderpsychosocial spaces created between and amongst us.

¹⁸ Narciso Martinez Cultural Center in San Benito, Texas. See www.cityofsanbenito.com/Narciso/php

¹⁹ This was the title of Shirley Temple’s trademark song.

²⁰ In Cantú and Nájera-Ramírez, 2002, 124.

²¹ An internet search about Vicks Vaporub will provide plenty of sites that offer “natural remedies” using this product that has been around for over 100 years.

Chapter Four

Temas, Voces Feministas, y la Conexión con Anzaldúa

In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders.

Gloria Anzaldúa¹

Intervención

I recognize that the interrelationship between us and our sociocultural environment impacts both our conscious and unconscious; which in turn influences our psychological, emotional, and social experiences and thus drive our behavior and development throughout our lifetime. It is with this understanding in mind that I have come to identify borderpsychosocial as a viable concept that can claim space within dominant and mainstream theorizing about psychosocial experience and development. Recognizing and acknowledging the existence of specific borderpsychosocial experiences, as documented in the previous chapter, identifies various border and borderland themes that serve as examples of a lifelong experience of negotiation and navigation by *las mujeres del valle* and shape the development of a complex, dynamic, and multifaceted borderpsychosocial experience. These border-based experiences are fundamental to the specific psychosocial consciousness developed by border women.

Read individually, a *cuento* by *una de las mujeres del valle* may appear as no more than one border woman's personal story; however, taken collectively the *cuentos de las mujeres del valle* demonstrate a pattern of borderpsychosocial experiences. While *los cuentos* offer a glimpse into some of the border-based aspects of lives lived in the Río

Grande Valley of South Texas, they also offer empirical evidence in strong support for the reasonable expansion of the currently centered mainstream notion of psychosocial development by drawing from the experiential margins - the borders and the borderlands.

This chapter features the voices of feminists and Chican@ scholars that speak directly to the themes on which Chapter Three focuses: religion/spirituality, traditional medicine/traditional healing/*curanderismo*, education, and language. I place the *temas* in this order because of the close relationship and the blending of experience between religion/spirituality and traditional medicine/traditional healing/*curanderismo*, and education and language. In reality, all four *temas* blend together, but for this purposes of this study, I sort the *temas* in this order. The collection of scholar voices, just a few of the many voices that speak to these *temas*, further validate and recognize the experiential significance of border-based experiences and border-based dilemmas exemplified by the *cuentos of las mujeres del valle*. The dilemmas are a direct result of “*un choque*, a cultural collision” (Anzaldúa 1987, 78) between what *las mujeres* were taught growing up by family, friends, teachers, media, and religious leaders, and the material reality of their lived lives.

This chapter concludes with a group of culturally responsive, relevant, and imagined clinical interventions that draw directly from the life-long border and borderland theorizing of scholar-activist Gloria Anzaldúa. Prominence is given to the Anzaldúan concepts of Nepantla, La Facultad, Shadow Beast, Coyolxauhqui State, and Coatlicue State from her overarching theory of Mestiza Consciousness - “...*una conciencia de mjuer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands” (1999, 100) - this as a means of bringing Anzaldúa’s mythohistorical² interventions and theorizing then into a clinical setting as culturally

relevant interventions and demonstrating a connection and applicability to the notion of the borderpsychosocial. The intent is to actualize a culturally specific, significant, and dynamic psychological understanding through both traditional and mythohistorical means.

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente.

Anzaldúa³

Religion/Spirituality

Without exception, all of *las mujeres del valle* were born and grew up in a Catholic environment. As illustrated by *los cuentos*, there is significant variation in religious/spiritual experience, knowledge, and practice; however, all of *las mujeres* experienced, and continue to experience, border-based dilemmas which historically create, but are not limited to, feelings of confusion, frustration, resentment, and marginalization. The range of “formal” religious activity varies widely among *las mujeres*; some attend church and some do not, but all provide evidence of being spiritually active.

Being born into a Catholic family environment, and having Catholicism as an important part of their familial cultural experience such as meeting religious milestones like Baptism, Communion and Confirmation, many of *las mujeres* have struggled with a number of border-based issues related to religion, religious practice, and spirituality. While issues result in feeling controlled, inhibited, guarded, and even embarrassed by circumscribed

practice, they are also negotiated and navigated in such a way as to maintain an adherence to a sense of Catholicism. We experience, and often think of our Catholic religion as a cultural obligation. Many of us have possessed a desire to, or actually do, deviate from prescribed practice and experience feeling emotionally or spiritually disconnected and dislocated; often feeling we have sinned and therefore are not worthy of participation. At times we are not able to accept some of the political or social positions taken by the Church, and struggle dealing with contradictions and ambiguities put forth by our religious leaders. All of this leads to an experience of feeling marginalized within the church and often leads to self-imposed marginalization away from the church. While this was not always the case, there still remained a concern, for many, about not being absolutely loyal to family practices. Practice does change over time. Without exception, all of *las mujeres* claim a cultural identification and loyalty to Catholicism while at times expressing guilt, ambivalence, and even contradictions about their border-based practice.

Now let us turn to the *voces* of Chicana@ scholars that speak to this *tema*.

With a focus on religious history and the Chicana spiritualities, Lara Medina points out that “limitations [are] placed upon us by Western thought which teaches religious practice should not be mixed. As *mestizas*, our very nature calls us to cross borders, to make sense out of contradictory values...” (1998, 210-211). The border-based dilemma is how to resolve the cognitive dissonance, the disagreement of messages, between the conflicting external (socially constructed) and internal (intuitive) information and knowledge we carry. Vicki Ruiz, professor of history and Chicano studies coined the term “cultural coalescence” to describe what we have historically done, that is, to “navigate across

cultural boundaries” and “...pick, borrow, retain, and create distinctive cultural forms” (1998, xvi). The “coalescence” is applicable to the religious/spiritual practices created.

In 1987, Anzaldúa wrote, “In my own life, the Catholic church fails to give meaning to my daily acts” (37). In the lives of *las mujeres*, it often does give some sense of meaning; however, the meaning, for some, contains a powerful negative aspect given the examples provided by *las mujeres* of their violation of what was considered a “strict” practice of Catholicism.

Ten years later, in 1997, Anzaldúa tells us that for her, “...spirituality is a source of sustenance, a way of knowing, a path of survival. Like love, spirituality is a relational activity leading to deep bonds between people, plants, animals, and the forces of nature” (in Connor 1997, vii). As I witnessed, all of *las mujeres*, without exception, embrace this concept of spirituality. The mention of birds, flowers, art, film, books, self, pets, music, objects, land, mentors, etcetera, are all evidence of connection and relational activity. To bring this unconscious understanding to a conscious level would facilitate an expansion of the notion of “religion” and alleviate the struggle experienced in rejecting the “constraints and contradictions” (Medina 1998, 206) of Catholicism; which create border-based dilemmas.

In 1997, Anzaldúa stated that for a “‘postcolonial’ *mestiza* like myself, any single way is not ‘the’ way. A spiritual *mestizaje* weaves together beliefs and practices from many cultures...crossing of borders, incessant metamorphosis” (in Connor, vii). To believe this, is to gain a greater understanding of what has been traditionally circumscribed as religion, of which the essence is spirituality, and to begin to resolve border-based dilemmas and

ultimately lead to an expansion of our own awareness of self and what we need for self-care and healing.⁴

As Anzaldúa pointed out in 2002, “The goal of spirituality is to transform one’s life” (In Keating 2009, 289). This infers daily consciousness of the role of spirituality in one’s life, rather than a provisional and strategic deployment as a coping strategy, or out of cultural or social obligation; all of which are made obvious by *las mujeres*.

Professor of religious studies, Luis D. León asserts “...religion is a system of symbols that are constantly contested, negotiated, and redefined” (2004, viii). This speaks directly to the experience of border-based dilemmas which result from the emotional conflict when questioning established systems and symbols. Nevertheless, Anzaldúa affirms that “We are cultivating our ability to affirm our knowing. Jauntily we step into new terrains where we make up the guidelines as we go” (1990, xxvii). An example is the interest expressed by several of *las mujeres* regarding *Día de los Muertos* described by Sibil Venegas as a “ceremony of memory” and that Medina and Cadena claim is a way Chican@s “...empower themselves by reclaiming indigenous traditions” (In León 2004, 125). This deviation from known established symbols does create a dilemma for several of *las mujeres*. They are simultaneously drawn both toward and away from the traditional honoring of their *antepasados* – which is of course connected to knowing and honoring a part of their history, a part of themselves, a part of their identity.

At this stage in their life, each of *las seis mujeres* has arrived at a resolution to the border-based dilemma of being loyal to their cultural religious and spiritual traditions, or not. These life-long acts of questioning and struggling with the question of

religion/spirituality are indicative of psychological, emotional, and behavioral navigation and negotiation. However, their stated resolution is always accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity and a wide range of feelings that are indicative of the ongoing process of development.

Traditional Healing/Traditional Medicine/Curanderismo

The link between *curanderismo* and religion is so strong...activities such as propitiation, prayers, attempts to coerce the gods and saints into granting requests, sacrifice, penance, miracles and vows can be part of *curanderismo*.

Raynaldo Maduro⁵

The border-based life experience of traditional healing/traditional medicine/*curanderismo*⁶ of *las seis mujeres del valle* is in some ways the same, in other ways similar, and in specific ways different from each other, including my own. Whereas the experience of *las mujeres* consists of both interfamilial and social experience and encounters, my own experience includes a conscious effort to seek out further education and understanding beyond what I have encountered by culture and by chance.⁷ Interestingly, a number of *las mujeres* struggled with the term *curanderismo*. Some *mujeres* completely rejected the notion, and the term, because of their negative understanding of *curanderismo* due to its association with *brujería*.⁸ Scholar and *promotora* of Mexican indigenous medicine, Patrisia Gonzales, tells us that "...this tension of the Curandera-bruja in many Mexican families is a legacy of the persecution of female healers" (2012, 20). This type of legacy is passed down through the generations at either a conscious or unconscious level; verbalized or not.

The border-based dilemmas established within their *cuentos* are immediately evident upon asking the question about knowledge and experience with traditional medicine/ traditional healing/*curanderismo*. In the introduction to his book “Green Medicine,” Eliseo Torres states, “If I were to use the word ‘medicine,’ you probably would not conjure up the image of a plant” (6). The request for clarification of question was consistent with each one of *las mujeres* as I did use the word “medicine.” Interestingly, it was not until I used the word *herbitas* that *las mujeres* were able to connect with the question and thus recall their experience from childhood to the present.

Luis León (2004) asserts, “The crux of *curanderismo* is formed in the religious matrix emergent in colonialism: it inscribes ancient Mexican rituals and idioms onto Catholic grammars and symbols, which is why I treat it as a religious tradition” (130). A *curandera* interviewed by León tells him, “any priest will tell you [that] *curanderismo* is wrong” (159).

Clarissa Pinkola Estés contends that “...threats of marginalization because of one’s beliefs, may force an individual to attempt to assimilate...there one becomes disconnected...Latinos...continue, over centuries, to meld their religious rites that are, in part, Old World, and in part New World, *Católico*. *Curanderismo* is a part of the great colorful weaving that results.” She goes on to say, “...what is at the center of *curanderismo* is God” (In Avila 1999, 2-6). For the most part, the majority of *las mujeres del valle* attempt to separate *curanderismo*, God, and spirit.

In 1973, anthropologist William Madsen points out, “...many Mexican Americans are caught in the conflict between the scientific theories of modern medicine and the supernatural theories of folk magic” (70).

Adela de la Torre (2008) makes a similar point; she notes,

Advances in medical science over the past twenty to thirty years have made it difficult for us to hold on to our traditional cultural beliefs about health and health care. Nevertheless...many Latinas still maintain important links to their cultural expression and unique spiritualities, which frame how we cope and interpret our illnesses.

de la Torre continues,

...as a child, I remember my *abuelita* keeping her *yierbas* (sic) conveniently tucked away in a kitchen drawer...she would rub our *panza*, muttering '*sana, sana, colita de rana*'...she seemed able to cure any illness without antibiotics or visits to a physician. Her faith and healing powers made us feel safe, both physically and mentally (In Chabram-Dernersesian and de la Torre, 174).

In 1983, Anzaldúa acknowledged, "When I was a teenager, I tried to fit in, so I became very sophisticated. I had all this book knowledge...and viewed *mal de ojo*, *susto*, and other Indian and Mexican indigenous beliefs about the spirit as 'superstitious' (In Keating 2009,79). Clearly, this was a border-based dilemma for Anzaldúa.

