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Nopalitos Mean Something: Communicating Identity in Mother-Daughter Relationships through Food and Recipe

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**NOPALITOS MEAN SOMETHING:
COMMUNICATING IDENTITY IN
MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS
THROUGH FOOD AND RECIPES**

by

DARLA M. ANTOINE

BACHELORS

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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DEDICATION

To the Corn Mother
and her colorful daughters

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze a memoir/cookbook to highlight the unique role of food and recipes in relationships among women—specifically within mother-daughter relationships. The text highlights how food and recipes can become emotionally entwined in our life stories and in our relationships. Using cluster analysis, the analytical research of this thesis creates conversations about food and recipes as communicative vessels of intimacy and legacy among women and their daughters. Finally, this thesis demonstrates new ways food and recipes may help women navigate their own identities within both the psychoanalytical stages of the Oedipal complex and the psychological construct of the Mother archetype. The result is insight into how women may come to identify themselves as women—as a part of the ancestral and cultural sisterhood they are born into and as individuals.

*The title of this thesis, “Nopalitos Mean Something,” was taken directly from the text of A Taco Testimony. The author, Denise Chávez, expresses surprise when a local woman learns for the first time that “Nopalitos” are a food, a cactus leaf, and exclaims, “Nopalitos, you mean it **means** something?” Up until this moment she thought it was only the name of a local restaurant. I feel this exchange not only validates the symbolic and communicative power of food to **mean** something, but also highlights how this power is often overlooked or unnoticed.*

No matter who else we have in the world after our mother, no matter what ways we devise to do it better or do it again or do it in separate packages, she is the one with whom we did or did not do it first; and the relationship with the mother, which does not end when a daughter is twelve or twenty-one or fifty or ever (not even after the mother is dead), remains the place where this dynamic continues, over and over, all of our lives.

– Suzzane Juhasz, *A Desire for Women*

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INVOCATION: PRAYER TO MADRE DEL MAÍZ

Madre del Maíz
Mother of the Maíz
Sacred Mother
Mother of the Earth, her children

We thank you for the grace of your gifts to us:
Maíz: the five holy sisters—
Red, blue, white, speckled and yellow—
They are the races of the earth and they are good.

Madrecita, you who have created blessing
You who are blessing
Feed us, nourish us and prepare us
For the final blessing of earth

You who dreamed us, it is you
Maíz Mother we are grateful

Madre del Maíz
Holy Mother who dreams worlds
Tender Mother who holds life in her hands
Kind Mother who feeds her children
Far-seeing Mother who wants to see her children
Nourished, sustained, uplifted and healed

We bless you
We bless you
We bless you

Te bendicimos
Te bendicimos
Te bendicimos

— Denise Chávez

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you who you are.

— Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, 1825

In her essay, *In the Kitchen, Family Bread is Always Rising!*, Benay Blend (2001) writes that reproducing a recipe is not much different than retelling a story. The story is one of claiming or reclaiming culinary (cultural) rituals, and the author is the cook (pgs. 153-56). Chicana literary critic Tey Diana Rebolledo coins the term “writers as cooks” in *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature* (1995). She uses the term to convey how both writing and fiction can be expressions and representations of identity for women, specifically Chicana women, saying “one way to express individual subjectivity (while at the same time connecting to the collective community) is by reinforcing this female identity as someone who cooks,” (p. 130). When Chicana women write and when they write about food (as does the Chicana author analyzed in this thesis), the food becomes symbolic communication for tradition, culture, gender, relationships, and politics. The food is the story, but it is also telling a story. And like stories, food-preparation secrets and recipes are handed down from one generation to another. And like a really good story, food can have the power to take you back in time or to distant lands—in nostalgia or in escape.

I have encountered such recipes, compiled into cookbooks and memoirs alike, and have even sat down with such books, reading each recipe like it’s an individual little novel—transporting myself into another time, another country, and another culture via my sense of sight, smell, and most importantly, taste. We may never know exactly what the ancient Romans saw when they looked across their great city thousands of years ago, but thanks to diaries, histories, and even cookbooks, we can know exactly what they ate,

nearly exactly what they tasted, and can guess how it made them feel. And this opportunity to visit ancient Rome (or any other foreign or otherwise distant culture), to literally take it in and experience it as our own for just a brief moment, is thrilling. I believe the narrative power of food is great, and this thesis is an exploration of that power. Let's begin with my own story.

Perspective of the Author

I have a little recipe book. I began it in the spring of 1999, my junior year of high school. It began as a blank notebook, and 12 years later is an almost-full collection of recipes. Of course, it is more than that. It has seen me through high school graduation, college, a marriage, graduate school, a move to another country, and a divorce. The first recipe I wrote in it was my grandma's recipe for fry bread or "Indian bread." Flipping through it, I get a sense of how far I've come in the last 12 years. My handwriting has changed a lot—it closely resembles my mother's now, but 12 years ago I was still experimenting with the kind of handwriting I wanted to have, a reflection that I was still toying and experimenting with the idea of what kind of a woman I wanted to become.

It also contains recipes that remind me of the women in my life who have loved and supported me. My gratitude is marked in naming the recipes for them, "Sarah's Monster Cookies," "Mom's Biscuits," "Shannon's Lasagna," and "Aunt Shirley's Russian Dill Pickles." Some of the recipes are my own—experimentations from when I was a newlywed living far from my friends and family in Iowa and so turned to cooking as both a hobby and a comfort in my time of transition. "Newlywed" risotto is an example. It makes just enough for two people and is peppered with green onions and sun-dried tomatoes, an ingredient I remember obsessing over my first year of marriage.

The recipe book also has served as a diary of sorts. Written on the inside cover of my recipe book is a list of “Things to do before I’m 30.” I don’t remember when I wrote that list, but I think it was shortly after graduating from college in 2004. I’m proud to report that I’ve completed four of the seven items on this very short list; I’ve lived abroad for at least six months, gotten another tattoo, nearly mastered a foreign language, and been a published journalist.

There is the “Sausage-Egg Bake,” recipe that, once upon a time, was a dish beloved by all of my friends and roommates in college. It was often requested at dinner parties and brunches alike. Today it seems rather simple and unimaginative, but to young and tightly budgeted college students, it was a treat. It the memory of those celebrations created around the dish that I want to hold on to.

The “German Train Station Dutch Baby (stolen)” is another recipe that holds many memories. I learned how to make “Dutch Babies,” a European baked pancake for all intents and purposes, in an 8th grade home economics class. The recipe being simple (eggs, sugar, flour, and butter), I soon had it committed to memory and took pride in baking it for anyone who’d eat it. Fast forward seven years, and I’m on my first overseas adventure as part of a study tour spanning Italy and Germany. One night, as our group was waiting for a train in Germany, I wander into a souvenir shop and find a German recipe book printed in English. Amused, I flip through the book and stop when I find a recipe for “Dutch Baby.” Not wanting to purchase the entire book, I quickly scribbled the recipe down, my roommate standing watch in case a pesky storekeeper decided to intervene. My lovingly stolen recipe now has a place of honor among dozens of other recipes, and its name “German Train Station Dutch Baby (stolen)” tells its story.

In addition to providing nourishment, sustenance, comfort, love, and medicine, food is symbolic of whom we are, of where we come from, and of our family history. Put simply, food is a powerful identity marker. Food has the capability to communicate not only where we've been in our lives, but where we are in the present moment, and even where we desire to go next.

The artifact discussed in this thesis is the work of a Chicana writer, exploring and cementing her Indo-Hispano heritage in a borderland that prizes Spanish and Anglo culture and customs over Indo-Hispano traditions. As an Indigenous woman, I have found myself particularly drawn to this text. In analyzing it, I've also analyzed and combed over my own heritage and identity. I'm a member of the Okanagan Indian Band, a small tribe centered in British Columbia but whose ancestral homelands extend into north central and northeastern Washington State, where I grew up. My maternal grandmother, Lucy Antoine, was part of the generation that was forced into a boarding school system designed to simultaneously break her spirit and assimilate her into the dominant, Anglo-centric culture. On top of this atrocity, she lost her mother at a young age, and she and her siblings were soon thereafter abandoned by their father. Suffice it to say, preserving the Okanagan way of life, culture, customs, and traditions, was not a priority and barely an option.

Much of what I know about what it means "to be Okanagan" is through food because I did, in fact, grow up in my ancestral homelands where the land still influences the food. Many of the stories my grandmother told me about her life revolve around food: Participating in berry camp with *her* grandmother, her uncle going fishing in the mornings, her brother hunting, her sister baking. Walking down the road to borrow the

proverbial cup of flour from a neighbor to discover that *that's* where her father had been all this time. She begged him to come home and was humiliated when he refused. She tells me it was the first and last time she ever begged a man for anything.

Not only is food the vessel through which I've reclaimed parts of my Okanagan identity, but I've found that much of what I seek to additionally know about what it means to be Okanagan is also tied to food. How did my ancestors provide their families with winter sustenance? How did my grandmothers prepare salmon? What medicinal properties do the roots and plants of my homelands have? What stories, histories, and landscapes are tied to this knowledge? There may be several reasons I seek to understand my ancestors through food. First, I am a woman. There exists among women a certain inherent right to food knowledge. Recipes and food customs are easily available to me for the asking, from my grandmother, my mother, my aunts, their cousins, and other Okanagan women. Secondly, while consumed with conquering our bodies, minds and spirits, our stomachs often were overlooked by the Anglo-Europeans. As a nation that was never forcefully removed from our homelands, I think we have an advantage: we have been living, harvesting, cultivating, and feeding from the land much longer than Anglo settlers. They, in fact, had to defer to us, the Indigenous people, for guidance and assistance on living off of the land—enough so that our food traditions are by-and-large intact; our great-grandmothers could probably pop into our kitchens and recognize the processes and celebrations being prepared with little difficulty. This is an advantage to being from the West, “the final frontier,” and I recognize that many Indigenous people from the East, who were forcefully removed to new lands that resembled and offered

little of the lands they call home, may not find these cultural traditions so readily intact and accessible.

So, my perspective on this thesis includes questions of how I am using my maternal connections—my mother, her mother, and the mother before that—to access my own cultural heritage and to create my own cultural legacy. How am I negotiating my identity as a mestiza, a mixed-race woman? How am I navigating a system that has deliberately granted me all-access to a dominant, historically “preferred” culture while detouring, and attempting to pull out from underneath of me, the culture of my mothers. What do my recipes and my writings say about me, about how I’ve situated my identity? What am I creating for my daughters/my readers?

The Artifact

*Tacos. I know tacos. They are familiar.
And not so ordinary — Denise Chávez (p. 164)*

For this study I have chosen to analyze *A Taco Testimony: Meditations on Family Food and Culture* by Denise Chávez (2006). *A Taco Testimony* is Chávez's autobiographical story of life, family, growing up, good and hard times, nourishment, cultural identity, and, above all, tacos. Because this book is about making tacos just as much as it is about Chávez's life, I chose to approach this book as first and foremost a cookbook, and secondly as an autobiography or memoir, which give context to her recipes. Born in Las Cruces, New Mexico, (40 or so miles from the US/Mexico border) Chávez uses her recipes and the stories they conjure to recount her life and family through the lens of the food being served and the culture and occasions creating the food.

Through the story of tacos (and other foods) in her life, Chávez tells the story of the life her mother, Delfina Chávez, had before Chávez was born—a life that involved studying with Diego Rivera and eating oysters with a husband destined to die young. Woven into that story is the story of meeting Chávez's father, a man who would feed her oatmeal instead of oysters and who would come in and out of their lives like he came in and out of sobriety. Chávez grows up, goes to college, and gets married. Her mother and father grow apart, tired, and old, and eventually die. Through it all, and at every major event, there are tacos. Tacos a la Delfina, Dog Food Tacos, Un Taco de Sal, tacos of comfort, tacos of celebration, tacos of reconciliation, tacos of sanity, and tacos of pleasure.

It's always back to the tacos. Tacos are my life and my story. They are my hope. They are my salvation, and I don't say that lightly. They are my

history. My culture. They are who I am. They are my roots and my
Becoming. My pride and my healing. It's so good to be Mexican. (Chávez,
107)

Women are historically connected to food in a way that men are not. Traditionally believed to be the “gatherers,” women were the first agriculturalists (Diamond 1951, p. 21). Women have also traditionally been in charge of cooking and preparing food for their families. In fact, throughout most of history, women's primary functions have been to raise children and to cook and serve food to their families. This more historical, intimate, and often times limiting connection to food has resulted in the unique vessel of food (and cookbooks) as an extension of personal identity among women.

Goldman (1996) argues in *Take My Word: Autobiographical Innovations of Ethnic American Women* that cookbooks are especially territories of the autobiography for ethnic American women. To write about food is to write about the self, she claims and Chávez's writings are familiar to the women of New Mexico. Meléndez (2007) writes in his essay on self-representation in the Chicana culture that *nuevomexicanas* began publishing personal life narratives, often in the form of cookbooks, since the 1920's. The efforts of women like Nina Otero Warren, Cleofas Jaramillo, and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca were born out of a desire, he says, to correct ideas outsiders had about their culture and as a result, these efforts have formed a resistance to Anglo-American ethnocentrism (Meléndez, 2007, p. 50).

Often socially constricted in forms of expression, women have used cookbooks, recipes, and meals to explore their creativity, raise money, assert individuality, convey thoughts and opinions and pass on a legacy in a time where they were not allowed to own

or manage property often. For example, in *Eat My Words*, Janet Theophano (2002) writes of 19th-century women:

Because women's authority rested in the regulation of family relations, courtship rituals, leisure, and domestic space, and a cookbook was so intimately connected with the functioning of a household and all of these activities, it was, de facto, an aspect of domestic space; it was a woman's property to give or bequeath. (p. 86)

She continues:

Because recipes do more than provide instructions for preparing food, and because they reenact social transactions, they also may signify social identity . . . Having her own book was a symbol of a lady's rank and privilege. It signaled wealth, lineage, and literacy. (pp. 90-91)

In *A Taco Testimony*, Chávez shares family recipes for various tacos, side dishes, snacks, and desserts. Dispersed between these recipes are accounts of her childhood and early adult years. Not only is Chávez repeating the tradition of cookbooks as an expression of identity and heritage, but I believe she is also using the book to navigate her relationship with her mother. Her book is a reflection on who her mother was to her, how her mother's identity as a Chicana woman shaped her own identity as a Chicana woman—and how it didn't—and her mother's legacy to the world.

Research Questions

Based on the artifact and my perspective towards it, I've come up with the following three questions to drive this research: RQ1: *What associations does Chávez make between food and her mother?* RQ2: *How does food function in the artifact to allow Chávez to negotiate her relationship with her mother?* RQ3: *How does the artifact function as a general navigation of mother-daughter relationships?*

Key Concepts

The key concepts at the center of this study are *Chicana* and *mother-daughter relationship*. First, because the author who is being analyzed in this thesis identifies herself as a Chicana, I feel it is appropriate and necessary to clarify what “being Chicana” means for this study. Rubén Salazar (1970) summed up the definition of Chicano/a for his *Los Angeles Times* article “Who Is a Chicano? And What Is It the Chicanos Want?” as “a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of himself.” Chicano artist José Montoya expands this definition to include the notion that Chicanos/as are:

Offsprings in origin of Mexican parents and their progenitors, Indos y Españoles—but since extended to include the rainbow and with only one thing in common for certain: we have roots in this continent, from way before! So that, and being from this country, the U.S.A., not Mexico, is what makes us adamantly Chicanas y Chicanos who never forget we are Mexicans. (Del Castillo, et al, pg. 19)

To define mother-daughter relationship, in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, editor Cathy Davidson (1980) writes “as daughter-scholars, we all search for the stranger who has been our mother. We find her in our body memories,

in our gestures towards the world. Collectively, we hail her. She approaches, and we recognize ourselves” (p. xiii). And in *Reading from the Heart* (1994), Juhasz suggests that women turn to their mothers or to surrogate mothers to “find the secret self—the true self... Someone from outside has to be there, to notice, to say, ‘Oh, it’s you!’—for the self to know she is there” (p. 9).

For the purposes of this study, a mother-daughter relationship is defined as a relationship between a daughter and the woman or women who are key elements in raising her and/or the woman the daughter turns to in order to better understand or recognize herself. It may be her biological mother, her grandmother, a surrogate mother, an adopted mother, or all of the above, but it is a defining relationship that continues (though it may evolve) into the daughter’s adulthood and extends even after the mother’s death. In the instances I capitalize the word “Mother,” it is to indicate an overarching and abstract experience of the mother as it relates to the universal psyche.

Statement of Purpose and Rationale

This thesis explores the narrative, and thus the communicative, value of food and attempts to understand how women have utilized this narrative in creating, reinforcing, and sustaining relationships. Recipes are an extension of that food, being traded and passed along with the stories of both their context and their creators. In this way, recipes create and sustain the food and its social value. And when women exchange recipes (or food), they also create and sustain relationships; the recipes then become a legacy of that relationship.

Accordingly, this study will examine the role of food and recipes in communicating and navigating mother-daughter relationships. The focus will be on

Denise Chávez's (2006) *A Taco Testimony*, and the nature of this topic dictates the use of rhetorical criticism. The artifact provides evidence that food and recipes are an essential component to both a daughter's process of creating an identity that is separate from her mother and to establishing and sustaining a mother-daughter relationship while passing on cultural legacies. There is much to be gleaned about mother-daughter relationships from reading Chávez's memoir. In *The Daughter's Dilemma*, Paula Marantz Cohen (1991) writes:

What can be learned from novels about how families operate can also provide us with a better understanding of individual identity a product of family experience ... in the end, reading ... is a quest to understand my own relationship to experience and, more specifically, to understand why I have chosen to write, from this particular vantage point, this particular book. (p.5)

While researching for this study, all of the information regarding mother-daughter relationships and food was in reference to eating disorders and body image. The studies focused on how a mother's negative relationship with food is passed down to her daughter in a way that is harmful to the daughter's physical, mental, and emotional health. This study then, contributes to understanding some of the positive associations daughters can make between their mothers and food.

Assumptions

To paraphrase Avakian and Haber (2005), a basic assumption in both food and women's studies is that studying the daily life of ordinary people is necessary to understand their past and present worlds (p. 16). Unarguably, food is a necessary and

routine part of our daily lives. Entire days are scheduled for and around meal times. How ordinary women select, prepare, and serve these daily meals is necessary to understanding their past and present worlds and the relationships that occupy them.

In *Food is Culture*, Massimo Montanari (2006) writes (emphasis original):
Food becomes culture *when it is prepared* ... food is culture *when it is eaten* because man, while able to eat anything ... does not in fact eat everything but rather *chooses* his own food, according to criteria linked ... to the symbolic [cultural] values with which food itself is vested. (pp. xi-xii)

In this study I assume that every ethnic culture has foods that are rich with significance for its members and that the members of an ethnic culture are aware that these foods and meanings are specific to (chosen by) their group. It is also assumed that cultural identity and self-identity are intertwined and cannot be separated—so that the foods that are specific and meaningful to a cultural group are also specific and meaningful to the individual within that group.

Carole M. Counihan (2005) writes of one woman who explained food and her identity as follows:

The responsibility of providing food was instilled in us. Because I saw it when my grandmother did it for my grandpa, I saw it when my mother did it for my daddy, and I saw that it was my duty too. That's the cultural thing that you have to do. Now I've seen it, I know I do it, and my sister Virginia does it for her husband. (p. 203)

And as such, it is assumed that the handing down of food knowledge, through recipes and techniques, is a rite of passage most frequently reserved for daughters and officiated by their mothers, establishing food, and all of its trappings, as part of female identity.

Preview of Thesis

Chapter 1 of this thesis has addressed my perspective, the selected artifact, the driving research questions, key concepts, the rationale for this study and the assumptions. Chapter 2 will establish a literature review of food as symbolic communication, as an extension and symbol of cultural identity, and of cookbooks as a vessel of legacy and intimacy among women. Chapter 3 will describe my method of analysis and will identify the clustering terms around the key elements of Chávez's writing. Chapter 5 will summarize my findings and their implications for mother-daughter relationships, and the communicative value of food.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research draws on three areas of literature: Chicana/feminist scholarship on recipes and cookbooks as intimacy and legacy, scholarship on the relationship between food and cultural/self-identity and prior studies of food as symbolic communication.