The late Elena Avila, a registered psychiatric nurse and *curandera* tells us of her growing-up experience:

...during the 1940s through the 1970s, Chicanos were feeling a tremendous pressure to assimilate into mainstream American Culture, and things such as *curanderismo* were considered passé and old-fashioned. I was swept along by those currents...when the professor asked me to talk about *curanderismo*, I felt ashamed, insulted, and bewildered...over the years I had come to associate *curanderismo* with everything that was primitive and backward (1999, 94 – 96).

According to Martín Maldonado-Durán et al. (2002), "traditions and cultural prescriptions give a sense of orientation, of belonging...some of these patterns and care practices are impossible to maintain...they may lose their meaning in the new social context...in the extreme, they may be perceived as absurd, primitive, or superstitious...as a

result, culturally based practices may be abandoned abruptly as obsolete or impractical...parents may feel lost...or even guilty because some important milestones or cultural markers are missing or taboos are transgressed..."(76-77). My sense is that this experience has been a part of the lives of most, if not all, of *las mujeres*.

As described by Chicana scholar and mariachi musician Leonor Xóchitl Pérez, there were many contradictions that created conflict while growing up with a mother who retained many rituals and spiritual beliefs of her own experience growing up as a Catholic, and a father who was a pastor in a Pentecostal Church. Her mother's consistency in seeking out the guidance of, and treatment by *curanderas* and healers, and the family's participation in the Pentecostal church was a clear contradiction. She admits, "My father, the pastor, and our church congregation never knew about these experiences...my mother swore my three sisters and me to secrecy...I always seemed to be participating in some inappropriate behavior" (In Cantú and Nájera-Ramírez 2002, 146-47).

The blending of the *temas* of religion/spirituality, and traditional healing/traditional medicine/*curanderismo* seem unavoidable. Yet the *cuentos* of *las mujeres* seem to, more than not, demonstrate in various forms, the ongoing border-based dilemmas that keep the ideas, beliefs, and practices disconnected in certain ways and completely apart in other ways. On the other hand, rituals and remedies attested to by *las mujeres del valle* seem to confirm that in some way or another each one retains a sense of knowing their connection and loyalty to the knowledge they carry; and in a sense, pride in their family history of both religious/spiritual traditions, practice, and obligations, along with traditional medicine/traditional healing/ *curanderismo*.

Perhaps it is as Luis León (2004) suggests, “Curanderismo is both the failure and triumph of Christianity” (162). Perhaps it is.

Language

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language.

Anzaldúa⁹

Without exception, all of *las mujeres del valle* were born and grew up in a Spanish speaking home environment. While Spanish is the heritage¹⁰ language of all the *familias*, there is a wide range of both Spanish and English proficiency within and amongst them.

As revealed in the *cuentos*, these differences led to both border-based experiences and dilemmas inside and outside the home; in both public and private spaces. For some of the *mujeres* this resulted in feelings of anger, frustration, fearfulness, loss, embarrassment, powerless, and marginalization; however, some felt or came to feel, empowered and proud.

Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures, Glenn A. Martínez insisted,

Bilingualism is beyond a doubt the cornerstone of the Mexican American language experience. The social reality of bilingualism affects all Mexican Americans, whether they speak only English, only Spanish, a little of one language or the other, or a great deal of both. The effects of bilingualism in the daily lives of Mexican Americans range from the routine to traumatic... (2006, 3).

Martínez continues to state that “while hanging on to Spanish is not seen as something that necessarily connects [a group of people] to Mexico, it is something that distinguishes them as a distinct group within the United States” (2006, 29). In this case, it is both. All of *las mujeres*, at either a conscious or unconscious level, demonstrate their desire to be connected to Mexico. They know they are and see themselves as so. However, at the same time, they also see themselves as a distinct group in the Río Grande Valley of South Texas.

Accents can often create a dilemma. For this reason, it is not unusual to feel “lucky” not to have one, or at least not to have a Mexican accent. At one point, I felt this way. This is worth noting given that all of *las mujeres del valle* had different accents which seemed regional, but also distinct from each other. Novelist, poet, and activist/*curandera* Ana Castillo speaks to this linguistic border-based dilemma as she contends that those who speak with a Spanish/Mexican accent are often perceived and then treated as “simply not very smart” while those with European accents “are assumed by white people in the United States to be intellectually superior on the sheer basis of an accent” (1994, 7). I would add to Castillo’s statement that this particular perception and response to an accent is not exclusive to people who are white – which is a part of the border-based dilemma related to language. Anzaldúa writes that her mother would ask her, “*Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un ‘accent’...mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican*” and this was after she, along with “all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes” for the purpose of getting rid of their accents. This occurred at the University of Texas, Pan American – in *el valle* (1987, 53-54).

Professor of English Sonia Saldívar-Hull, herself from the Río Grande Valley, speaks to Anzaldúa’s notion of “linguistic terrorism” when she explains how “we are punished for speaking Spanish in ‘American’ classrooms and play-grounds, yet we are mocked by other native Spanish speakers for the version of Spanish we have managed to retain” (2000, 69). This is another common border-based dilemma. Often, it isn’t quite right how we speak, and there is often someone around to tell us so.

In a testimony collected by historian Vicki Ruiz, Rosa Guerrero, from El Paso recalls,

I remember being punished for speaking Spanish. *Nos daban unos coscorriones, pero coscorriones, o nos daban unas zuibandas con un board. Tenían un board of education por hablar español...yo sufrí unas cosas horribles...yo no fui la única...* (In Saldívar-Hull 2000, 19).

Castillo also speaks to the fact that because we were “educated in English and learned it is the only acceptable language in society...in later years if [we] have no or little facility in Spanish” this too, may become an emotional dilemma as we may feel we were “forced to forfeit an important part of [our] personal identity...” (39). This is quite common, and often leads to ambiguity and insecurity about language, and thus self, that can last a lifetime.

The late Hector Torres, professor of English at the University of New Mexico, interviewed a number of Chicana@ writers and asked about their experiences within the borderlands of language. Gloria Anzaldúa talked about growing up “speaking half and half” as she traveled between English and Spanish, while talking with either family or friends. She referred to her Spanish as “an oral acquisition” and thus she needed English to articulate particular notions. When asked about code-switching, Anzaldúa suggested, “...you can code-switch from one reality to another just like you can with language” (2007, 27-28).

When Torres asked Chicana poet Pat Mora about her bilingualism she said it was “seamless” and this was her experience in a home where both parents were bilingual. She did note that while in school, “it is possible that the nuns said to us, ‘Don’t speak Spanish’”, however, she told Torres that she has no recollection (251). Given the normalization and comfort of the “seamlessness” Mora experienced at home, and the frequency with which I

heard similar “don’t speak Spanish” stories from *las mujeres* about their experiences in Catholic school, I strongly suspect Mora did hear those words; clearly, these are experiences we would rather forget.

When Torres asks author Richard Rodriguez about his “shifting language loyalty,” he responded with, “To this day I am eared, but not mouthed...I can understand everything said around me...I can read everything around me, but it is like I am asleep, because I don’t speak” (284). It is a fact, life experience did lead to some of *las mujeres* being more “eared” than “mouthed” but not as absolute as Rodriguez.

Ana Celia Zentella, researcher in what she has named anthro-political linguistics, claims that switching from one language to another is a “normal bilingual practice” (2003, 51) and that if we speak “a lot of English, mixed with Spanish or not, [we] are likely to have [our] cultural authenticity challenged (2007, 31). “Spanglish” she states, “is a symbol of pride in [our] dual heritage, because it shows [we] have a foot in both worlds” (1998, 8). On the other hand, she adds, that for many, “...the right to claim a legitimate...Mexican identity is based partly on the extent to which your Spanish is free from English” (2007, 31).

My lifelong recollections of speaking Spanish – I originally referred to as “speaking Mexican” – include memories of being challenged, corrected, laughed at, punished, at times not having a voice, and even feeling I did not have the right to speak. I remember seeing eyebrows raised while hearing whispers and snickers; all this, resulting in confusion, *vergüenza*, and even fear. Zentella (2007) points out that even “those with advanced degrees who speak both languages at ease can do more damage than good by prescribing ‘the right way’ to speak” (35-36) and thus compounded the humiliation experienced in

childhood. As was the case with most of the *mujeres del valle*, this border-based dilemma began, for me, as I entered school; and persists. Many years after the first linguistic wound, I would find understanding in Anzaldúa's words:

Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally...due to geography, Chicanos from the Valley of South Texas were cut off linguistically from other Spanish speakers. We tend to use words that the Spaniards brought over from Medieval Spain. (1987, 55-57)

We, *mi familia* and I, took the "border tongue" with us *al norte* to Detroit and all of us continue to negotiate this border-based experience in similar ways.

Education

Perhaps the most memorable experiences one has in school are those that come into direct conflict with one's family's beliefs and traditions.

José Antonio Burciaga¹¹

Chicano activist, muralist, and founding member of the comedy group Culture Clash, José Antonio Burciaga wrote about his experience of living within, between, and sometimes outside of two cultures – the spaces which produce border-based experiences. About his school experience he writes, "...no learning experience was more painful or damaging than the silence imposed on our Mexican culture, history, and beautiful Spanish language. To speak Spanish was not only illegal but also a sin...I knew I would sin again..."(1993, 40). This type of experience creates tremendous anxiety. We are expected to manage this dilemma without complaint; to acquiesce *y aguantarnos*.

In the 70s, education researchers Spencer Kagan and Raymond Buriel made this point about Texas – along with California and New Mexico,

Prejudice against Mexican-Americans in the educational sphere today still takes many forms, ranging from overt, unwarranted physical abuse of students by teachers to subtle instructional practices that communicate lower teacher expectations” (In Martinez 1977, 284).

Chicana scholar Maria Herrera-Sobek, who also grew up in the Rio Grande Valley during the 1950s and 60s writes,

The school systems in the Rio Grande Valley (and other parts of the southwest) were geared specifically to eradicate the Spanish language from Chicano children as soon as they stepped into the classroom...Teachers zealously monitored the playground...vigilantly looking for disobedient children who dare uttered a Spanish word while playing...[they] became our adversaries: not a conducive environment for learning (2006, 267-268).

Written in 1987, Anzaldúa told us of her school experience in the borderlands:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess – that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for ‘talking back’ to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. If you want to be American, speak ‘American.’ If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong...I remember how the white teachers used to punish us for being Mexican” (53 and 89).

Sylvia S. Lizárraga, *mexicana* scholar and author writes about her experience, as she and a friend sought out advice about education. In her *cuento* “The Gift?” she wrote,

Every time they can’t see me I feel somewhat strange, as if I’m lacking something. Although I don’t know what it could be, the only thing I know is that I’m missing something, because although I can see myself and I can see the people I’m with, they can’t see me...I know I’m there; because I am there, aren’t I? (In Rebolledo and Rivera 1993, 91).

This sense and experience of invisibility is a common one.

In 1988, Chicana scholar Irene I. Blea made this observation: “Much psychological violence is performed in the field of education...in spite of all the documentation teachers still teach that Columbus discovered America” (148). This, and much more, misinformation

was taken in by all of *las mujeres del valle*. This distortion of history then distorts our understanding of self. Any attempt to re-inform, to re-educate, is met with a variety of responses; many of which often discourage us from engaging.

The late literary scholar, Arturo Islas, who grew up on the borderlands of El Paso/Juárez during the 40s and 50s, told this story to Torres in 1990:

I would get Bs in PE, which always distressed me because I wanted to get straight As in everything. But the reason I was getting Bs in PE was that I was speaking Spanish on the school ground during recess...it would just slip out...the teacher would overhear and knock me down for that... (In Torres 2007, 62).

Legal scholar Margaret E. Montoya also draws from her own academic experience when she wrote, “Being obliged to abandon your mother tongue, to surrender your primary language, to give up the language that you first learned as a baby, forces a rupture with your family, your community, and your history” (In Delgado and Stefancic 1998, 574).

Anzaldúa also spoke to family perceptions of education by providing a familiar example of how she was perceived as being “lazy” because “I wanted to study and read and draw...” (In Torres, 2007, 119). Who wants to be perceived as “lazy?”