Food as Symbolic Communication of Social Relationships

Inside were tacos, people struggling and succeeding in being family, and it was there I ate, was nourished and politicized in the ways of brotherhood/sisterhood. It was there that I learned what it is to be human.
(Chávez, 2006, p. 49)

Communication theorist M. L. Knapp (1978) suggests that relationships are created, sustained, moved, and killed by messages. I suggest that food can become a code through which messages of relational creation, sustainability, movement, and destruction also are expressed. Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1975) writes:

If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries, and transactions across boundaries. Like sex, the taking of food has a social component, as well as a biological one. (p. 249)

Douglas goes on to state that intimacy is one message (of several) that food encodes. She argues that a meal puts its frame on the gathering and that the rules which order a particular social interaction are reflected in the rules that control the internal ordering of the meal itself. For example: drinks are for strangers, acquaintances, close friends, and family. Meals are only for close friends, family, and honored guests (p. 254). Those we know at a meal we may also know at a drink, but the reverse is not true without an increase of social pressure and/or awkwardness. The line between sharing “just” drinks

and sharing a meal is the line between intimacy and distance. Assuming this boundary matters, then the difference between sharing a drink and a meal also matters. As Montanari (2004) puts it in his book *Food is Culture*, “sharing a table is the first sign of membership in a group” (p. 94).

Food and food semantics are a transmission of culture, which make it a communication of culture. The multiple functions, rules and social arrangements of food and eating are major players in the human food experience and make understanding cultural uses and interpretations of food an important and complex task. We humans are, after all, the only animal to *invite* others of our species to dine with us. Because actions performed with others tend to bypass the functional and take on a communicative value, our socializing instinct immediately gives meaning to the food and gestures present at a table (Montanari, 2004, p. 93).

In *A Taco Testimony*, food repeatedly is used to celebrate and reinforce community and bonding. Through food we express new relationships and strengthen old bonds. Food reaffirms our humanity and reinforces/reminds us of the joy of being alive—of be-ing. To this Chávez writes “I don’t profess to be an expert in living; all I know is that I like a good story, a great taco and to live among the truly free” (p. 58). And “Who can’t remember a certain food, the story of that food, the night or day of that food, the story of the people you ate the food with, and what you felt?” (p. 92). Focusing on the family dining table, Chávez recounts how holidays and birthdays were celebrated, how her parents were reunited—if just for one meal—of conversations with her mother, and of the countless friends, family, and strangers who were nourished body and soul at that great table.

As an example of the symbolic nature of food, in *Food as a Cultural Construction*, Anna Meigs (1997) describes the Hua of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea and their intimate and salient connection with food. There are hundreds of rules the Hua apply to food, the preparation of food, and the consumption of food. Female or *koroko*, foods are cold, wet, soft, and fertile. *Hakeni'a*, or male foods, are hot, dry, hard, and infertile. Women can become more like men by eating *haekni'a*, which is one way menstrual flow is believed to be minimized. Men, however, publicly proclaim female foods to be disgusting and dangerous to masculinity. In secret, however, Meigs says *koroko* foods are eaten by men to gain vitality and power.

The Hua also believe that we are affected by the relationship we have with the person who prepared the food being eaten. Food eaten from someone who has ill will towards you, or with whom you have a hostile relationship, will affect your emotions and physical condition. The reverse also is held true. Eating food prepared by someone with love will nourish and sustain you. Meigs makes the argument that through the analysis of food and eating systems one can gain information about how members of a culture understand and navigate some of the basic categories of their world (1997, p.100).

In summary, food is a central part of culture that communicates power relations; behavior; community; systems of meaning; and even conceptions of sex, sexuality, and gender. Food can serve as a social function by providing an occasion for gathering with friends and family—a gathering that will also serve to create, reiterate, and reinforce social bonds while even creating and communicating social distinctions. And as a central part of culture, food also creates and sustains that cultural identity, reflecting and affirming that cultural identity with every bite.

Food as an Extension and Symbol of Identity

My hope is to show how tacos have been nourishment to me, as well as a celebration of hope. I want to show how fiercely our family loved each other and how much culture has meant to me all my life ... Family, food, and culture are our salvation. If we have all three, we know what it is to love and value any form of life, either past, present, or to come. (Chávez, 2006, p.12)

Food, its preparation, and human food preferences vary from one culture to another. Influences such as religion, geography, resources, and wealth, among many other factors, determine which foods become cultural staples. These staples are then used as symbolic communication to create and sustain both social and intimate relationships. Over time, these dishes become entwined with the culture, so that, at least to the individual, the two become synonymous. For Chávez, tacos are her culture and her culture is tacos. To eat tacos is to reinforce and enact her cultural identity, which is also entwined with her self-identity.

Food is entwined with cultural identity because it is so often the vehicle through which cultural identity is learned and/or expressed. For women these teachings and expressions are often learned in the privacy of an intimate relationship (i.e., mother and daughter) but in preparation for a social event (such as a family or community meal). One Armenian woman explained to Avakian (2005) that she learned the history of her cultural identity during the times that she helped her grandmother prepare food. This passage illustrates both the teaching of a cooking technique and of cultural identity (intimate), rolled into one symbolic act of preparing dinner for the family (social):

She would take a whole onion and hold it in her hand and cut it in slices one way and perpendicular another way and then finely minced ... lots of stories were told in that arena. You know, the genocide stories were told

there too ... food was absolutely central and the conversations, the most important conversations that I have had with my family have happened in the kitchen, usually around cooking and food preparation. (Avakian, 2005, p. 265)

Chávez (2006) also relates food as identity in her book. “This is my story of nourishment, of culture, and how I came to know who I am ...” (p. 30), she writes in the first chapter. And in the third, “By understanding a people’s food you can understand their culture and what they believe in,” (p. 63). What she believes in is the power of food, specifically the taco, to symbolize gratitude, brotherhood/sisterhood, empowerment and healing.

In her last chapter, Chávez (2006) writes:

The tortilla is a staple of life in the Americas ... To understand a tortilla, we need to understand maíz ... We need to study the maíz plant and learn from it. It can teach us how to expand our vision of what constitutes blessing,” (pp. 189-190). “Tacos are sacred to me. I have been saved from depression, anxiety, and more-than-serious mental and spiritual breakdown by making tacos, (p. 194).

In her family, Chávez says tacos were served all of the time, as a regular staple and with extra flair and ritual on special occasions. She points out that tacos are just tacos, but no two tacos may be alike. Tacos from a kit, tacos from a restaurant, tacos from New Mexico, New York, or Paris and everywhere in between, may be very different. The best tacos, of course, are found at home (p. 103). Tacos from/at home are “prepared with love and maybe that’s why they (taste) so good” (p.159).

One woman told Avakian (2005) of her parents' rationale for encouraging her to marry an Armenian man. They would say, "if someone doesn't understand your food, how can they understand you? But they didn't say, they won't understand your history, or they won't understand the suffering that your grandparents went through, they won't understand your language, or your culture," (p. 263). Montanari (2004) supports this idea of food representing a shared identity when he writes: "cuisine is the very symbol of civilization and of culture; the rejection of cuisine represents a challenge [to these civilizations and cultures]" (p. 43).

In summary, food becomes entwined with cultural identity for geographical, political, and many other social reasons. These social reasons and obligations often mandate the social serving and consumption of the foods that reinforce the collective identity. When these occasions arise, it is most often women in charge of the preparation of the food and between these women exist intimate relationships that are also being reinforced through the collective preparation of the food—through dicing onions, sharing recipes or techniques, and telling the geographical, political, religious, et al stories that are the context for the food. In this way the food becomes part of both the collective and individual identity. One of the ways these foods and their entwined identities are preserved and reinforced is through cookbooks.

Cookbooks as Intimacy and Legacy Among Women

I've been fed by many women, all sorts of women, and to me, they were never 'bad' or 'good.' They were merely women, working out their lives and destinies amongst food and prayers. (Chávez, 2006, p.58)

Cookbooks have served a unique purpose/role to women for centuries. Perhaps it's because for centuries, women have been regulated to the world of kitchens and the cooking/serving/entertaining the kitchen implies. Because of these social restrictions/obligations/expectations, women became creative in using their cookbooks and recipes as a form of expression/subversion, creativity, legacy, collective memory, and even currency.¹ In their cookbooks, writes Theophano (2002):

Women have given history and memory a permanent lodging. The knowledge in cookbooks transcends generations ... while some recipes signify an eternal (ongoing) connection to the past, other recipes (and sometimes the same ones) and dishes, associated with a culture of origin, may display changes in social life ... as icons of cultural identity, a culture's cuisine may be used to mark the complex negotiations groups and individuals undertake. (pp. 49-51)

In addition to passing on recipes and recording cultural shifts, cookbooks became a place for women to write their secret thoughts, favorite poems, or Bible verses, and other notes about their daily lives and relations. In the 17th century in particular, paper was scarce and expensive, making the cookbook a much more common trove for a woman's thoughts, experiences, and opinions as its margins and end pages offered free

¹ According to Theophano (2002), women would negotiate for a prized or highly desired recipe by promising three or four of their best recipes in return (pp. 40-41). Women (and now, men) have also been creating community cookbooks as fundraisers since the 19th century.

writing space. After decades of daily use, it is no surprise that cookbooks become a memoir, a diary, a record of life.

What's more, the inclusion of a contributor's name in the recipe title cemented or acknowledged a relationship. Sharing recipes, argues Leonardi (1989), is an act of trust and acknowledgment of the woman from whom the recipe came "is one way to signal and affirm affiliations"(p. 345). Likewise, withholding a recipe is a "subtle, but still visible, act of... acrimony" (Theophano, 2002, p. 41). What's more, by reading the recipe, we can infer from the style and the depth of the directions the level of intimacy between (and being exchanged between) two women, as well as their level of cooking prowess.