In 2000, scholar Sonia Saldívar-Hull recalled many border-based memories drawn from her experience growing up in *el valle*. Among them are the differing educational expectations for her and her brothers, and for her and her husband. She tells us,

The boys in the family could aspire to everything the school system provided...my attempts to read and study were signs of laziness and nothing more...growing up in the Frontera in Brownsville, Texas, in the 1950s and 1960s taught me to long for something more...never imagining that I could do anything other than bask in the reflected glory of a man, I married one year out of high school and dedicated my considerable energies to realizing my husband’s career goals...as I had been programmed to do. I knew no other way (9-10 & 13).

With the encouragement and support of her brothers, Ramón and José David¹², Sonia was exposed to Chican@ writers including *Movimiento* poetry. She would later write about Anzaldúa's discussion of the "liberating potential of education for women" (72).

After 30 years of practice in cross-cultural education and as director of the Center for Intercultural Leadership Training and Conflict Resolution in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Roberto Chené noted, "...the coercive nature of the Americanization process generates a tyranny of conformity that places people of color in the untenable position of being the 'wrong' kind of American" (2008, 32). This was, and continues to be, a familiar experience in the education systems of *el valle*.

There is a long history of educational and linguistic oppression in *el valle*. Once more, we can see the border-based dilemmas that have occurred and will likely continue to emerge from both language and education as independent issues, but also how both of these *temas* are inseparable when living on, or in the borderlands. The border-based dilemmas that emerged from such social encounters and the negotiation and navigation of such dilemmas are ongoing and demonstrate the historical resiliency of Chican@s.¹³

Conexión: Anzaldúan Concepts, Border-based Dilemmas, and Borderpsychosocial Experience

The foci of this section are the descriptions of the Anzaldúan concepts of *Nepantla*, *La Facultad*, *Shadow Beast*, *Coyolxauhqui State*, and *Coatlicue State*; examples of how they connect to and manifest within the *temas* of religion/spirituality and traditional medicine/traditional healing/*curanderismo*, and education and language established in the *cuentos* of *las mujeres del valle*; and finally, how this connection demonstrates the potential clinical

efficacy of a set of Anzaldúa's intervention techniques for border-based dilemmas and the relation to the notion of borderpsychosocial development, in other words, using Anzaldúa's *teorias* as a lens for the further understanding lives lived by *las mujeres del valle*.

As we turn toward Anzaldúa's concepts, I begin by providing her own words that speak to the terms she chose to use in her theorizing. In 1996, Anzaldúa stated,

I try to give a term, to find a language for my ideas and concepts that comes from the indigenous part of me rather than from the European part, so I come up with Coatlicue, la facultad, la frontera, and nepantla – concepts that mean: 'Here's a little nugget of a system of knowledge that's different from the Euro-American. This is my hit on it, but it's also a *mestizo/mestiza*, cognitive kind of perception, so therefore this ideology or this little nugget of knowledge is both indigenous and western. It's a hybridity, a mixture, because I live in this liminal state in between worlds, in between realities, in between systems of knowledge, in between symbology systems' (In Keating 2000, 267-268).

As we continue, it will become evident that all of *las mujeres del valle* were able to recall borderpsychosocial experiences that fit within each Anzaldúa concept. The overarching question we might think about is: Would it be helpful if *las mujeres del valle* were consciously aware of these concepts?

Nepantla

In 1987, Anzaldúa introduced us to the Náhuatl word *nepantla* meaning "...torn between ways..." (100) and in 1999, she stated, "Nepantla is a stage that women and men, and whoever is willing to change into a new person and further grow and develop, go through" (238). Her theorizing about Nepantla, *este lugar entremedio*, continued throughout her lifetime and in 2002 she wrote of Nepantla as meaning,

...*tierra entre medio...tierra desconocida*...transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Nepantla *es tierra desconocida*, and living in this liminal zone

means being in a constant state of displacement – uncomfortable, even alarming feeling. Most of us dwell in Nepantla so much of the time it's become a sort of 'home'...I associate nepantla with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another (1). ...pulled between opposing realities...you don't know whether to assimilate, separate, or isolate...Nepantla is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic tenets, ideas, and identities inherited from your family, your education and your different cultures. Nepantla is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it. Living between cultures results in 'seeing' double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another (In Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 548- 549).

In 2005, historian Emma Pérez referred to Nepantla as an “interpretive tool” (5).

This is exactly what we need, more tools to help us understand our lives; make sense and meaning from experience.

AnaLouise Keating,¹⁴ professor of Women's Studies at Texas Woman's University, worked closely with Anzaldúa for over a decade. In 2006, Keating wrote about her own understanding of Anzaldúa's concept. She stated:

...Nepantla includes both radical dis-identification and transformation. We dis-identify with existing beliefs, social structures, and models of identity; by so doing, we are able to transform these existing conditions (9).

In 2009, Keating added, “Nepantla occurs during the many transitional stages of life and describes both identity-related issues and epistemological concerns” (322).

Las mujeres del valle viven en nepantla – it is “home.” It is made clear from their *cuentos*, *las mujeres* have experienced border-based dilemmas which stem directly from the experience of being “torn between ways.” Without exception, each of *las mujeres* provide examples of how experiencing Nepantla creates states of feeling “uncomfortable” and propels one to “question old ideas” which manifest in a wide range of emotional

experiences, decisions made, and behavioral acts. They question what they learned and practiced growing up and what they currently know and understand about religious teachings and practice and also how this may or may not be connected to their experience and practice of traditional medicine/ traditional healing/curanderismo. A similar point can be made regarding the experience of *las mujeres* as related to the *temas* of education and language. It appears from *los cuentos*, that all of *las mujeres* have developed, and continue to use, multiple strategies in their attempt to negotiate and navigate their linguistic and educational experiences. We often find ourselves moving amongst assimilation, acculturation, separation, and even isolation - and maybe back again.

This is what we have been doing and this is how we have been living – in nepantla. The question remains for *las mujeres del valle* is are we/they aware of the notion of Nepantla, and the process of struggle and transformation that results? If not, it does not make it not so. This is precisely what I found. That is, not a single *mujer* was aware of the notion and process of Nepantla by name, yet they were able to provide *cuentitos* that demonstrate the experience. I believe having this awareness of the process of living *entremedio* would normalize the process, and therefore allow the shifting of psychic energy and work toward negotiating and navigating this space in a more efficient and productive manner while also eliminating some of the confusion, frustration, and anxiety that results from the process. Claiming conscious awareness of nepantla, and thus further understanding of the existence and impact of social structures and beliefs will assist in moving through border-based dilemmas that are a part of the process of living in nepantla.

La Facultad

In 1987, Anzaldúa also introduced us to the concept of *la facultad*. In Spanish, the word *facultad* means both capacity and authority; add *la*, and the direct translation is the capacity and the authority. As mentioned previously, Anzaldúa described *la facultad* as,

...as the capacity to see in surface phenomena meaning of deeper realities...an instant 'sensing,' a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. An acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak that communicates in images and symbols...Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity). Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense...the females, homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign...It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It's latent in all of us...Confronting anything that tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness and that thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic sense of reality increases awareness and *la facultad* (38-39).

In 2008, Keating wrote, *la facultad* "...often develops within oppressive contexts and entails a deepening of perception" (8) and in 2009 she explained that *la facultad* is "Anzaldúa's term for an intuitive form of knowledge that includes but goes beyond logical thought and empirical analysis" (321).

Whether they know it or not, the *mujeres del valle* have developed this capacity. How much more of a sense of agency would be experienced if they knew they carry this skill? How much further could this skill be developed? Bringing this notion into consciousness would make a significant difference in the lives of each *mujer*. It is obvious that each one has experienced this "knowing" that has assisted them throughout their life, but have not had a name for it. They talk about it and provide examples of how they came

to understand certain things in their life and how *la facultad* has been used to stay safe. To acknowledge such a skill would certainly have made a difference; and still can.

Shadow Beast

Again, in 1987, Anzaldúa introduces us to the notion of the Shadow Beast. She stated, “It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities...it is the part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed” (16).

In the introduction to the second edition of “Borderlands” (1999), Sonia Saldívar-Hull wrote about Anzaldúa,

The feminist rebel in her is the Shadow-Beast...The Shadow Beast emerges as the part of women that frightens men and causes them to try to control and devalue female culture. Girls in the borderland are commonly taught to fear sexuality and learn that men value women’s bodies only. Their individuality is devalued and selfishness is decried. (In the borderlands of Anzaldúa’s youth, ‘selfishness’ includes anything women want to do to improve their lives) (4-5).

In 2002, Anzaldúa elaborated on features of the concept of the shadow beast and claims that we will always “struggle with the shadow, the unwanted aspects of the self (545) [the]...fragmented pieces and bits of yourself you’ve disowned (551) ...the part of you holding your failures and inadequacies” (557). She presented to us this paradox:

...the knowledge that exposes your fears can also remove them. Seeing through these cracks makes you uncomfortable because it reveals aspects of yourself (shadow-beasts) you don’t want to own. Admitting your darker aspects allows you to break out of your self-imposed prison. But it will cost you. When you woo *el oscuro*, digging into it, sooner or later you pay the consequences – the pain of personal growth...delving more fully into your pain, anger, despair, depression will move you through them to the other side, where you can use their energy to heal. Depression is useful – it signals that you need to make changes in your life, it challenges your tendency to withdraw, it reminds you to take action...engage in the world (2002, 553).

Twenty-two years after Anzaldúa introduced us to the Shadow Beast, Chicana scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba tells an audience of Anzaldúa scholars, “we feed the shadow beast.”¹⁵ I was in the audience, and yes, we do. We feed our shadow beast and we do a very good job of it. We feed it with our own perception, understanding, interpretation, and/or explanation of our experience living on the borderlands. However, we are also fed “our daily bread” by our private and public social encounters. Border-based dilemmas are the result of not being able to distinguish between lived experiences (internal and external – intrapersonal and interpersonal – public and private) that nourish us and those that wound. If true, that we are what we eat, consider the difference in our psychological diet that would result from careful and conscious decisions about what we feed our shadow beast. There is no escape. We will feed the shadow beast, but to understand this concept and its manifestation is helpful in monitoring “feedings.”

Without exception, *todas las mujeres del valle* talked about experiences that both nourished and wounded them; both were evident. Whether or not these “unwanted aspects of themselves” were imposed by others or self, they all had experienced the “agony of inadequacy”¹⁶ and several continue to do so.

Coyolxauhqui State

Drawing from Aztec mythology, Anzaldúa utilized Coyolxauhqui (Ko-yol-sha-UH-kee), the dismembered Aztec moon goddess, as a symbol for healing. Sylvia Ledesma, a ceremonial leader in the Azteca Conchero tradition, and a founder of the women’s collective at Kalpulli Izkalli in Albuquerque, New Mexico, teaches that Coyolxauhqui was

“born from chaos and brought order...Coyolxauhqui emerges as the Cosmic Mother to remind us of her eternal cycle of renewal...”¹⁷

In 1993, Anzaldúa wrote about her first gaze at the huge round stone sculptural depiction of Coyolxauhqui¹⁸:

I stop before the dismembered body of la diosa de la luna, Cocoylxauhqui, bones jutting from sockets. The warrior goddess with bells on her cheeks and serpent belt calls to mind the dominant culture’s repeated attempts to tear the Mexican culture in the U.S. apart and scatter the fragments to the winds...to me she also embodies the resistance and vitality of the Chicana/Mexicana...” (In Keating 2009, 177.)

While being interviewed by *mexicana* Chicana poet Carmen Abrego, and writer/editor Debbie Blake in 1994, Anzaldúa elaborated on her imaginings of myth of the dismembering of Coyolxauhqui by her brother. She told us of the symbolic representation of Coyolxauhqui.

To me that’s a symbol not only of violence and hatred against women but also of how we’re split body and mind, spirit and soul...I think the reason this image is so important to me is that when you take a person and divide her up, you disempower her. She’s no longer a threat (In Keating 2000, 220).

In 2002, Anzaldúa describes Coyolxauhqui as the “first sacrificial victim” and imagines her as the:

...symbol for both the process of emotional and psychical dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon a labor of re-visioning and re-remembering...(546)

She continued by saying that “Coyolxauhqui personifies the wish to repair and heal...” *el deseo de reparación y curar,*

...as well as rewrite the stories of loss and recovery, exile and homecoming, disinheritance and recuperation, stories that lead out of passivity and into agency, out of devalued into valued lives. Coyolxauhqui represents the search for new

metaphors to tell you what you need to know, how to connect and use the information gained, and, with intelligence, imagination, and grace, solve your problems...(563)

Anzaldúa also cautioned us about the need to understand and “...see through the illusion of permanence – the fantasy that you can pull yourself together once and for all and live happily ever after” (In Anzaldúa and Keating, 562).