For example, in *A Taco Testimony*, Chávez (2006) sets the tone for her recipes in her very first recipe for her mother's tacos: Tacos a la Delfina (p. 25). The ingredient list is precise in the number of pounds of hamburger needed, how many tortillas, etc. Surely Chávez herself doesn't pay attention to the weight of hamburger meat. Tacos have been such a mainstay throughout her life (in more than one way) that she just needs to look at the lump of meat to know if it is enough or not.

The articulation of the quantities in the recipe indicate that she is aware that not everyone reading her recipes may be as familiar with the making of tacos, and she wants to make sure the readers have all of the basic information they need. I suspect, however, if she was sharing her recipe with another woman whose mainstay was tacos, she might simply say, "grab some taco meat," knowing that the other woman would know what kind and how much to use.

The directions for the recipes, however, attempt to bridge the formality with a more intimate tone. The directions could have been made more brief and formal, reading something like, “Heat a frying pan on medium high heat. Add the hamburger meat, onion, and garlic and cook until the hamburger is no longer pink, about 5-7 minutes.” That certainly is a direction you would find in most any cookbook. However, Chávez expresses tenderness and a desire for intimacy with her reader when she instead directs:

Fry the hamburger with the onion and fresh garlic. Don’t use too lean of a meat as you want some fat. It’s worthwhile to get good meat. The better the meat, the better the taco. Avoid meat that looks as if it will never blend; sometimes when the meat is extruded by the butcher it stays in that extruded state. (Chávez, 2006, p. 26)

The language of this recipe is inviting the reader to slow down and chat with her for awhile, and I think it’s appropriate. Chávez is telling us her secrets—we should feel inclined to tell her ours.

My own mother recently sent me a recipe I had requested from her. She didn’t have the recipe on hand and so her older sister, whom we all call “Cowboy,” sent the recipe to my mother. As my mother’s daughter I recognized immediately that she did NOT write this recipe, and in fact had just forwarded the recipe exactly as it had been forwarded to her. The recipe is too informal and imprecise in many ways to have been written by my mother. I know because 1) I have spent a lifetime deferring to my mother’s recipes for guidance and 2) I remember my mother actually teaching me *how* to write recipes—and this recipe doesn’t reflect that lesson. For example, in the unedited version, all of the ingredients were sprinkled into the directions, rather than set out at the

beginning—something that is a personal pet peeve for my former Navy nurse and current Emergency Medical Technician mother. She likes order and protocol. Nor are the measurements written in my mother’s own preferred shorthand: “c.” for cup, “t.” for teaspoon and “T.” for tablespoon—all knowledge that is evidence of the intimacies we’ve shared over recipes. Conversely, I recognize my Aunt Cowboy immediately in the rushed, casual, style the recipe is written.

In summary, *A Taco Testimony* serves Chávez as a place to record a collective memory, explore and assert her individual and cultural identities, and pass on family recipes. In doing so she is sharing and acknowledging intimacies while also establishing a legacy. She is also ensuring preservation of the collective through the recollected experiences of the individual—something women have been doing with cookbooks for centuries.

Chapter Summary

This literature review has established that food has communicative value. It can communicate power relations, boundaries, taboos, love, and affection, among many other things. The geographical, political, religious, and other factors that influence a culture’s cuisine become part of the cultural identity. Finally, because women traditionally are responsible for preparing and serving these foods the foods become a part of their individual identity, perhaps in a more intimate way than it does for men. The sharing of recipes and food preparation techniques both dictates and fosters an intimacy among women and often these intimacies are turned into legacies. In the next chapter I will discuss the methodology used to further explore the selected artifact for these themes of food/recipes as intimacy, legacy, and identity in mother-daughter relationships.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Cluster Analysis

The study of food, the writing of food, and the transactions between a mother and daughter surrounding food and writing is being investigated in this thesis and as such constitutes the use of a cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is a method developed by Kenneth Burke (1941) to gain understanding of a rhetor's worldview. The basic operation of cluster analysis involves the critic selecting an artifact's key terms and observing other terms that cluster around the key terms. The result is a more thorough insight into how the rhetor associates and connects various concepts. This insight is gained by identifying repeating patterns of words that "cluster" around the key terms, illuminating the meanings and symbols that the rhetor associates with key terms. The rhetor is usually unaware of these clusters and associations—they are the subconscious—and herein lies the value of a cluster analysis: "A cluster analysis... provides 'a survey of the hills and valleys' of the rhetor's mind, resulting in insights into the meanings of key terms and thus a worldview that may not be known to the author" (Foss, 1996, p. 66).

Identifying Key Terms

Because this study is expressly interested in how Chávez characterizes and relates to her mother in *A Taco Testimony*, I chose to focus on the word "Mother" as the key term for this study. I also focused on the pronouns "she" and "her" in the instances that they substituted for the word "Mother." For the sake of simplicity I will refer only to the key term "Mother" for the remainder of this study, though this term also encompasses "she" and "her."

Charting the Clusters

The process of charting the clusters involved closely examining *A Taco Testimony* for each occurrence of the word “Mother,” and identifying the clustering terms around this word. I chose to identify clustering terms as words that appeared within two lines above or below the key term as this strategy tended to encompass both the preceding and following sentence in which the key term is mentioned, in addition to the sentence in which the key term is the subject or object.

Because Chávez sections the chapters of the artifact into a menu, I also divided the artifact into sections to represent the four different courses of a full course meal — appetizers, first course, main course, and dessert. I will draw parallels between the stage of the meal represented as *A Taco Testimony* and the stage of her relationship with her Mother. In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as “a characteristic of language in which we understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another (p.5). I propose that, for Chávez, the stages of a meal serve as a metaphor for the stages of her relationship with her mother.

Appetizers

This stage consisted of analyzing the chapters titled “Aperitif,” “Hors d’Oeuvres” and “Appetizers.” Of the 77 major words clustered around the term ‘Mother’ in this stage, 47 may be considered positive (*heavenly, elegant, beautiful, stylish, unparalleled*). Another 22 terms may be considered negative (*hated, embarrassment, critical, older, demanded*). The other eight words found in this stage refer to tacos (*taco, tortilla, taco table*) or the color blue (*blue, blue window, blue room, blue glass, blueness*).

Key Term: Mother

Taco, tortilla, blue, blue window, blue room, blue glass, blueness, unearthly, heavenly, elegant, loved, passion, well-loved, heart and soul, extraordinary, embracing, beloved, favorite, Father, beautiful, responsible, trusted, stylish, famous, wonderful, sweet, enthusiastic, respected, Taco Table, elusive, effervescent, unparalleled, nourishment, wistful, happy, gracious, legendary, special, unique, all-embracing, whole, memorable, secure, blessed, sacred, lovingly, generous, valuable, activist, tireless, formidable, beauty, mysterious, suffering, struggled, hated, embarrassment, dutiful, well-intentioned, skeptical, critical, girl, jealous, frantic, worry, strict, hard, embarrassing, too difficult, older, expectations, stain, taint, defect, abhorrent, demanded.

First Course

This stage consisted of analyzing the chapters titled “Hot Soup,” “Rice or Pasta” and “Salad.” Of the 107 major words clustered around the term ‘Mother’ in this stage, 56 may be considered negative (*afraid, stigma, bothersome, over-zealous, horrible*) while five may be indicative of puberty and Chávez’s increasing awareness of her changing body (*naked, nude, breasts too large, bleeding sisters, womanhood*). Words used to frame cultural identity are also present in this stage (*Mexican, culture, language, ethnicity, Texan, displacement*). References to tacos (*taco, tortilla, corn*) and the color blue are repeated in this stage as well.

Key Term: Mother

Tacos, memorable, Mexican, culture, language, ethnicity, Texan, hard lives, displacement, mistreatment, respectful, deference, rose above, embrace, difference, blue, kitchen, bedroom, house, naked, nude, unashamedly, steamy, horrible, comforting, trademark, contribution, discreet, comfortable, pristine, embarrass, humiliate,

tenderhearted, inopportune, civic-minded, bothersome, spoiled, restless, over-zealous, persistent, healing, loved, traditional, afraid, divorce, shock, howl, escaped, wept, horrible, hard, dragged, screaming, crushing, ugly, loneliness, older, out-of-step, religious fanatic, onerous, breasts too large, afraid, disliked, severe, tortillas, corn, held tight, dusty, special, curse, imperfection, stigma, suffer, scarred, throbbing, escape, sorrow, struggling, hunched over, brutal, battles, cry, dominated, grateful, annoyed, privilege, trust, relief, admonishing, unhappiness, bedroom, den, tight, breakdown, trouble, sacred, family, nursed, blessing, hope, macho, bleeding sisters, sanctity, womanhood, strength, priorities.

Main Course

This stage consisted of analyzing the sole chapter titled “Main Course.” Of the 108 major words clustered around the term ‘Mother’ in this stage, 49 describe illness, death and grieving (*cancer, death, sobs, despair, grief*). The references to tacos and the color blue are repeated here as well (*taco, tortilla, taco table, blue, blue room, blue window*) as are markers of identity (*language, culture, cultural history, cultured, Texas*), and 41 are positive terms (*effortlessly, opulent, gracious, brilliant*).

Key Term: Mother

Died, cancer, hepatitis, illness, crying, decline, death, dying, hospital, inexorable, taco table, blue, blue room, blue window, blessing, terrible, tribulation, magically, irony, resented, deeply loved, cried out, wept, hard tears, dismay, immeasurable grief, sobs, despair, stunned, devastated, burden, immense, sadness, anorexia, angry, tired, ready to die, torturous, miraculous, mourning, insensitive, unaware, distress, impending, tacos, ordeal, arduous, comforting, language, culture, cultural history, cultured, Texas, distinct,

effortlessly, fluidity, admirable, opulent, gracious, loving, warm, loved, fiercely, hard work, prayer, dutifully, not well, abundant, softly, slowly, patient, accused, avoiding, quieter, sicker, caregiver, illness, brilliant, sweet, struggle, worried, taboo, tried, believed, struggled hard, improper, embarrass, unforgiveable, legacy, food, pinnacle, greatness, kitchen, dignity, heaven.