In the last essay published in her lifetime (in February 2002), Anzaldúa told us,

The Coyolxauhqui imperative is to heal and achieve integration. When fragmentations occur you fall apart and feel as though you’ve been expelled from paradise. Coyolxauhqui is my symbol for the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation, of seeing that self or the situations you’re embroiled in differently. It is also my symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that that allows for the putting the pieces together in a new way. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is an ongoing process of making and unmaking. There is never any resolution, just the process of healing (In Keating, 2009, 312).

Without exception, each of *las mujeres del valle* provide evidence of ongoing experiences of significant distress and confusion throughout their lifetime. However, *las mujeres* also provide evidence of moving through, reconstructing, and making sense of some of the distressful experiences in order to continue moving onward in their day-to-day lives. We can only imagine the degree to which it would be helpful to provide *las mujeres* with Anzaldúa’s chosen symbol to represent such a process, and Sylvia Ledesma’s recipe for a monthly moon ceremony directly related to the conscious and spiritual re-membering of self that is infused with positive and feminine energy from the cosmos.

Coatlicue State

Again, drawing from Aztec mythology, Anzaldúa chose *Coatlicue* (Kwat-LEE-Kway) the earth goddess of life and death, and the mother of the gods, to represent the process of

emotional and psychic struggle until we shift our understanding of reality and thus, “*No hay más que cambiar*” (1987, 49). She elaborated,

Those activities or Coatlicue states which disrupt the smooth flow (complacency of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of self. Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences – if we can make meaning out of them – can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The Coatlicue state can be a way station or it can be a way of life (46).

It is when the Coatlicue state becomes a “way of life” that we feel a deep sense of helplessness or hopelessness that may lead us to fall into a deep depression; or worse.

In 2002, Anzaldúa’s thinking about this Coatlicue continued:

In the Coatlicue state an intensely negative channel, you’re caged in a private hell; you feel angry, fearful, hopeless and depressed, blaming yourself as inadequate...though you want deliverance you cling to your misery...The last thing you want is to meditate on your condition, bring awareness to the fore, but you’ve set it up so you must face reality. Still, you resist. You close your eyes to the ravaging light waiting to burst through the cracks. Once again you embrace [the] comfort [of] willful unawareness. Behind your isolation is its opposite - a smoldering desire for love and connection. You pour ice water on that fire...You wallow in the ruins of your life – *pobre de ti* – until you can’t stand the stench that’s yourself (569 & 550-551).

Keating (2009) notes, Anzaldúa coined the term “Coatlicue state...to represent the resistance to new knowledge and other psychic states triggered by intense inner struggle...” (320).

Anzaldúa tells us from her own experience, “My resistance, my refusal to know some truth about myself brings on that paralysis, depression – brings on the Coatlicue state” (1987, 48).

Again, without exception, *todas las mujeres del valle* provide us with stories of painful periods of confusion similar to those Anzaldúa described from her own personal

experience; that she named Coatlicue states. The exploration, excavation, and *al fin* articulation of her psychic experiences describe the isolation, depression, shame, and anger that result from a resistance to replace old self constructions with new ones. There is no doubt, *las mujeres del valle* would benefit from the knowledge and understanding of Coatlicue and the Coatlicue state.

In 2005, after Anzaldúa's death from complications from diabetes, scholar Suzanne Bost said about Anzaldúa, "Unlike the suffering woman, Anzaldúa took pain as the starting point for her theory of agency, the shock that disrupts passivity and propels one forward...In a sense, learning depends upon crisis" (31 and 21). Because I understand this, I, too, embrace pain as the starting point of psychotherapy, and the theorizing of borderpsychosocialness.

Lo demás – cómo cargo cada concepción

All of my work, including fiction and poetry, are healing trabajos.

If you look at my central themes, metaphors, and symbols...

you'll see that they all deal with the process of healing.

Anzaldúa (2003)¹⁹

Borderpsychosocial development can be accurately described as a complex, diverse, and dynamic collection of psychological experiences and dilemmas that are based on, and shaped by, our changing sociocultural and historical interactions and experiences both inter- and intrapersonal and in both private and public spaces during our entire lifetime.

The introduction of borderpsychosocial into the nomenclature of psychology will fundamentally challenge the dominant and mainstream ways of seeing, understanding,

knowing, accessing, conceptualizing, and teaching psychosocial development.

Borderpsychosocial development does not separate any single person's psychology from their own history; on the contrary, it joins them.

Having terms and symbols that are culturally, linguistically, spiritually, and historically relevant and meaningful embedded within the overarching theory of psychosocial development not only make sense given our country's demographics, but are also expected both ethically, and most recently legally, from the helping and healing professions; in my case, from those of us practicing clinical social work. We are expected to practice both personal reflection and self-correction. The process of being reflexive, in and of itself, provides the opportunity to continue to be curious about self and other. It connects *las mujeres del valle*, including me, personally – not just as a human, but as a human being and living within a particular social, historical, cultural, and linguistic experience. I agree with professor Vicki L. Ruiz (1994) as she stated, "There is not a single hermetic Mexican or Mexican-American culture but rather permeable cultures rooted in generation, gender, region, class and personal experience" (311).

Introducing the notion of borderpsychosocial development and using Anzaldúa's mythohistorical theorizing, and the concepts of Nepantla, La Facultad, Shadow Beast, Coyolxauhqui State, and Coatlicue State will lead to an alternative sight for healing within a traditional and mainstream environment – the clinical setting. We must not separate any single person's psychology from their own history given the awareness that within their own history lies healing...*la cultura de veras cura*.

In 1994, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano wrote, “Mestiza consciousness is not given but must be *produced*, or ‘built’...” (13). I would add, must be introduced and taught to both clinicians and patients in order to engage in the process of building.

In a 2001 interview by Chicana researcher Irene Lara (2008), Anzaldúa reasoned that,

The major paradigms for reality – the scientific paradigms, the democratic paradigms – were constructed by those in power. We need a new paradigm that comes partially from the outside and partially from inside the dominant paradigm...we need to realize that the pictures of reality imposed on us can’t be made only by those in power; they have to come from us *también* (51.)

In 1987, Anzaldúa told us, “The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react” (79). I agree, and would also add to this reflexive statement, that prior to the acting we most surely react. It is in the reacting joined by self reflection and the desire to self-correct that we gain the awareness of yes, we do have options.

In 2012, the 25th anniversary edition of Anzaldúa’s “Borderlands” was published. The introduction was written by Chicana feminist scholars Norma Élia Cantú y Aída Hurtado; they were also Anzaldúa’s personal *amigas*. They wrote,

In her life she exemplified the core of the philosophy espoused in Borderlands – that it is possible to both understand and reject, to love and detest, to be loyal and question, and above all to continue to see enlightenment out of the ambiguity and contradiction for all social existence (5).

Keating (2007) understood, “Anzaldúa insists on the complex interrelatedness of inner/outer, self/other, body/spirit” (Introduction). I, too, *entiendo y cargo las concepciones de Anzaldúa conmigo y con confianza*.

No nos podemos quedar paradas con los brazos cruzados en medio del pente.

Anzaldúa 1983²⁰

Así es.

¹ Anzaldúa 1999, 101.

² For further reading of mythohistorical “an integrated network of myths and histories” see Bebout, 2011.

³ Anzaldúa 1987, 77.

⁴ For further study and analysis of Anzaldúan concept of spritual *mestizaje*, see Theresa Delgadillo 2011.

⁵ See Maduro 1983, 871-72.

⁶ See Maduro 1983.

⁷ I began seeking out cultural/spiritual teachings, more than ever, immediately after moving to Albuquerque. See Eliseo Torres books and Kalpulli Izkalli – www.kalpulliizkalli.org

⁸ Also see Avila 1999, 27.

⁹ 1987, 59.

¹⁰ As defined by Agnes Weiyun He, “The term ‘heritage language’ (HL) refers to a language that is often used at or inherited from home and that is different from the language used in mainstream society.” See Weiyun He.

¹¹ See Burciaga, 1993, p. 36.

¹² Both of whom are also successful scholars. See José David Saldívar 1997 and Ramón Saldívar 2006.

¹³ For further historical discourse see Montejano 1987; Acuña 2004; Montoya in Delgado and Stefancic 1998.

¹⁴ Keating is now a co-trustee, along with executor of Anzaldúa’s estate with Kit Quan, of the Gloria E. Anzaldúa Literary Trust housed at the University of Texas at Austin, Benson Latin American Collection.

¹⁵ Gaspar de Alba quote from dialogue at The International Conference on the Life and Work of Gloria Anzaldúa, May 16, 2009, University of Texas at San Antonio.

¹⁶ Gaspar de Alba quote from a collective dialogue at The International Conference on the Life and Work of Gloria Anzaldúa, May 16, 2009, University of Texas at San Antonio.

¹⁷ April 11, 2011 workshop, Re-Membering Coyolxauhqui: Healing the Heart, Transforming the Spirit presented by Comadre Sylvia Ledesma. Also see Gonzales, 2012, 91.

¹⁸ The name and image of Coyolxauhqui is remembered and honored by the Mexican government who placed her image on the \$50 (peso) Mexican coin. The image is accompanied by the identification of the location of the 1970s archeological find that recovered, among other indigenous figures, Coyolxauhqui, in downtown Mexico City; *Templo Mayor de México*.

¹⁹ In Keating 2009, 292-293.

²⁰ In Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, Forward to 2nd edition.

Chapter Five

Conclusión

Borderlands theorizing is the contemporary imaginary that is reforming disciplinary canons.

Chela Sandoval 1998¹

The Borderpsychosocial Development Project was set in motion and gained momentum by the goals and questions put forth from its inception. This qualitative study set out to explore the space filled with traditional and mainstream psychosocial development theories. It intends to call attention to the theories and voices that have historically been marginalized, in order to demonstrate the benefit of infusing current training with marginalized voices so as to expand the current and dominant understanding of psychosocial development and challenging the status quo.

Both historical and contemporary discourse in the arts and social sciences has succeeded in shedding light on the complex and dynamic process of psychosocial development. Much remains to learn about how every conceivable manner of social impact shapes one's psychology and forms one's subjective experience throughout a lifetime.

In 2010, Tiffany Lopez and Josie Mendez-Negrete, Chicana scholars and editors of the *Journal of Chicana/Latina Studies* stated, "We have been taught that our personal experiences and professional lives exist on separate registers" (16). In real-life, this separation is impossible and has never been so. It is through my academic experience and this project that I have been able to articulate the relationship of my personal and professional life; my standpoint, my subjective experience. It is through this connection of

my personal, professional, and academic lives that I have arrived at this place of awareness and thought.

My task was to provide supportive evidence for the conceptualizing of a strand of psychosocial development theory that I have named borderpsychosocial. The evidence provided, *los cuentos*, private stories made public, embraces the impact of sociocultural and historical events and also draws from a diverse and interdisciplinary knowledge base imbued with concepts put forth by many scholars; with an emphasis on Chican@, feminist, and borderland scholars; Anzaldúa in particular.

My hope is to move this work out of a nonclinical and academic environment and into a clinical environment where this notion of a borderpsychosocial experience and development can be further explored. In 1948 Carl Jung said, "It is really high time academic psychologists came down to earth and wanted to hear about the human psyche as it really is and not merely about laboratory experiments" (1960, 279). This research can claim space in the arena outside of the "laboratory" as it situates itself in and draws from the community. It is as Paul Thompson (2000) said, "The use of oral evidence breaks through the barriers between the chroniclers and their audience; between the educational institution and the outside world" (9).

The research objective of this study was to bring the stories of a specific group of women, *las seis mujeres del valle*, whom have grown up in a particular historical period, and geographical and social location, into conversation with a number of Chican@ scholars that embrace a postmodern feminist perspective while also drawing from foundational mainstream theory to define a specific and culturally relevant psychosocial process that will

serve the interests of a specific group of women, like me, who knowingly or not, have been marginalized in mainstream dominant psychosocial theory.