Dessert

This stage consisted of analyzing the chapters titled “Dessert,” “After-Dinner Digestif,” and “Leftovers.” Of the 46 major words clustered around the term ‘Mother’ in this stage, 12 words describe emotional states of being (*thankfully, compassion, loved, greatness of heart*) and *forgiven* is repeated three times. *Tortillas* are mentioned four times and Chávez uses the words *strange, unusual, and grateful* to describe taking care of her Mother in the last days of her life.

Key Term: Mother

Thankfully, tolerance, love, culture, books, loved, educated, cultured, greatness, forgiven, strange, distracted, battles, fiercely, stubborn, intractable, dramatic, busy, women, compassion, heart, forgiven, tortillas, recipe, quickly, error, fanfare, without, silver, favorite, Mexican, unusual, grateful, old, seasoned, wonder.

Chapter Summary

Chávez begins her memoir at the beginning, in her childhood. As the courses/chapters of her book progress, so Chávez progresses through adolescence, young adulthood and into a woman. By reading through the various clustering terms found in each “course,” one begins to get a sense of the state of Chávez’s relationship with her mother during that course, or stage of her life. For example, clustering terms that crop up

around the term *Mother* in the “Appetizers” course include: *taco, embracing, beloved, wonderful, generous, formidable*. The words suggest a romanticizing of the Mother. However, towards the end of this course, we begin to find words such as: *embarrassment, dutiful, critical, girl, strict, expectations, defects, demanded*. These words are suggestions that Chávez is beginning to transition into young adulthood. She’s beginning to break away from her mother and her expectations and in her desire for individuality her mother becomes an *embarrassment, critical* and *strict*.

During the “First Course” we find clustering terms such as: *tacos, Mexican, culture, language, displacement, mistreatment, horrible, bothersome, divorce, imperfection, bleeding sisters, womanhood*. These terms mark this course/stage with a tinge of hate or criticism for Chávez’s mother but they also indicate adolescent Chávez’s increasing awareness of her ethnic cultural identity and its situated place in her larger national identity: *Mexican, language, displacement, mistreatment*. This stage ends with clustering terms that indicate a transition into womanhood: *sacred, bleeding sisters, sanctity, motherhood, and strength*.

In the “Main Course” we find very real, very adult, realities: *died, cancer, illness, crying, tacos, immeasurable grief, sobs*. Chávez’s mother has just passed away, which is causing Chávez to reassess her identity in relation to her mother. Food is the golden thread woven throughout all of the courses of Chávez’s relationship with her mother: *taco, tortilla, kitchen, table, and nourishment*. And when Chávez is dealing with her mother’s death we begin to see whispers of a temporary death for food, too: *anorexia*.

In the “Dessert” course Chávez wraps up her narrative and summarizes her relationship with her mother clustering terms that express love and gratefulness:

thankfully, love, compassion, heart, grateful. Chávez also recounts her Mother's last days and what it was like to take care of her: *strange, unusual, grateful, arthritic, rubbed.*

Culture appears three times, as does one of her symbols of culture: *tortillas.*

In summary, Chávez begins *A Taco Testimony* at the beginning of her own story, from her childhood. From there we are taken through the stages of adolescence, complete with its bliss (*embracing, beloved*) and its pitfalls (*embarrassment, critical*). As the book progresses into the later stages of Chávez's life her mother is mentioned less frequently but the words she associates with her mother return to words she used in her childhood and to words of gratitude (*love, compassion, grateful*). In the next chapter I will discuss the implications these clustering terms have on the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this thesis is to better understand how women might use food and recipes as vessels of intimacy and legacy as well as how they use food and recipes to navigate and function in mother-daughter relationships. In this chapter I will consider the broader implications of my findings and analysis, answering the research questions set forth at the beginning of this study and reflecting on the implications this study holds for communication theory. I will also consider the limitations of this study and make suggestions for future research.

The findings and implications I present in this thesis highlight new ways food is used as a communicative tool, specifically by women. And though these findings are presented in the context of a mother-daughter relationship, many of the implications will be applicable to women who share food and recipes with one another, everywhere.

Research Questions Revisited

RQ1: *How Does the Artifact Address Chávez's Relationship With Her Mother?*

In *A Taco Testimony*, Chávez organizes the book by following the structure of a full course meal. The sections include: Aperitif, Hors d'Oeuvres, Appetizers, Hot Soup, Rice or Pasta, Salad, Main Course, Dessert, After-Dinner Digestif, and Leftovers. Each section claims several chapters and recipes. In investigating the chapters based on the stages of a full course meal (appetizers, first course, main course, dessert), I discovered that the chapters closely resemble the stages of the Oedipal complex. Analyzing the stages of the meal in terms of the stages of the Oedipal complex reveals a distinct pattern of word usage that creates a snapshot of Chávez's relationship with her mother during the various Oedipal stages of development/courses of a meal.

The Oedipal Complex

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1955) first advanced the Oedipal complex in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries. The name is derived from a 5th-century BC Greek myth about Oedipus, a character who unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother. Freud proposed that the complex is a universal phenomenon of the psyche that can be summed up as a child viewing the parent of the same gender as a sexual rival for the affections of the parent of the opposite gender. This occurs during the psychosexual development stage, between the ages of three and five years old and is only resolved when the child has developed a mature sexual role/identity and can identify with the same-sex parent rather than view him/her as a rival (p. 296).

A Feminist Approach to Psychoanalysis

Though influential and groundbreaking, Freud's Oedipal theory has faced much criticism from feminist scholars who identify Freud's work as lacking a thorough analysis of the female experience and in assuming that female Oedipal complexes can be summed up as having "penis envy" or as women wishing they were male. Juhasz (1994) points out that in fact "Freud's paradigm all but ignores the infant's early relationship with the mother. The story he tells really begins when the father becomes a dominant presence" (p. 16). In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978, 1999), Chodorow argues that because in most cultures mothering is done almost exclusively by women, men and women construct their identities differently and accordingly. Women's selves are constructed in relation to their mothers while men's selves are often socially encouraged to be constructed as more detached or otherwise distant from their connection to their mother.

In the Freudian model of development, mothers are the object of an infant's drives and the fulfillers of its needs. But what Freud fails to acknowledge, perhaps because Freud himself was never a mother, is that the mother is also a subject, with a life and passions that have existed before her child was born and which will continue to exist even after the baby has left her breast. Jessica Benjamin (1988) writes:

The mother is the baby's first object of attachment, and later, the object of desire. She is provider, interlocutor, caregiver, contingent reinforcer, significant other, empathic understander, mirror. She is also a secure presence to walk away from, a setter of limits, an optimal frustrator, a shockingly real outside otherness. She is external reality—but she is rarely regarded as another subject with a purpose apart from her existence for her child. (p.24)

She goes on to summarize that it's in recognizing that the mother is a separate identity, with her own inner world and experiences, that the child reaches an important development achievement which only then makes it possible for a child to establish their own individual identity, whether it's in relation to or detached from their mother's identity.

Stages of the Oedipal Complex

For these reasons, I now turn to Chodorow (1978, 1999) and her feminist approach to identifying the key stages of the Oedipal complex as it occurs in mother-daughter relationships. Chodorow maintains that the feminine Oedipal complex is more than just a transferring of affections from the mother to the father resulting in a complete rejection of the mother. Instead, psychoanalytic research has demonstrated an on-going

importance of a girl's internal and external relations to her mother, and that relations to her father are added to this relationship rather than supplanting it. In accordance with Jung (1982) and Freud (1955), Chodorow identifies three stages of the Oedipal complex: Preoedipal, Oedipal, and Post-Oedipal. Unlike Jung and Freud, Chodorow's description and analysis of the stages are mother/female-centric:

The Preoedipal Stage of Mother-Daughter Relationship

According to Chodorow, a girl's preoedipal relationship with her mother and the resulting entrance into the Oedipal stage is a vastly different experience than that of a boy (1999, p.96). While a boy's preoedipal phase is marked with competitive issues of possession and the preoccupation of the father as a rival, a girl remains preoccupied with the mother alone. This preoccupation lasts for a much longer period than a boy's preoccupation with his father, because the daughter is not only being mothered by the mother but learning to mother, as well. This is manifested in many young girls through their desire to play with dolls (Deutsch, 1944, p. 96).

It is in this stage, I propose, that the myth of the capital M, Mother is created. Juhasz introduces us to the concept of the "capital M, Mother" in *A Desire for Women: Relational Psychoanalysis, Writing, and Relationships Between Women* (2003). She describes this "Mother" as the creation of a child's desire or fantasy:

She is all-loving and all-powerful. Her love is entirely focused upon and available to [her daughter], who sees her as the perfect love object, providing love, nurture, and recognition always. She is indeed, on the level of fantasy and desire, who the [daughter] once was, who the [daughter] thinks she is, and who the [daughter] wants to be. This Mother

is an object, not a subject. (Juhasz, 2003, p. 16)

The “capital M, Mother” is formed in this phase because, to reiterate Juhasz’s (2003) description, the mother was once the daughter, is now who the daughter thinks she herself is as well as who the daughter wants to become (p. 16). And in the artifact, Chávez insists on capitalizing the word “mother” throughout her narrative. “I have done this to pay honor to my [Mother], elevating [her] ... to the echelon of spirit ancestors,” she explains (Chávez, 2006, p. 11). The result of a capital M, Mother is a fantasy, an exalted and all-too-perfect version of the mother. She is beautiful, intelligent, strong, and capable—all of the things the daughter (Chávez) herself hopes to embody.

This exaltation is reflected in the 47 clustering terms of this “Appetizers” course that may be considered positive, even mother-as-fantasy: heavenly, elegant, beautiful, stylish, unparalleled. This image of perfection, however, cannot survive this stage unaltered—because it is in the next stage that a daughter comes to grips with the fact that the capital M, Mother is indeed a myth while she simultaneously is learning to identify herself as separate and differentiate from her mother. Evidence of this transition appears in the clustering terms: hated, embarrassment, critical, older, and demanded. These terms are suggestive of Chávez becoming aware of her girlhood in the shadow of her Mother’s womanhood.

The Oedipal Stage of Mother-Daughter Relationship

To Freud, the major task of the Oedipal stage is preparation for adult heterosexual relationships (Chodorow, 1999, p.111). In this traditional paradigm a girl must transition from her mother being her primary love object, to her father. Chodorow points out that here lies a weakness in the traditional psychoanalytic accounts of a girl’s Oedipal phase

as they do not give as much attention to a girl's Oedipal identification with her mother as they do to the process and outcome of a boy's identification with his father. If they mention it at all, it is to simply say that it happens, but do not go into detail about why or how (p. 113).

In the classical account of the feminine Oedipal complex, a girl completely rejects her mother, seeing her as a sexual rival. This stage is often marked with more embitterment and finality than a boy's parallel stage (Brunswick, 1940, p.238).

Chodorow counters that, in fact, the extended nature of a girl's preoedipal stage creates an omnipotent mother who is the primary object/source of a girl's love and identification. At the Oedipal stage a girl's father is likely to become a symbol of freedom from her dependence and merging with the mother, and so she desires and acts out in ways that will liberate herself from her mother, through a new focus on the father (Chodorow, 1999, p.121- 24). This stage often is marked with a hatred or criticism of the mother. The girl does not, however, give up her internal relationship with her mother. Instead the girl is simply going through a stage in which she is also adding the father to the relationship as a means of creating a boundary, or separate identity, from her mother (Chodorow, 1999, p. 127).

This transition is reflected in this "First Course" stage of Chávez's mother-daughter relationship through the absence of clustering terms that are strongly positive (the most positive are *memorable* and *respectful*). Meanwhile there are nearly 56 negative words (*afraid, stigma, bothersome, over-zealous, and horrible*), and five puberty-associated terms (*naked, nude, breasts too large, bleeding sisters, and womanhood*).

The Post-Oedipal Stage of Mother-Daughter Relationship

Freud argues that the resolution of the Oedipal stage occurs when a child has developed “appropriate” gender identity and heterosexuality. Chodorow counters this by claiming that a daughter will enter the post-oedipal stage of her relationship with her mother only after she is also post-pubertal and has developed a basis of empathy as part of her primary definition of self (1999, pp. 166-67). At this point she also feels it’s important to stress the mother’s side of the Oedipal process:

Because mother’s tend to experience their daughters as more like, and continuous with, themselves... girls tend to remain part of the dyadic primary mother-daughter relationship itself. This means that a girl continues to experience herself as involved in issues of merging and separation. (1999, p.166)

This ongoing sense of self as part of a merging and separation then sets girls up for emerging from the oedipal stage with a stronger inclination to experience someone else’s needs and emotions as her own. A girl will then slightly revert back into the preoedipal stage as it is not a threat to her ego, having been parented by a person of the same gender who, again, embodies the same archetype that she must embody. And because a daughter does not resolve her Oedipal complex to the same extent as a son, she remains in an “ambivalent struggle for a sense of separateness and independence from her mother,” while also continuing to experience herself as a continuation of others (Chodorow, 1999, pp. 168-69).

Reflections of this stage occur in the “Main Course” where preoedipal clustering terms reappear (*opulent, gracious, brilliant*) as well as markers of separateness or

independence (*accused, avoiding, embarrass, improper*). But what really marks this stage is the death of Chávez's mother and the clustering terms (*wept, immeasurable grief, despair, stunned*) that appear to transition Chávez into a new stage, a stage in which she becomes a motherless daughter and a daughterless mother.

The Preoedipal/Postmortem Stage: Motherless Daughters

Here I propose a fourth Oedipal stage, one that occurs after the mother has died. This stage is marked by an extreme return to the preoedipal stage in which the mother is perfect, whole, and complete. She once again embodies everything the daughter is, hopes to be, and once was. In *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss* (2006), Hope Edelman writes of the tendency to over-sentimentalize our mothers after their death by extolling and remembering their ideal characteristics while forgetting or overlooking their faults (p. 253). Sharon Abbey and Charlotte Harris also write about it in their article "Motherline Connections across Cultures and Generations" (2000):

Since our mothers can no longer speak for themselves, we are aware that any text we create can only be written from our viewpoint as daughters, a necessity that continues to silence and objectify them. For the most part, our mothers ... were not willing informants of our work but in no way do we mean to exploit them... we presume to fill in the gaps in order to retell the stories of others in our own voice and, in so doing, enter a space we don't inhabit, and in doing so, annihilate, erase, or reinvent the M/Other, (p. 248).

This return to the preoedipal worship of the capital M, Mother, may function to create a figure larger than life, thus also larger than death, while also serving to advance the

archetype of the mother into the next generation—setting up the granddaughters to view the grandmother as the Great Mother.

In *Aspects of the Feminine*, psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung (1982) describes the grandmother as fulfillment of the Great Mother to the granddaughter because she is not as intimately known, making it easy to transfer all of the fabulous and mysterious qualities the granddaughter loses for the mother during her oedipal stage of development. The grandmother then assumes the attributes of wisdom and the archetype assumes mythological features beyond those of the mother archetype. This exaltation of the grandmother, says Jung, can be demonstrated in the funerary practices of the Bataks. A service for a dead father is modest and rather ordinary. However if the father had lived to become a grandfather he had consequently gained a greater status in the Beyond and elaborate and important funerary services were in order (p.132). It becomes easy for the grandmother to become the Great Mother to both the mother and the granddaughter after the grandmother's passing when she can no longer speak for herself, as pointed out previously by Abbey and Harris (2000), and thus becomes a vessel for her descendants to pour their hopes, nostalgia, and desires into.

Chávez herself never had any children. Interestingly, Juhasz (2003) points out that readers and writers often enact a mother-daughter relationship of sorts: the writer acts as daughter, seeking approval from her mother (the reader) through her efforts. Meanwhile the reader also acts as daughter, eagerly scanning the pages of the writer/mother's text; looking for a glimpse of herself, recognition, or an admitted understanding of herself as a part of the writer/mother (pp. 28-31). Because Chávez is bringing her own mother, Delfina, into the story I suggest that Chávez is ushering her mother into the role of the

Great Mother—for Chávez's memoir is a practice in passing down the legacy of her mother to her daughter-readers.

In my own legacy as a daughter and as a granddaughter, there is a recipe for Raisin Cake that functions in the same manner—a recipe that elevates my grandmother to the role of Great Mother, if only because through this recipe I know that my mother was greatly mothered. The cake serves as one of my mother's fondest memories of her childhood—a childhood that was filled with hard work and little time for personal attention or affection from her mother. My grandmother, an Okanagan woman, was largely a single mother of four children. My grandfather died when my mother was young and though I'm told he loved my grandmother dearly, he never married her. He was Anglo, and he had an Anglo family. Not only was it scandalous to divorce in those days, but it was even more scandalous for a white man to leave his white family for a brown woman. And so when he died, she was entitled to nothing, and in fact, his estranged wife and kids took from her whatever they could. Thus, she was a single mother, a Native woman, in the 1960s, trying to run a ranch (the only life she'd ever known) and keep her four children fed and clothed. There wasn't much time for affection or much money for anything in general.

On top of that, my grandmother lost her own mother at an early age and was then raised in a boarding school ran by the Canadian government and meant to assimilate First Nations children into the dominate culture. Her hair was cut, her language silenced, and she wasn't allowed to communicate with her brother and sister, who were also at the boarding school. She was fed oatmeal with maggots in it and forced to spend school vacations working for non-Native families rather than with her own family. She was

raised by an institution that inherently hated her and which provided little in the way of love, affection, and recognition. It is in this context that I invite you to read my mother's story about my grand/mother's raisin cake.

Mummy's Raisin Cake

"This cake is special to me. As you know, I've tried hard to locate the recipe over the years. I believe our cousin Linda Antoine Goodwin has the original, but I have no idea how to reach her. Aunt Cowboy says she doesn't live in Keller anymore.

[Your] Grandma would make this cake about once a week. It is a simple "Depression-era" cake, made without eggs because eggs were a luxury during the Depression. It's special to me because, first of all, we loved the cake, but even more importantly I have memories of Mummy taking the time to bake it no matter how busy she was with the ranching and haying. I'm talking about when we lived up here at Deer Creek when I was a little girl, not at the Malo ranch.

Sometimes the cake would burn because the oven (a woodstove oven) would be too hot. Sometimes it was too gooey in the middle because the oven was too cold. Sometimes the edges would be thick and hard, overdone, but it didn't matter, we all loved the cake!! Mummy mixed it all by hand, we didn't own an electric mixer. We would get handfuls of raisins to eat while she mixed the cake, and stories about her youth or events of the day. It was a time when, for just a few minutes, we had Mum to ourselves, without the ranch interfering. I can still see her whipping the batter by hand, with a wooden spoon. It looked so easy! When she let me do it, I was surprised that I couldn't whip the batter like she could; my arm got tired too fast!

It's kind of funny, the one recipe and memory I have of good times as a little girl is this, the raisin cake. I think this makes a full small pan, not a 13x9.”

The Recipe

Preheat oven to 350 degrees

2 cups raisins
2 cups water
1 cup sugar
2/3 cup shortening
2 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp nutmeg
3 tsp baking soda
2 cups flour

Put raisins, water and sugar in large saucepan and bring to boil for 5 minutes. Add shortening and turn off burner. Add cinnamon and nutmeg. Let cool until just warm. If you forget the time just slightly warm raisin/mix till shortening melts again. Add baking soda. It will foam. Stir till mixed. Add flour. Mix (stir with a spoon) lightly until all flour is wet (will look like regular cake batter). Grease and flour cake pan. Put in glass or metal pan and cook at 350 degrees for 30-35 minutes till toothpick comes out clean. Cool and enjoy.”

Question Summary

As Chávez recounts her life among her mother and tacos, she recounts and relives the stages of the Oedipal complex. And in the wake of her mother’s death she chooses to nestle into a new stage the more closely resembles the preoedipal stage rather than the post-oedipal stage. And in doing so she creates a mother larger-than-life, a Great Mother, while also returning to the preoedipal stage in which she and her mother were closest, were one. Though of course, outside of her narrative, the death of Chávez’s mother has separated them as far as physically possible. But it’s in this physical separation that Chávez’s narrative is given room to breathe and expand into a life of its own. A Taco Testimony, then, becomes Chávez’s recipe for returning to the stage in which there was no difference nor separation between herself and her mother; while simultaneously

navigating the complexities of their shared life, separate identities, and a desire for legacy.