I was born on the geographical borderlands. I have lived on the social borderlands all of my life; and always will. The difference now is that I possess awareness of where I am situated. I am aware of being both on the margins and at the center at different times and in different situations. This life-long process, I am fully aware, will continue. My experiences will be different only because of my awareness and the strategies I have put in place to take care of myself. I know I will survive. I can cope. I can negotiate and navigate from margin to center and back. I can experience success, heal myself, continue traveling on my *camino* of life knowing: (1) I live in Nepantla, (2) I have a Shadow Beast, (3) I have awareness of how to re-member myself as Coyolxauhqui, (4) I can count on Coatlicue to urge me forward, and (5) that I have the capacity of La Facultad. Knowing this provides me with the strategies I need to be available to self and others. I first had to become consciously aware of my marginalization (whether imposed or self-imposed) in order to begin to understand the interventions needed to cope, survive, and succeed. I was born and continue to live through a time of growth and *movimiento*.

In 1987, when Anzaldúa said, "I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me" (16) she was referring to her geographical home - *el valle*. I, too, felt that I needed to leave home and to leave as soon as possible; however, my geographical home was in Detroit. It wasn't until many years later that I would realize the "home" I needed most to "leave" was the

psychological home that I had constructed and had become very attached to – including the uncomfortableness of it all.

Temas y Border-Based Dilemmas

Like a tenacious weed, Racism crops up everywhere – it has a stranglehold on everyone. It is cultivated and produced in families, churches, temples and state institutions. The psychological effects of racism have been greatly underestimated.

Anzaldúa 1990²

*Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural
 able to slip from “how’s life?”
 to “Mes’stan volviendo loca,”
 able to sit in a paneled office
 drafting memos in smooth English,
 able to order in fluent Spanish
 at a Mexican restaurant,
 American but hyphenated,
 viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,
 perhaps inferior, definitely different,
 viewed by Mexican as alien,
 (their eyes say, “You may speak
 Spanish but you’re not like me”)
 an American to Mexicans
 a Mexican to Americans
 a handy token
 sliding back and forth
 between the fringes of both worlds
 by smiling
 by masking the discomfort
 of being pre-judged
 Bi-laterally.*

Pat Mora, *Legal Alien*³

Mora’s words tell the story of border-based dilemmas; they cause discomfort. Each of *las mujeres del valle* experienced the discomfort in all four themes discussed in Chapter

three; religion/spirituality, traditional medicine, language, and education. In 1987, Anzaldúa told us, “So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language...Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.” Although not without struggle throughout their lifetime and in a variety of settings (school, church, family), ultimately, all of *las mujeres* took pride in both their Spanish and English languages. In 1998, Chicana scholar Lara Medina stated, “The spiritual practices of many Chicanas emerge from a purposeful integration of their creative inner resources and the diverse cultural influence that feed their soul and their psyches” (In Trujillo 1998, 189). Again, either having moved, or in the process of moving through ambivalence and ambiguity of spiritual practices, including belief and practice in traditional medicine, all of *las mujeres* revealed a unique combination of practice that for them was different, but good enough.

In 1987, Anzaldúa told us that we can cope “...by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (79). An acknowledged and adaptive tolerance offers us a sense of agency. As difficult as adaptive tolerance is to develop and sustain, with the ongoing work of practice we are able to see and feel a difference in our being in the world.

In 1993, George J. Sánchez said, “The movement between Mexican and American cultures is not so much a world of confusion, but rather a place of opportunity and innovation...” (9). I agree with Sánchez, but would add that the “world of confusion” that often manifests as anger, despair, and anxiety both in- and outside of the clinical setting is more common. Until there is a borderpsychosocial intervention, this “world of confusion” continues to expand; the sooner the intervention the better.

One of my own dilemmas faced throughout my training and career in fields of psychology and social work, and that I have repeatedly been angered by, I perceive as the inappropriate use of the word “schizophrenia” in any context outside of mental health treatment, given the seriousness of the diagnosis as a psychotic disorder. However, more recently I have come to further understand, and thus adaptively tolerate and accept, the use of this word when preceded by the word “cultural.” As stated by Julia Alvarez in 2007, “It turned out that many of us who came of age in the 60s and early 70s felt a kind of cultural schizophrenia, torn and divided by pulls in so many directions.” This is not a psychotic state of being. It is a borderpsychosocial state of being. It is, at times, the uncomfortable movement from margin to center and back again, a direct result of the impact on our psyches by mixed messages, ambiguities, and contradictions. This type of movement produces the ongoing and never ending manifestations of border-based dilemmas.

As James P. Spradley said in 1979, “...cultural diversity is one of the great gifts bestowed on the human species...” (v). Let us continue to demonstrate appreciation for this gift. By listening, transcribing, and analyzing the cuentos of *las mujeres del valle*, I witnessed the diversity of conscious reclaiming of pride in religion/spirituality, traditional medicine, language, and education. I also witnessed the diversity of patterns of coping with public/private encounters and self/other imposed marginalization as the result of the shameful, hurtful, and depressing response to the oppressive border-based encounters with racism, sexism, and classism that resulted in border-based dilemmas. This study contributes to the expansion of awareness of the range of psychosocial experience beyond what is

currently considered “normal.” This work helps further the understanding of a particular American experience.

Clinical Intervention – Becoming Aware

To survive the Borderlands
you must live *sin fronteras*
be the crossroads.

Anzaldúa 1987⁴

Though all the theorists discussed earlier in this study have made contributions to the formation of my conceptualization of the relational experience of self and other, I found many, especially in my early and foundational clinical training, also possess limitations. In 1994, Professor Oscar J. Martínez, who spent most of his life on the USA-Mexico borderlands and conducted research at the El Paso-Juarez border wrote, “Marginal people are conditioned to view problems from different angles, to identify alternatives, to capitalize on advantages, and to search for opportunities not readily apparent to others” (313). As a marginal person, I was taught from which “angle” I should view problems from and it was only much later that I became aware of the value of my own “angle.”

In 2002, Anzaldúa wrote,

As swells break against the Santa Cruz mudstone promontories I feel that we who struggle for social change are the waves cutting in the rock and erecting new bridges. We are loosening the grip of outmoded methods and ideas in order to allow new ways of being and acting to emerge, but we’re not totally abandoning the old – we’re building on it (In Anzaldúa and Keating, 2).

Succinctly stated, the goal of a psychotherapeutic intervention is the resolution of a stated distress. In order to relieve and resolve such distress it is necessary to facilitate the

movement toward increased awareness and understanding of self and the worlds in which we live, the dilemmas that we face, and the navigation and negotiation strategies needed to do so. In 1999, anthropologist Joan D. Koss-Chioino and psychologist Luis A. Vargas argued that:

Despite a growing literature on how to conduct psychological interventions with ethnically diverse children and adolescents, few works integrate development, culture, and psychological intervention....The solution to making psychological interventions culturally and developmentally responsive is not to continue to modify existing practice models based on theories that decontextualize the individual – that ignore the ‘local worlds’ in which the individual participates...[rather] to base interventions on theory that highlights the individual-in-context (xiii).

There are a number of Anzaldúan interventions identified within this study that connect to this notion of “individual in context” and reflect my approach to borderpsychosocial intervention. The clear objectives of this clinical intervention are to provide culturally relevant names to components of this therapeutic intervention process, bring this process up to consciousness, and work toward sustaining the awareness. The Anzaldúan interventions explored in this study that are applicable to a borderpsychosocial clinical intervention are the following:

1. Coyolxauhqui State – the acknowledgement of psychological, emotional, and/or spritual fractures and learning how to heal from such insults to our mind, body, soul, and spirit.
2. Coatlicue State – the acknowledgement of a deep depression that can claim us as legitimate victims, but that also is a dynamic space that moves us toward recovery.

3. Shadow Beast – acknowledging the unwanted parts of one self and recognizing how we collude with these parts of self to maintain our emotional and/or behavioral status.
4. La Facultad – acknowledging and accepting that we have the ability to see and intuit what will be helpful to us.
5. Nepantla – acknowledge and accept that we live within a borderland space and can learn to live in an adaptive manner with a tolerance for ambiguity, contradictions, and ambivalence in our lived experiences which are always in the process of change.

How the mind is organized is often referred to as Freud's "topographical model" which implies that psychic life can be represented by three levels of consciousness at which mental processes vary in both awareness and accessibility. To describe my conceptualization of the mental and psychic process of borderpsychosocial intervention, I will make use of an image of an iceberg (fig. 28), commonly used to represent the three levels of consciousness: conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. The top of the iceberg, what is above water, represents our conscious; what we know and can articulate about our experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The center of the iceberg, what lies within the waterline, represents our preconscious; retrievable information, experiences, thoughts and feelings. The bottom of the iceberg, what lies below the waterline, represents our unconscious; a vast space for storage of the least accessible information, experiences, thoughts, and feelings. All three levels are inseparable and all function simultaneously. It seems obvious that we are most aware of what is conscious and least aware of what lies in

the depths of the unconscious. You will note that the unconscious takes up the most space. It would then seem reasonable to consider that our unconscious has a profound, but for the most part, unknown impact. This understanding of the three levels of consciousness sets the foundation for a borderpsychosocial intervention.



Figure 28: Iceberg as representation of three levels of consciousness.

Next, there is a need to have knowledge and understanding of the different levels of impact and response to public and private border-based events and social encounters. The initial impact and response is experienced at the conscious level. The impact and response may lie in the preconscious, but is not easily recalled or articulated. All impact and response is stored in the unconscious.

The process of naming conscious, preconscious, and possibly unconscious experiences is followed by drawing the experiences up to conscious awareness, and establishing them as interventions. These include: Coyolxauhqui State, Coatlicue State, Shadow Beast, La Facultad, and Nepantla.

After that, there is a need to understand the nature of the natural move, the ebb and flow, from consciousness back to preconscious and back again to consciousness of the knowledge gained from experiences related to identified interventions. This is possible through ongoing practice and reinforcement of interventions.

Finally, over laying all of this is the understanding of levels of agency. We can experience agency at the conscious level. At the preconscious level, we have a sense of, and are developing, agency. At the unconscious level, we have no sense of agency at all.

At times, it is as Moraga states, "Consciousness spoils your time" (2011, 152). In spite of this, being conscious, being aware, and having agency, provides a reality-based experience which cannot, should not, and must not go unknown and unnamed.

I now turn to the ideogram I developed (fig. 5.2) to represent the experience of borderpsychosocialness and its variations; the ongoing process of borderpsychosocial development. This ideogram suggests the movement of development is not linear and there

is invariable movement from margin to center and back that is concurrent and in perpetual motion. It is also not one dimensional, but rather multidimensional and reflects a response to the impact of any particular social encounter. This experience is life-long.



Figure 29: Ideogram representing borderpsychosocial experiences. Drawing by author.

Private and public encounters we experience and how we respond to those experiences impact this process experienced by individuals. The encounters may include, but are not limited to, experience with: historical events, material needs, health issues, patriarchy, cultural traditions, heterosexism, popular culture, spirituality, racism, classism, law, sexism, language, education, and politics.

Where we find ourselves at any given time within this ideogram may be a matter of imposed or self-imposed, or conscious or unconscious decision making. This positioning is often related to safety or level of risk. How do we exercise agency and choose where to situate ourselves? How will we learn that we can choose? Are we even aware that we can choose? This ideogram evokes these questions. A borderpsychosocial intervention can facilitate the answering of such questions. In the end, and most often, we choose to situate ourselves where we feel safe; and all that it implies.

In 2002, AnaLouise Keating said, “it’s not the differences that divide us but rather our refusal to openly discuss the differences among us” (In Anzaldúa and Keating, 520). I would add to this the need to understand and accept, rather than reject, differences. In my clinical work, I often facilitate the open discussion of difference and often witness the rejection of it and how it then manifests in relationships and the cycle of injury and healing. Learning new ways to understand and manage pain and suffering leads toward resolution, which implies change, and provides evidence of our capacity to live with contradictions, ambiguities, and difference. The development of healing strategies by means of a combination of awareness, ceremony, and rituals are helpful.

At this point in time, the word borderpsychosocial has three meanings: (1) a specific strand of psychosocial theory, (2) a culturally responsive and relevant set of techniques for identifying and understanding border-based dilemmas, and (3) a culturally responsive and relevant method of clinical intervention for border-based dilemmas.

Culturally relevant and responsive treatment stands in contrast to much of what many clinicians currently practice. This makes sense, given Ana Castillo’s observation that,

“...in fact, we have been schooled in a Western perspective and immersed in it all our lives” (1995, 7). The traditional and mainstream practice has, in fact, been normalized. I propose the expansion of our practice perspective to include a borderpsychosocial epistemology.