RQ2: *What Associations Does Chávez Make Between Food and Her Relationship With Her Mother?*

Chávez so intimately associates tacos with her mother that at times she turns to tacos to stand in for her mother in her mother's absence. Delfina Chávez died on April 26, 1983, and what followed, says Chávez, were tacos. Hundreds and hundreds of tacos. Chávez recounts how tacos and other family recipes have served her as navigational objects between major life events and other milestones. She writes, "I have made tacos [when flustered and hostile], as well as when I was sad, lost and depressed. Tacos have brought me back from the brink" (Chávez, 2006, p. 120). Food, specifically tacos, serves many functions between Chávez and her mother in *A Taco Testimony* (2006). It serves as both a reason and a vessel for bonding, and it is a legacy, an inheritance. But food also serves as a tangible link to her mother: past, present and future. In the absence of her mother, whether in distance or in death, Chávez repeatedly turns to food, specifically her mother's tacos, to stand in as a surrogate mother.

For example, one of the most significant events of Chávez's life occurred in graduate school. Chávez was over extended, suffered depression and an eating disorder, was using drugs and was what she calls homesick and heartsick (pp.108-10). One night, she began to unravel into a nervous breakdown. What saved her, she says, is the need to make tacos. She bought the ingredients and started preparing the tacos. Interspersed between the steps of making the meal, she would lie down and give into "It." Then she'd

get back up, needing to finish the tacos. “Having spent my illness on taco making, only then did I go to bed. Tacos can save your life. They did mine that night” (pp.111-12).

Tacos served as her navigation back to herself. “I remember the night of the tacos,” she writes. “I remember how I turned back to the self that knew what she was doing and how to do it. My faith was and is a thing familiar, as familiar and sacred as a corn tortilla on a hot comal” (p. 113). Tacos brought Chávez back to herself. But to come back to herself, Chávez first had to go back to her mother, back to the food that is so synonymous with her mother.

Recent research has suggested that to avoid feelings of loneliness, people sometimes seek out social surrogates, or nonhuman social objects—food being chief among them (Derrick, Gabriel, & Hugenberg, 2009). In “Chicken Soup Really is Good for the Soul: Comfort Food Fulfills the Need to Belong,” Troisi and Gabriel (2011) hypothesize that certain foods become associated with comfort because people have been repeatedly exposed to them in the presence of significant relational partners. This explains how Chávez’s exposure to tacos both through and with her mother leads her to reach to tacos in the absence of her mother. Tacos are a surrogate mother bringing comfort and assurance whether she is having a nervous breakdown, has a hangover, is sad, or is lonely.

“There have been other times when tacos and the love of family have saved my life. As anyone knows, tacos can cure you if you have a cruda, a hangover of any kind. They can soften your sadness, ease the pain and set the brokenness in you back on the bed where it can rest awhile and then go

to sleep like an overheated petulant child, a child that doesn't know how deeply it is hurting itself. Amen I say. Amen.” (pp. 113-14)

In 1951, D.W. Winnicott, a pediatrician-come-psychoanalyst, first proposed the idea that infants seek out and use what he calls “transitional objects” to help or comfort them as they transition through development stages. A transitional object, posits Winnicott (1971), is an object that infants latch onto as they transition into stages of growth and maturation. These objects can be their fingers, a blanket, a stuffed animal, etc. One of Winnicott's young patients had a fixation with string and attached it to all sorts of random objects around his house. Winnicott proposed that the string and the desire to connect things are the boy's methods for dealing with separation from his mother due to the birth of another child, as well as various operations and bouts of depression he has suffered. The fixation came and went between the ages of four and 11 years for the boy (p. 15).

According to Winnicott, the phenomenon of transition, and the objects associated with it, first occurs in the “potential space” between a baby and mother. This space is both an actual playground and the conceptual stage where culture originates. Experiencing this space starts when an infant first detects the “me” and “not me.” At birth this distinction is implausible, but soon the mother's breasts become the first transition between stages of being one with the mother, and of becoming a separate identity (p.11).

Food, then, is also the first transitional, or surrogate, object—in the form of a mother's breast milk. But more than that, the desire for food is the first meaningful need a human communicates—it is the first meaningful communication. An infant cries and her mother provides the breast that provides the nourishment and comfort. The provision of

this food is the first act of love a human palpably receives. This food is then not only the first method of bonding with another human, but sets the stage for food to serve as a vessel of the expression of love and bonding with and between all humans throughout their lives. And when a person is not physically present to express love and reaffirm a bond, food can stand in as their surrogate.

Whenever Chávez is lost or upset, ecstatic or calm, there are tacos. Time and time again the familiar taco has eased Chávez into the unfamiliar, holding her while she's afraid, showing her the way home when she's lost and cheering for her when she's succeeded. "A good taco session can cure the nastiest blues and remind you once again why you love life," (p.193). Tacos are first and to all, nourishment. To Chávez, however, tacos are also a link, an extension of, the Mother, and of the nourishment the Mother provides. This is self-evident when "mother" is supplanted for "tacos" in the above quoted excerpt from Chávez's memoir:

"As anyone knows, a [Mother] can cure you if you have a cruda, a hangover of any kind. [She] can soften your sadness, ease the pain and set the brokenness in you back on the bed where it can rest awhile and then go to sleep like an overheated petulant child, a child that doesn't know how deeply it is hurting itself ... A good [Mother] can cure the nastiest blues and remind you once again why you love life." (p. 193)

Food has also served as a link to my Mother, as a vessel of bonding and as legacy for me as well. Except in place of tacos I have huckleberry muffins. Huckleberries are an important and much loved berry of the Pacific Northwest that are "in season" for only

one or two weeks a year, in the late summer, and which grow in mid-alpine regions. Part of their appeal is that they refuse to be domesticated. Scientists/botanists have tried to domestic the plant to no avail. Thus, if you want to enjoy the ruddy purple berry you have little choice but to pack a picnic, the kids, and head to the mountains to find a good patch to pick from.

I have many sunny memories of doing just that with my sisters, parents, and grandmother. Huckleberries are an important and much loved berry to my family because for countless generations they have been both enjoyed by, and necessary to, my Okanagan ancestors. And in fact one of my grandmother's only remaining memories of her own grandmother, my great-great grandmother, is a time when she joined her at berry camp. An entire community packed up and headed to the mountains for a few days of picking, feasting, communing, and preparing the fruit for winter sustenance. I love this story and its implications for what it means to be a community and to center community activities around the harvest, preparing, and feasting of food.

In the late summers my own family would spend an afternoon picking berries. We often ate as much as we picked but nonetheless we'd manage to come home with two or three gallons of berries. Some of the berries were used immediately in a pie or as topping for shortcake, but the rest were placed in the freezer to be carefully rationed out over the winter, in pancakes and in muffins—gentle reminders of the fruits and of the glory of summer in the cold and dark Northwest winters. My sisters remember the immediate pleasure of the berries—rinsing them and enjoying them the very day we gathered them. But I remember the occasional cold, dark, winter mornings when my mother would resurrect the berries.

On these mornings my two sisters and I would wake up to the smell of something warm and sweet baking. Then the cold, dark morning would become punctuated with the sound of three sets of frantic little feet racing to the kitchen, shouting: “Get up! Get up! Mom is making muffins!” And there was never any doubt as to what kind of muffins they were, for there was only one kind: Huckleberry. To me, early morning batches of huckleberry muffins are still the ultimate expression of love, devotion, and the pleasure of surprising a loved one with a favored food.

Question Summary

Whether tacos or muffins, chicken soup, or grilled cheese sandwiches, preparing and eating food has a social component that leads to an emotional component. When we socialize over food we create intimacies and bonds with other human beings, other members of our community. When we’re lonely or alone and craving the social and emotional bonds of our community, food can serve as a surrogate for the social—for the relationships we associate with that food.

In *A Taco Testimony*, tacos take on an emotional and social component that Chávez associates with her mother. When she is sick, upset, or lonely Chávez instinctively turns to tacos to provide the emotional comfort she needs in the absence of her mother. “Mother let me find my way back to health. Her food helped me and surely jump-started the healing,” she writes (p. 114). Because her relationship with food is associated with her relationship with her mother, when she experiences the social and emotional death of her mother, she temporarily experiences the social and emotional death of her appetite for food.

RQ3: *How Does the Artifact Function as a General Navigation of Mother-Daughter Relationships?*

The act of writing A Taco Testimony serves not only to document Chávez's life, but the book as a whole serves as a navigation of her relationship with her mother. However, when reading and analyzing Chávez's story, though it is uniquely her story, it has enough generalities that often span over the stories of most women, of most daughters, that I have concluded that the artifact has much to communicate about the general navigation of the mother archetype. Navigating and exploring the archetype of the mother is an important part of the process when women desire to understand their roles and experiences as daughters and as mothers.

According to Jung (1982), the archetype of the mother is a structure in the psyche of all human beings. He defines archetype as an inherited idea or mode of thought that is derived from the collective experience of a group of people (culture, ethnicity, family) and is present in the unconscious of an individual (Merriam- Webster). In Jung's psychological framework, archetypes are innate, universal prototypes for ideas and may be used to interpret observations. In *Aspects of the Feminine* (1982), he writes:

Even if all proofs of existence of archetypes were lacking, and all the clever people in the world succeeded in convincing us that such a thing could not possibly exist, we would have to invent them forthwith in order to keep our highest and most important values from disappearing into the unconscious.

(p.122)

Chodorow (1978, 1999) echoes this in the preface her book, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, when she writes of the “inextricable interconnectedness and mutual

constitution of psyche, society, and culture” (p. x). And in *Goddesses in Everywoman*, Jungian analyst Jean Shinoda Bolen (1984) describes the mother archetype as a “powerful archetype [that] can dictate the course a woman’s life will take, [and] can have a significant impact on others in her life” (p. 171).