Denzin and Lincoln state, “Quantitative researchers are deliberately unconcerned with rich descriptions because such detail interrupts the process of developing generalizations” (2003, 16). I would argue that this qualitative researcher used the details and method of *bricolage* to actually demonstrate the possible generalization of the concept of borderpsychosocialness.

In 1988, Nichols and Schwartz claimed, “...one size fits all therapies are a thing of the past...” (11). Yet, they continue to flourish in practice. The academic and clinical training environment teaches their theories. How ironic, that I may propose that the notion of borderpsychosocial, and its specificities to a particular person, can be used as an overarching notion that may, in fact, facilitate a one-size-fits-all therapeutic intervention in the future.

*Life is all about mestizaje, the mixing of cultures, colors, forms,
ideas to create new possibilities.*

Carmen Tafolla 2012, San Antonio’s First Poet Laureate⁵

In 1987, Anzaldúa said, “*En unas pocas centurias*, the future will belong to the Mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures” (80). I truly believe this. I see these dynamics happening around me. I see people struggling to understand these dynamics.

Anzaldúa states, “The struggle has always been is inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society” (1987, 87). This dissertation has been about further understanding of that inner struggle and how it is connected to the reality of our external sociocultural encounters, with which we struggle, and are then played out internally.

Answering Questions

The following answers to the questions posed at the onset of this study and drawn from and evidenced by the *cuentos* of *las seis mujeres del valle*, my own *cuentitos*, and the voices of Chican@ scholars.

Yes, it is possible to successfully negotiate and navigate through the expectations, traditions, and norms that present themselves while living on and within borderpsychosocial spaces. Although at times posing significant dilemmas, each of *las mujeres* demonstrated this possibility.

The skills and coping strategies that are developed and performed that lead to social and psychological success for women living in the borderlands include religious/spiritual engagement, formal or informal education, blood or fictive family relationships, but above all, they learn to tolerate ambiguity, contradictions, and ambivalence even though they may not be consciously aware of this skill, nor do they have a name for it.

Some of the aspects of the borderlands’ experience that form a distinct and yet common human experience include the struggle and effort made to survive, cope, and succeed. We can all identify these aspects as we reflect on our lives lived; the distinction lies in the differences.

Yes, it does make a difference if you are born, grow up, move away, return, and/or spend your entire life on the border and in the borderlands. As often stated, by many about the USA-Mexico geographical border, “the border moved – we didn’t.”⁶ But, when we did move, so did the sociocultural borders. For a variety of reasons, all of *las mujeres del valle* moved away and for another set of reasons, they returned. Upon returning, they all brought with them an expanded set of experiences which came from outside *el valle*. This expanded awareness at times created frustration to the point of again wanting to leave; but most did not. There was only one exception; one *mujer* who never left. Interestingly, she seemed the most socially isolated and disconnected of all.

The emotional and psychological impact of our social encounters, as articulated by the *voces* in this study, demonstrate there is a clear impact on the choices and decisions we make about the *camino* we chose to travel in this lifetime. The diversity of what guides or compels us onto any particular *camino* seem to be based on emotional, spiritual, material, and/or functional needs which are a direct response to our social encounters. Choices emerge from a multitude of sources including desire, motivation, modeling, support, education, etc. Yet it appears that the profound desire to survive takes center stage – and sometimes that means collusion with oppressive systems. What occurs at the crossroads of *caminos* that compels one to change is either found internally or provided externally by someone or something. Unfortunately, most of us have found our *caminos* quite lonely and downright scary. When we have more information and support, such as education or mentoring, that is when we can change *caminos* and make informed decisions of which we can feel confident.

With regards to answering the question about which theoretical models in part contributed to the further understanding of the process of living on and within borderpsychosocial spaces, it is clear that everyone from Freud (with his theory of the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious) to Anzaldúa's borderland theory have contributed to the evolving understanding. A significant contribution was also drawn from artists, poets, and popular culture. From psychology to social work, from history and feminism, all contribute to this complex and dynamic *mestizaje* notion.

The outcome of gathering the *cuento*-data, these personal and intimate disclosures from *las seis mujeres del valle* and braiding them with stands of reflexive *cuentitos* of my own formation, and the scholarly, both mainstream/dominant and alternative/marginalized discourse from multiple fields of study met the goal. With an emphasis on Anzaldúan theorizing, this study makes evident that the notion of borderpsychosocial development is well grounded and at once relevant and meaningful as a theoretical, social, and clinical intervention.

As agreed, I provided a finished product that is accessible to *las seis mujeres del valle*, including the original documentation which included both original transcript and video.

The last, but certainly not least, of my goals was to have this project contribute directly to the task of addressing existing inadequacies related to current theories of psychosocial development put forth and given prominence in various training and clinical environments. This has yet to be determined.

Finally, my answer to the question that drove this study: Is there a specific psychosocial experience that frames consciousness for border women? The answer is simply yes. The question I am left with is: Are they aware of it and its value?

Recommendations for Future Research

The greatest value [of evaluation of practice] will be...an evaluation of one method against another, or one's present work with one's past and one's hope for the future. Out of such evaluations will come, I believe, better service to the client.

Dr. Richard Cabot, 1931⁷

Future research efforts in *el valle* may consider more in depth exploration of the four *temas* explored here by way of revising the list of questions asked. For instance, I did not ask, nor did anyone mention *dichos* which have historically been used as “words of wisdom” passed through generations. I found that if I didn’t ask, they didn’t tell. A second recommendation is to add a follow-up interview to assess the efficacy of the interviewing process. Another suggestion is to interview a group of men who meet all the criteria of the *mujeres del valle* except for gender; *hombres del valle*. I can imagine it interesting to interview elders from *el valle* and even consider interviewing a set of family members such as husband/wife, partners, siblings, and even multiple generations. I can also imagine an interesting study made of the *cuentos* of other ethnic groups living in *el valle*. Last, but certainly not least, I would suggest exploring the experiential understanding of borderpsychosocial development of the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered community in *el valle*.⁸

There are many reasons why the “arts and sciences” are connected in academia. As stated by Mayor Julian Castro as he appointed Carmen Tafolla the first poet laureate of San Antonio, Texas, “...it has been recognized that the arts speak our voice and our soul, and that they therefore, become a crucial part of our survival” (In Bennett 2012, 37). What an interesting study it would make to expose *mujeres del valle* to art and writing by *chicana mujeres* and do an analysis of their response.

Everyone’s borderpsychosocial experience is different. “Dominance not difference, is at the root of cross-cultural conflict” (Chené 2008, 35). There is a great call for updating our understanding of the relationship of dominance and difference. Recently, national anti-immigrant legislation⁹ speaks to the continued fear of difference within the USA. Difference across race, gender, religion/spirituality, language, class, social orientation, and other social identities continue to draw attacks from particular communities against other communities. This problem needs further understanding about how difference is experienced, negotiated, and navigated along with the impact of dominance to the process. The ambition of some to prevent access to knowledge and historical narratives of the diverse population creates borderbased dilemmas that are invisible, not understood, and certainly not taken into consideration in our social world. Just as important, this information is important in our clinical encounters where the objective of seeking services is often to address problems that often result from being historically marginalized.

Contributions

This research study contributes to academic, clinical, and social literature by generating and introducing the concept of borderpsychosocial to deepen our understanding

of a complex, multidetermined, and contextually influenced phenomenon that has always already existed and continues to be a major social issue in the 21st century, but now with *más voces*.

While I believe that multiple fields of study will continue to explore and expand on the concepts brought forth from the life-long theorizing by Anzaldúa, I also believe that the concepts of La Facultad, Coyolxauhqui State, Coatlicue State, Shadow Beast, and Nepantla provide the field of psychology with interventions that are innovative and culturally responsive to a particular population, in addressing issues that manifest from borderpsychosocial experiences. Borderpsychosocial development occurs in the face of the force of assimilation, acculturation, oppression, and racism. Survival, coping, and success strategies develop over time. Borderpsychosocial development also occurs over time. Our strategies will change as we become increasingly aware of the borderpsychosocial experiences of self and others.

While my hope was to create a baseline for further study, I also hoped the study will serve as a strategy for others who wish to escape the cultural, social, and academic constraints by which they have been historically defined as social workers.

In 1997, scholar Patricia Zavella said, "...it is exciting to envision a feminist studies in which women 'on the margins' are demanding that the 'center' be reconstituted" (In Romero, 1997, 193). I am, in a sense, making this demand.

Al Fin

Al fin, I put forth borderpsychosocial as a clinical concept that describes a specific dynamic and lifelong social experience that helps us understand and explain a specific

developmental process that stems from and occurs when living between cultures. When understood and further nurtured in an adaptive manner this concept will create movement for both individuals and groups toward conscious knowing, symbolic construction, and visualization of a *camino* that itself becomes the means for transformation of subjectivity and thus our relations in the world.

As Chela Sandoval said in 2008, “Anzaldúa was a resolute theorist of hope.” (In Keating, xiii) Maybe it was the reading of this statement that in my mind connected Anzaldúa to Obama and now Obama to Anzaldúa as we move “forward” in our lives with the hope for a more just world that operates based on mutuality rather than individualism.

Yo Soy Otra

I have been, and continue to be, identified by many names in my profession. I have been called a social worker, a clinical social worker, a clinical counselor, and a psychotherapist. I have also been called a *consejera* or *terapeuta* by the Spanish-speaking families with whom I work. I now name myself. Because I am aware of living in Nepantla, at this developmental time in my life, I see myself both personally and professionally as a Nepantlera. In 2003, Anzaldúa talked about this term she coined,

Las Nepantleras...act as intermediaries between cultures and their various versions of reality....They can work from multiple locations, can circumvent polarizing binaries. They try not to get locked into one perspective or perception of things. They can see through our cultural conditioning and through our respective cultures' toxic ways of life. They try to overturn the destructive perceptions of the world that we've been taught by our various cultures. They change the stories about who we are and about our behavior. They point to the stick we beat ourselves with so we realize what we're doing and may choose to throw away the stick....They serve as agents of awakening, inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness, greater concocimiento; they serve as reminders of each other's search for wholeness of being (In Keating 2009, 283).

I take responsibility for doing, what I am able, to facilitate change in my personal, professional, and academic roles. I have found myself plunged into not only the process but also the content of my work. Most of my life has been a recovery project which set out first and foremost to recover self as a means to help others recover. I learned a long time ago that you can take patients only as far as you have gone in your own process of development, understanding, and awareness. For this reason, I am compelled to continue my own learning.

As you continually reinterpret your past, you reshape your present. Instead of walking your habitual routes you forge new ones. The changes affect your biology. The cells in your brain shift and, in turn, create new pathways, rewiring your brain.

Anzaldúa in Anzaldúa and Keating 2002, 556.

This dissertation, at its core, is about stories, power, and the power of stories. It explores the development of my own consciousness that led me onto a *camino* of imagining the role of myth and psychology in clinical work. Clinical work is most often seen in terms of theories and evidence based treatments that produce the desired outcome of emotional and behavioral stabilization as a result of resolution of concerns, problems, or issues that are brought into a therapeutic setting. This is another way of doing that.

In the end, I can say with sincerity, that I unknowingly and without plan have met the criteria set forth by professor of psychology and women's studies, Mary Gergen (2001) for emancipatory feminist research:

- (a) to acknowledge my research goals and to advance them, (b) to create an effective opportunity for change for participants in the research endeavor, and (c) to

be personally open to change in unanticipated ways as a result of the commingling of influences of all participants (104).

In 1984, when bell hooks wrote about the “work of feminist reorganization” she talked about how we need to understand that “...we have all acted in complicity with the existing oppressive system (2000, 164). I am not an exception to this; as was at some level demonstrated in this dissertation.

Para Anzaldúa

In 2009, Amelia M.L. Montes wrote, “The fact that *Borderlands/La Frontera* has been translated into more than thirty languages tells us that a constant evolving of consciousness has been and is presently occurring nationally and internationally...creating new strategies of resistance...”(In Cantú and Gutierrez, 43).

As stated in 2004 by American Studies scholar, Alicia Gaspar de Alba,

The way I see it, your border theories have provided a model for Americanist scholarship of the twentieth-first century and a foundation for thinking and writing about the multiple histories, languages, genders, and racial realities that are converging in the great big cornfield of ‘American’ life and culture (vi-vii).

“I believe that by changing ourselves we change the world.”

Dr. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, 1981

“According to Maya knowledge, the sixth world starts December 2012. It is this nuevo mundo, this new order, we need to create with the choices we make, the acts we perform, and the futures we dream.”¹⁰



Figure 30: Author at *El Mundo Zurdo*: The International Conference on the Life and Work of Gloria Anzaldúa. May 2009, San Antonio, Texas.

¹ In Trujillo 1998, 353.

² Anzaldúa 1990, xix.

³ In Rebolledo and Rivero 1993, 95.

⁴ *Borderlands* 1987, 195.

⁵ In Fisch 2012.

⁶ See note 10 in Saldívar-Hull 2000, 174, where she attributes this “well-known aphorism” to Américo Paredes.

⁷ In Bloom, et al. 1995, xiii.

⁸ The absence of *cuento*-data from GLBT community only indicates I did not receive a response to my attempt to recruit from the GLBT community in *el valle*.

⁹ Arizona SB1070 signed in April 2010 and Arizona HB2281, serve as current examples.

¹⁰ Anzaldúa’s final essay published in her lifetime – “Let us be the healing of the wound” in Keating 2012, 303.

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Appendix A

Glossary¹

abuelita - grandmother

asina – like that (regional word)

a'el norte – to the north

ajeno para poder sacar – laundry, so you can get

al fin – in the end

alacrán – scorpion

alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro, me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio, Estoy

norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan simultáneamente – soul between two worlds, three, four, my head rumbles with contradictions, I am dissy from all of the voces that speak to me at the similtaneously

altar – altar

amá– mom

Amá, cómo se dice curly en Español? – Mom, how do you say curly in Spanish?

amigas - freinds

animalitos – little animals

antepasados - ancestors

antes - before

apá- dad

arte - art

Así es – and so it is, it is that way

asustados – afraid

aquí se mira – here it looks like

ay, ya empezó! ya empezó el programa El Juarachazo Norteño – oh, it started! the program started, the Huaracho of the North

ayyy – ohhhh

barrerlos – to sweep them

basta de gritar contra el viento – toda palabra es ruido si no está acompañada de acción - stop screaming against the wind – all words are just noise if not accompanied by action

bronquiales – bronchioles

brujería – witchcraft, black magic

cabritos – young goats

camino(s) – path(s)

católico - catholic

capilotada – traditional bread pudding made and eaten during Lent

casi – almost

charro – Mexican horseman

chingado/a – a curse word often used in place of “dam” and/or a “dammed one” he or she

chingate, que se vaya or vete a la chingada – too bad for you, go or get out of here

chorizo – Mexican sausage

chueca - crooked

colombiano – Columbian man

colonia nueva – new community

colonia seca – dry community

comité – committee

cómo – how?

cómo se dice la – how do you say the

conclusion - conclusión

conjunto – small musical group made up of a variety of instruments with an emphasis on
the accordion with roots in Mexican culture

conexión – connection

conocimiento - awareness

consejera - counselor

control remote de radio, una Casa Ciudad – remote radio broadcast, a House of the City
(name of store)

cruzando puentes– crossing bridges

cua, cua – imitation of bird song

cuando hablas, verdad, la palabra hablar - when you talk, right, the word talk

cuando yo – when I

cuento – story

cuentos - stories

cuentitos – small, little, short stories

curandera – traditional healer (female)

curandera-bruja – traditional healer-witch (female)

curanderismo – practice of traditional healing

de – of

de la revolución mexicana – of the Mexican Revolution

de más antes – of earlier times

del valle – from the valley

del otro lado – of/from the other side - Mexico

Día de los Muertos – a Mexican tradition to remember and honor ancestors and the dead

dicho(s) – saying, proverb, words of wisdom

diosa de la luna - moon goddess

discusión - discussion

el - the

el arte – the art

el deseo de reparación y curar – the desire to repair and heal

El Diez y Seis – the 16th, a celebration to mark the day of independence in México

El Grito de Dolores – the cry of Dolores (in 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla announced

thus marked the beginning of the Mexican War of Independence.

el locutor y todo hablando allí - the disc jockey and everything talking there

el lugar entremedio, un lugar no-lugar – a place in-between, a place no-place

el movimiento – the movement (as the Chicano Movement is often referred to)

el oscuro – the dark

el otro lado – the other side of the border

el valle de paz cementerio – the valley of peace cemetery

empachados- constipated, stomach ache

en la, cómo se llama, películas del tiempo de la época de oro...del cine mexicano – in the,

what is it called, films of the time the golden years...of the Mexican movies

en mi alma – in my soul

en unas pocas centurias – in a few centuries

entiendo y cargo las concepciones de Anzaldúa conmigo y con confianza – I understand and

carry the concepts of Anzaldúa with me and with confidence.

entra bien – enters well

entremedio – in the middle

es tierra desconocida – it is unknown space

esta mujer – this woman

estas artistas – these artists

éste – um

éste, las malvas, son unas plantas verdes, no más puras oja's – um, mallow, they are some

green plants, only the leaves

este lado – this side of the USA-Mexico border

este lugar entremedio – the space, place, in the middle

familia – family

feministas - feminists

gringas/os – white females/males (slang)

guía – guide

hay va la loca – there goes the crazy girl

hay tantísimas fronteras que dividen a la gente, pero por cada frontera existe también un

punte – there are so many borders that divide the people, but for every border

there exists a bridge

hierbabuena – mint

hierbas - herbs

hierbitas – little herbs

hierbaría – an herb store

hojas de toronja – grapefruit leaves

hombre, cállate la boca – man, shut up

hombres del valle – men from the Rio Grande Valley

honduraño – Honduran (male)

intención – intention

intervención - intervention

la calavera – the skeleton

la colonia – a community primarily populated by families from USA-Mexico border regions

la cultura cura – culture cures

la cultura cura y más – culture cures and more

la cultura de veras cura – culture truly cures

la diosa de la luna – the moon goddess

la época de oro – the golden age

la facultad – the faculty, extended definition in Anzaldúan theory

la frontera – the borderland

la frontera con Estados Unidos – the border with the United States

la madre tierra – mother earth

la mata – the plant

la medicina tradicional – the traditional medicine

la prieta – the dark one

la ruda – rue

la Virgen de Guadalupe – *mestiza* representation of the Virgin Mary

la Virgen María – the Virgin Mary

labor – tilled field

las batallas de México – the battles of Mexico

las chicanas – the chicanas

las cortinas – the curtains

las hermanas – The Sisters

las malvas, son unas plantas verdes, no más puras ojas...son unas plantas verdes que –

mallow, they are green plants, only the leaves...they are green plants that

las mujeres – the women

las mujeres del valle viven en nepantla – the women of the valley live in nepantla

las músicas tristes – the sad music

las obras – the plays

las otras mujeres – the other women

las películas – the films

las presentaciones – the presentations

las seis mujeres del valle – the six women from the valley

le digo – I tell her

liberdad – liberty, freedom

lo demás- cómo cargo cada concepción – the rest – how I carry each concept

los amo – I love you all

los Andes, allá en – the Andes, over there in

los corridos – life events or stories put to music

los cuentos de las seis mujeres del valle – the stories of the six women from the valley

los libros – the books

los pelitos del maíz – the little hairs from a cob of corn

lotería – a traditional Mexican game often compared to bingo

mal de ojo – evil eye

manzanilla – chamomile

manzanilla, te de anís, estrella de anís – chamolile, tea of anis, star of anis

mariachi - mariachi

más – more

más morena - darker

más voces – more voices

matinés – matinees

me falta - I'm lacking

me pongo nerviosa – I get nervous

me'stan volviendo loca – they are driving me crazy

mestiza – a woman of mixed blood and culture

mestizaje – a mixture

México - Mexico

mexicana – Mexican woman

mexicana de este lado – a Mexican woman from this side (of the border)

mexicano de este lado – a Mexican man from this side (of the border)

mexicano(s) – Mexican(s)

mi abuelita, la señora – my grandmother, the Mrs.

mi frontera – my borderland

mija – my daughter

momento – moment

Movimiento- referring to the Chicano Movement of the 60s

movimiento - movement

Muchas gracias to miya y su familia in califas, mi familia en tejas, mi esposo, mis hermanas y

comunidad aquí en burque, y a todos los demas – ustedes saben quien son – si no

hoy, mañana. – Thank you very much to my daughter and her family in California,

my family in Texas, my husband, my sisters and community here in Albuquerque,

and to all the rest – you know who you are – if not today, tomorrow.

mujer - woman

Mujeres activas en letras y cambio social – women active in scholarship and social change

Museo Nacional de Antropología, Ciudad de México – National Museum of Anthropology,

Mexico City

música y baile – music and dance

música mexicana que – Mexican music that

nepantla es una palabra indígena – nepantla is an indigenous word

no andes con tus maldiciones – don't be with your cursing

No hay más que cambiar – there is nothing else but to change

no le garro – I can't grab on to it

no me sentía agusto – I did not feel comfortable

no me salían las palabras antes asina – no, the words didn't come out like that before

no nos podemos quedar paradas con los brazos cruzados en medio del puente – we must

not stay standing in the middle of the bridge with our arms crossed

no se – I don't know

nopales – cactus

nos daban unos coscorriones, pero coscorriones, o nos daban unas zuibandas con un board.

Tenían un board of education por hablar español...yo sufrí unas cosas horribles...yo

no fui la única... - They would smack us or they would give us some swats with a

board. They had a "board of education" for speaking Spanish...I suffered some

horrible things...I was not the only one...

nosotras – us (women)

novela – Spanish soap opera

nuevomexicana – New Mexican (woman)

nuevo mundo – new world

órale – in this context use to imply "okay, let's get going" or "alright, let get on with it"

orquesta...boleros...tríos – orchestra...ballads...trios

o sea – that is

palabras – words

palas – garden hoes

panza – stomach

para - to

para burscar trabajo – to look for work

párate allá– stand over there

patrona de la frontera – patron saint of the border

películas - movies

pensando – thinking

pescado - fish

pero hora las novelas no le garo – but now i don't get the soap operas

pero todavía no se acaba la vida – but life hasn't ended yet

piñatas – a familiar word to many that is often pronounced without the “ñ” sound

platican de las fronteras – speaking from the borders

plática(s) – conversation(s)

pobre de ti – oh, poor you

por qué – why?

porque no me pegaban las – because they wouldn't stick to me

pos, iba a las vistas – well, I would go to the movies

primos/as – male/female cousins

promotora – community worker

punte – bridge

puro novelas stan saliendo – only soap operas are being shown

qué – what?

Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un – what is the value of all your education if you still speak English with an

quinceañera – traditional Mexican rite of passage for girls turning 15

rancheras – style of music and dance

rinches – name given to the Texas Rangers by Mexican Americans

rancho - ranch

Raymond – the town of Raymondville is called this by the locals

regañones – scolding

remedio(s) – remedy, remedies

resultados – results

revoluciones – revolutions

Río Grande- Rio Grande River

salones de sabiduría – rooms of knowledge/wisdom

“Sabemos que podemos transformar este mundo.” – “We know we can transform this world.”

sana, sana, colita de rana – healthy, healthy, little tale of a frog

santo - saint

se cree muy americana – she thinks of herself as so American

se fue al norte – he went to the north

se llamaba El Juarachaso Norteño – it (program) was called the Juarachaso of the North

se necesita lo que sabe, lo que se llegó a saber, y la sabeduría que nos espera – we need

what we know, what we have learned, and the wisdom that awaits us

se oíe, cua – you could hear the sound of the birds, “cua”

seis mujeres del valle – six women from the valley

sí no haces esto en la escuela – if you don’t do this in school

sí ‘staban – if they were

sí, yo soy del valle – yes, I am from the valley

sí, yo soy otra mujer del valle – yes, I am another woman from the valley

sin fronteras – without borders

sonar – to sound

sopita de arroz – rice soup

‘spantados – have been frightened, shocked, scared

susto – shock

tamales – a common word often mispronounced by English speakers

también – also

tejanas/os – women/men from Texas of Mexican descent

tejas – how Texas is referred to by some people of Mexican descent

televisión – television

temas – themes

teorías(s) – theory, theories

terapeuta - therapist

Terror de la Frontera – Terror on the Border

tías...se oía los pajaritos...turtulitas – aunts...you could hear the little birds...the turtledoves

tienes que – you have to

tierra entre medio...tierra desconocida – land in-between...land unknown

todas las mujeres del valle – all of the women in the valley (participants)

todos andábamos allí brinque, brinque, como unos locos – we were all there jumping,
jumping like crazies

tortillería – a shop where tortillas are made and where they can be purchased

trabajos - works

trenza – braid

triste – sad

un choque – a crash, collision

un día a la vez – one day at a time

un momentito señorita – one moment, miss

una consciencia de mujer – a consciousness of a woman

una de las mujeres del valle – one of the women from the valley

valle – valley

vas a ver, cuando llegue tu papá – you'll see when your father gets home

vas a ver, Dios te va castigar – you'll see, God is going to punish you

verdad – true

vergüenza – shame

voces - voices

voces feministas – feminist voices

wáchale – in this context used as slang for “hey, what’s happening”

y aguantarnos – and endure

y’hora garo la palabras bien, trato de ser las palabras bien – and now I grasp the words well,

try to be the word well

y la conexión con Anzaldúa – and the connection with Anzaldúa

y más – and more

yierbas – herbs (sometimes spelled this way)

yo creo – I think

yo me quedo viendo bastante – I keep looking, a lot

yo soy – I am

yo soy otra – I am another

yo soy la que le digo – I’m the one who tells her

yo también – me, too

¹ This glossary keeps intact and represents the words as spoken during the *cuentos*. Words are taken directly from recording and transcripts. There is no attempt to “correct” pronunciation and are written phonetically. The variance is evidence of the borderpsychosocial quality regarding linguistics.

Appendix B

Consent Form

The University of New Mexico Main Campus IRB Consent to Participate in Research

The Borderpsychosocial Project

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Maria Munguía Wellman, who is the Principal Investigator from the Department of American Studies. This research is studying the differences and similarities in life experiences of women who were born and have a family history in the lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas.

By 2025 there will be 61 million Latinos in this country. Mexican American women are the largest and fastest growing of all Hispanic-origin groups and the research in the area of culture and identity constructions is insufficient. This population of women has been understudied. There are no known studies of this nature that specifically focus on women from the lower Rio Grande Valley.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you were born in the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, are between 50 and 65 years old, and are of Mexican heritage. No people will take part in this study at the University of New Mexico. There will be between 5-15 participants. No sponsor funding is provided for this project.

This form will explain the research study, and will also explain the possible risks as well as the possible benefits to you. I encourage you to take time to think about your participation before you decide to take part in this research study. Maria Munguía Wellman is available to answer any questions you may have.

What will happen if I decide to participate?

If you agree to participate, the following things will happen:

____ Initials

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- You will be asked to complete two questionnaires. The first asks questions about you and your family (such as “What language(s) were spoken in your childhood home?”) and you will be asked to draw a diagram of at least three generations of your family. An example will be provided. The second questionnaire asks you to recall memories of the messages you received from a variety of people and media; things you heard, saw, or read. You may refuse to answer any questions at any time. Combined, these questionnaires will take about 30 minutes to complete.
- You will be asked to participate in an audio/video recorded interview that asks 25 open-ended questions about your life experiences (such as “What does being born in the Valley mean to you?”) You may refuse to answer any question at any time. This interview will may take 20 minutes to an hour and will depend on the time you would like to take with your response to each question.

Questionnaire completion and interview will take place in the location of your choice and in privacy. Only you and Maria Munguía Wellman, the Principal Investigator will be present. Anyone else who may be present will be at your discretion. Upon completion of the questionnaires and interview all materials will be securely held by Maria Munguía Wellman and used in her dissertation project. Upon completion of the dissertation project, all materials will be professionally destroyed. The only exception is if you request the audio/video tape of your interview.

How long will I be in this study?

Participation in this study will take a total of one to three hours over a period of one day.

What are the risks of being in this study?

There are risks of inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study.

For more information about risks, please ask Maria Munguía Wellman, Principal Investigator.

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What are the benefits to being in this study?

There may or may not be benefit to you from participating in this study. Potential benefits may stem from the opportunity to engage in a reflection of your life experiences, the documentation of such reflections, as this may lead to gaining insight into your developmental process and greater self understanding.

Society as a whole will benefit from this study given the potential contribution to the understanding of a “borderland” experience and this particular strand of “borderland” residents.

What other choices do I have if I do not want to be in this study?

You do not have to participate in this study to request and receive a copy of the completed dissertation from the Maria Munguía Wellman, Principal Investigator.

How will my information be kept confidential?

Maria Munguía Wellman, Principal Investigator will take measures to protect your privacy and the security of all your personal information, but she cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data.

Information collected as part of the study will be labeled with your initials and a number. Information (without your name) will be entered into a computer database/locked file cabinet in the Principal Investigator’s office. Only Maria Munguía Wellman and her faculty advisor will have access to your study information for the purpose of this research. All materials collected will be stored until the completion of the dissertation project. After completion of the dissertation project the written and audio/video taped materials will be destroyed. The only exception will be if you request possession of your audio/video tape.

What are the costs of taking part in this study?

There is no cost for participating in this study.

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Will I be paid for taking part in this study?

There will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

Can I stop being in the study once I begin?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point in this study.

Whom can I call with questions or complaints about this study?

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, the Principal Investigator, Maria Munguia Wellman, Doctoral Candidate, Department of American Studies, 505-255-408, or her faculty advisor, A. Gabriel Melendez, Ph.D., 505-277-3929, will be glad to answer them.

Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research subject?

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may call the UNM IRB at (505) 277-0067. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human subjects. For more information, you may also access the IRB website at <http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/HRRC/maincampusirbhome.shtml>.

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Consent

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided (or the information was read to you). By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research subject.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

_____/_____
 Name of Adult Subject (print) Signature of Adult Subject Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

_____/_____
 Name of Principal Investigator (print) Signature of Investigator Date

____ Initials

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Appendix C

Self and Family Questionnaire

Attached is a series of questions that I would like you to answer about you and your family. The final question is followed by a request to draw a diagram of at least three generations of your family. An Example is provided. If you are in need of any assistance or have any questions, please ask.

Thank you for participating in this research.

Self and Family Questions

- What name were you given at birth? _____
- What name do you currently use? _____
- Where and when were you born? _____ Did you grow-up there? ____
- If not, where did you grow up? _____
- Where do you live now? _____
- If you moved away from the Valley, when did you move back? _____
- Why did you move back? _____
- What language(s) were spoken in your childhood home? _____
- What language(s) did you speak when you started school? _____
- Where did you attend school? _____
- What level of education did you complete? _____
- Did you attend church as a child? ____ If so, what religion? _____
- Did you have a Quinceñera? _____
- Growing up, how did your family identify culturally/ethnically? _____
- How do you currently identify culturally/ethnically? _____
- Which of the following relationships have you experienced and what is your current relationship status? ____ Single ____ Married ____ Re-married
____ Separated ____ Divorced ____ Widowed ____ Living with current partner
- From what ethnic/cultural group were/are your partner(s)? _____
- As a child, what class would you have placed your family in? ____ Poor ____ Working-Class
____ Lower-Middle-Class ____ Middle-Class ____ Upper-Middle-Class ____ Rich
- In what class would you place your current status? ____ Poor ____ Working-Class ____ Lower-Middle-Class ____ Middle-Class ____ Upper-Middle-Class ____ Rich
- What is your sexual orientation? ____ Heterosexual ____ Lesbian ____ Bi-sexual

On the following page, please draw a family diagram that includes at least three generations of your family starting with your grandparents. Please use a box to indicate males and a circle to indicate females. X=deceased, // = divorced, and if known, you may add age and birthplace.

Example of Family Diagram

Appendix D

Things I Learned Growing Up Introduction and Questionnaire

Things I Learned Growing Up...

While we were growing up, we were constantly learning about ourselves and others. We learned from all those around us and our society. We learned stereotypes and we were given a particular history in our classrooms. We were taught by our families, our friends, our school teachers, our religious and spiritual leaders, and our churches. We were also taught by what we watched on television and in movie theaters as well as by what we read.

Attached is a questionnaire that I would like for you to complete. Please write down what you learned while growing up about the groups of people listed. Your answers may be as brief as just a few words or symbols.

It is important to know that your responses are what you heard growing up and may not necessarily be your current belief.

Thank you for participating in this research.

Things I Learned Growing Up... Questionnaire

Groups of People	From Family, Teachers and Friends	From Television, Movies, Books and Magazines	From Religious Practice, Leaders and Texts
Mexicans			
Mexican Girls			
Mexican Boys			
Mexican Women			
Mexican Men			

Things I Learned Growing Up...

Groups of People	From Family, Teachers and Friends	From Television, Movies, Books and Magazines	From Religious Practice, Leaders and Texts
Whites			
White Girls			
White Boys			
White Women			
White Men			

Things I Learned Growing Up...

Groups of People	From Family, Teachers and Friends	From Television, Movies, Books and Magazines	From Religious Practice, Leaders and Texts
Mexican Families			
White Families			
People Like Me			
People Not Like Me			
Families Like Mine			

Appendix E

Audio/Video Taped Interview Questions

- __What does being born in the Valley mean to you?
- __What were your religious/spiritual experiences and practices while growing up; and now?
- __While growing up, what was the role of traditional healing; and currently?
- __Have you been active in social and political organizations? If so, which ones?
- __What sense do you have about knowing your cultural history and traditions?
- __Do you have pictures that are important to you? Why are they important?
- __Would you please tell me about a time when you felt left out in school; and most recently?
- __Of all your siblings, who has the lightest and who has the darkest skin tone?
- __While growing up, what was the role of art in your life; and in recent times?
- __What type(s) of music did you listen to as you grew up and what do listen to now?
- __What style(s) of dance did you enjoy as you were growing up and what do you enjoy lately?
- __What were your favorite movies growing up? What are your recent favorite movies?
- __What did you like to read as you were growing up? What is the latest book you have read?
- __What television programs did you watch growing up? What do you watch now?
- __Would you please describe a negative experience that involved your language(s)?
- __Who or what inspired you while growing up? Who or what inspires you now?
- __While you were growing up, how was education talked about in your home; and now?
- __Can you describe the most important thing that happened to you in school?
- __Can you tell me about some of the successes' you have experienced in your life thus far?
- __Earlier in your life, what stood in the way of success for you? What stands in the way now?
- __What gave you hope while you were growing up? What gives you hope now?

__What is an important goal you have achieved? What goals do you still have?

__How would you describe (subject's name) to someone else? How would they describe you?

__What made you feel powerful while growing up? What makes you feel powerful now?

__Is there anything that I haven't asked that you think is important to include?

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A Class Apart: A Mexican American Civil Rights Story. Produced and directed by Carlos Sandoval and Peter Miller. American Experience, Public Broadcasting Home Video, 60 min, 2009.

Chicana. Directed by Sylvia Morales, 1979. 23 min.

Corpus: A Home Video for Selena. Directed by Lourdes Portillo, 1999. 47 min. See Women Make Movies at www.wmm.com.

El Jardín del Edén. Directed by María Novaro and written by Beatriz Novaro and María Novaro. 1 hr. 44 min. color. Spanish with English subtitles. Mexico, Canada, France, 1994.

Enamorada. Directed and written by Emilio Fernández. 1 hr. 27 min. b&w. Spanish with English subtitles. Mexico, 1945.

Maria Candelaria. Directed by Emilio Fernández and written by Mauricio Magdaleno. 1 hr. 30 min. b&w. Spanish with English subtitles. Mexico, 1944.

Mi Vida Loca. Directed by Allison Anders. 1 hr. 32 min. Channel Four Films, 1993.

Que' es Gramatica. 5:10 min. Starring Fortino Mario Alfonso Moreno Reyes (1911-1993) as *Cantinflas*. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ienV19qNNoA

Que Viva México. Produced and edited by Grigori Aleksandrov and Nikita Orlov and directed by Sergei Eisenstein. 1 hr. 25 min. Spanish with English subtitles. Soviet Union, 1979. Footage shot in 1930.

Salt of the Earth. Produced by Paul Jarrico and directed by Herbert J. Biberman. 1 hr. 34 min. Independent Productions Corporation, the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers and Voyager Company, 1953.

Selena. Produced by Gregory Nava and Moctezuma Esparza and directed by Gregory Nava. 2 hrs. 7 min. 1997.

Yo Soy Joaquin. Directed by Luis Valdez. 1969.

Zoot Suit. Directed by Luis Valdez. 1 hr. 44 min. Universal Studios, 1981.