Analysis of the mother archetype (the general mother), then, is as unavoidable as it is important because, as Jung (1982) writes, the mother is the first world of the child and the last world of the adult (p. 123). He adds that this makes the mother the single most powerful and important archetype that we hold in our psyche as a child lives in “complete participation” with her mother (or a mother-like figure) in the first few years of life and development (p.132). He goes on to say that this is especially true in the case of mother-daughter relationships where “only in women is it possible to examine the effects of the mother archetype without admixture” of the male interpretation of the female archetype (p. 123).

Chávez sets the stage for food and story to serve as a vessel both in homage and in navigation of the mother archetype in the preface of her book. Here she gives her daughter-readers a Huichol myth: The Corn Mother. She writes:

The Mother of the Maíz changed her form from that of a dove and adopted human form; she presented to the boy her five daughters, who symbolized the five sacred colors of maíz: white, red, yellow, speckled, and blue. As the young man was hungry, the Mother of the Maíz gave him a pot full of tortillas and a jar of atole; he didn’t think it would sate his hunger, but the tortillas and the atole magically renewed themselves so much so that he couldn’t finish them. The Mother of the Maíz requested that he pick one of

her daughters. He selected the Blue Corn Girl, the most beautiful and sacred of all. (Chávez, 2006)

This myth sets up and symbolizes the role of Chávez's mother in her own life as well as in her memoir. On the page preceding this legend she writes a dedication: For my mother, Delfina Rede Faver Chávez. La Muchacha del Maíz Azul. "La Muchacha del Maíz Azul," translates from Spanish to English as "The Blue Corn Girl." Turning the page and encountering the myth puts the dedication into context: Chávez is placing her mother into the myth. Her mother is "the most beautiful and sacred of all," and her mother is directly responsible for all things corn. If her mother is responsible for all things corn then it follows that she is also responsible for the food that flows from the corn and the relationships that flow from the sharing of food.

Myths are the expression of archetypes (Segal, 1999, p. 71) and when archetypes are expressed through myth, it enables humans to experience the archetype (Segal, 1999, p. 77), meaning it allows people to move through the systems, roles, and expectations of the archetype. In other words, myths serve as a road map of sorts, helping one navigate through common, over-arching themes/trials/stages of life. Mythologist Joseph Campbell reiterates this idea of myths as an expression and experience of archetypes in *The Power of Myth* (1988), "Myth helps you to put your mind in touch with this experience of being alive. It tells you what the experience is" (p. 6).

Using the myth, Chávez sets up the Mother of the Maíz to serve as her Great Mother, mother to her mother, the Blue Corn Girl. The Mother of the Maíz presents her five daughters to a young man, but interrupts the presentation when she notices he's hungry. Before proceeding, she feeds him tortillas and atole—both corn-based foods—

and once his hunger is sated, she allows him to choose a daughter to sate his loneliness, his need for companionship. He chooses Blue Corn Girl as a companion, and Chávez chooses Blue Corn Girl as her mother.

In addition to associating her mother with Blue Corn Girl in the legend, Chávez also associated the color blue with her mother throughout her narrative in *A Taco Testimony*, as evidenced in the cluster analysis. The color appeared as a clustering term in all four courses/stages and warranted a closer look. In order to better understand Chávez's associations with the color blue I performed a small cluster analysis on the color. The color appeared the most frequently in the "Appetizers" or Preoedipal stage of her life — appearing 24 times. The clustering terms surrounding the word 'blue' are consistent with the analysis of that stage: whimsy, nostalgia, and a romanticizing of that time/of her mother. The words include *home, attention, memories, Mother, ethereal, mysterious, spiritual, danced, elegant, legendary*. "Mother" was the clustering term repeated most frequently: 13 times.

In the Oedipal stage (First Course), the stage in which Chávez is attempting to construct her own identity apart from her mother, the color blue is only mentioned twice. "Mother" is associated with the color once, while "shoe" and "knife," incidental household objects, are mentioned four and three times, respectively. These associations may be evidence of Chávez's attempt to emotionally detach from her mother at this stage of her development. She is no longer romanticizing her mother and is instead very grounded in the reality of the physical world around her.

In the Post-Oedipal stage (Main Course), "blue" is mentioned six times and the clustering terms are a mix between emotional relationships and physical objects.

“Mother” is clustered around the word seven times, “sister” twice and “husband” makes an appearance. Her mother is dying in this stage of the narrative, and several clustering terms reflect that: *dying, upset, mourned, dreamt*. As does the desire to pass on her mother’s legacy: *children, kitchen, food, feast, dough, tortillas, attentive*. Finally, in the Post Mortem stage (Dessert), the color blue appears only three times and is associated with properties of life: *mothers, fathers, ancestors, blood, pulse, music, home*. Chávez has worked through the loss of her mother and has returned to associating the color with affirmations of life and of living — life goes on.

Question Summary

By closely analyzing her associations with the color blue, there is evidence of just how closely she relates the color to her mother. The color permeates all of the stages of the Oedipal complex in her relationship with her mother, just as it permeates/is central to the myth of the Mother of the Maíz. And by making her mother Blue Corn Girl, Chávez transforms her mother into something highly metaphoric and sacred. Her mother becomes an all-encompassing giver of life, nurture, and sustenance. She becomes a Goddess, a capital M, Mother of mythical proportions. She becomes an archetype without whom there would be no corn, no food, no relationship—both for the boy in the myth and for Chávez. Chávez uses the myth to give her readers a relationship to work with, to be a part of, to step into in order to experience and understand the archetype of the Mother. Some might say she is offering up her own story in much the same way—as an archetype.

Chapter Summary

Underlying Chávez's "meditations on family, food and culture" is a navigation of both Chávez's own relationship and identity to/with her mother as well as a navigation of the archetype of the mother. *A Taco Testimony* is ultimately a vessel meant to carry the story of Chávez's own journey as well as her mother's legacy. The memoir addresses Chávez's relationship with her mother by serving as a witness for Chávez's evolution through the stages of the Oedipal complex. The Oedipal complex dictates that Chávez progresses from identifying completely with and worshipping her mother to searching out and claiming her own identity as a woman separate/yet-part-of her mother. After her mother passes away Chávez returns to a stage of sentimentalizing/demi-worshipping her mother. The book chronicles that journey while also laying out the map, complete with signposts in the form of recipes and the stories of their context.

In the wake of her mother's death and in the absence of her own children, Chávez sets down her mother's story, her own story, and their shared recipes into *A Taco Testimony*, which now also functions as a vessel to carry on her mother's legacy, exalting her into the realm of the Great Mother. "Among my Mother's greatest gifts to me were ... her tacos," writes Chávez (p. 74). So intimately entwined in Chávez's psyche, socially and emotionally, are tacos and her mother that in her mother's absence, whether that absence is due to distance or death, Chávez turns to tacos to stand as a surrogate for the love, support, comfort and healing that she needs from her mother, but which she takes from tacos.

Finally, Chávez's narrative of her mother and its uncovered associations with the Oedipal complex make the story relatable/accessible to most women (who have had a

significant “mother” figure in their lives) and thus serves as a general map or navigation of the archetype of the mother. Chávez takes the navigation of the mother archetype a step further by inserting her mother into a myth, which functions to offer further insight into her experience of her mother and of the mother archetype. To Chávez, Mother is sacred, nourishing, exalted, giver-of-life, and giver-of-corn (food)—from which come tortillas. Which are turned into tacos. And Chávez has a few stories about tacos.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the well-mothered daughter requires the opportunity to act as a mother herself, to extend home and nurture into the society and into the future.

(Juhasz, 1994, p. 13)

In the male-dominated field of psychoanalysis, it has generally been thought that children go through an Oedipal complex designed to either a) secure their place in the world as dominant, heterosexual males; or b) cause females to leave their mother for the preference of their fathers in a state of “penis-envy.” In the feminist approach to psychoanalysis, however, it’s been shown that when females go through the stages of the Oedipal complex they add their relationship with their father to their preexisting relationship with their mother, rather than supplanting it altogether.

This study highlights how food and recipes can become a powerful vehicle of expression for daughters when navigating their entwined identity with their mother. *A Taco Testimony* is Chávez’s tribute to her mother, and it is an attempt by Chávez to untangle her story from her mother’s, to say, “here, these bits are yours and these bits are mine.” But *A Taco Testimony*, is also her effort to both respond to her mother’s legacy and recreate her relationship with her mother. As she relives memories of her mother, always punctuated with tacos, she is ensuring that the relationship spins on, sustaining itself decades after Delfina Chávez has passed away. The recipes emphasizing her story become bridges, uniting the life experiences and stories of each woman, acknowledging that they are two separate forks of the same river.

The story Chávez creates also leads her readers to the mouth of the river, to the Great Mother, or the archetype of the mother. Chávez invites us, her daughter readers, to come—sit close—and be gathered to the Great Mother’s bosom. *A Taco Testimony* is

Chávez's effort to understand her mother while also gaining a clearer picture of herself as her mother's daughter. It's in this way that Chávez passes down her own legacy to her daughter-readers. She *is* the well-mothered daughter exercising an opportunity to extend her own mothering into society. As she navigates the Mother Archetype by retelling her own story, she also offers her readers her own mother, invites them to consider her a Great Mother, and tells her story, conjoined with her mothers and tasting of tacos. And at the end, when her readers sit down at the Taco Table with her, Chávez too can take her place as a Great Mother. She's equipped her daughter readers with the knowledge, the history, and (most importantly) the recipe of her tacos and her readers are now equipped to use the tacos as a surrogate mother when feeling lonely, depressed, sick, or even celebratory.

Future Implications

In light of my analysis, findings and discussion, I would like to suggest a few possible ways this study may be of use to future studies. First, though it's well-known that actions performed in the presence of others tend to bypass the functional and take on a communicative (symbolic) value (Montanari, 2004, p. 93), and that food and eating are a social activity, the two have often been overlooked in the field of communication as a worthwhile area of study. This thesis offers new insights into how humans may use food to communicate their identity to others as well as to reinforce or reaffirm their identity to themselves.

This study can also contribute to psychoanalytical discussion about the Oedipal complex and its transformation postmortem—when the daughters (who never fully resolve their Oedipal complex) become motherless (Chodorow, p. 166). Up to this point

there hasn't been much, if any, discussion about a daughter's Oedipal experience when she loses her mother. This study may contribute to understanding how women may use food to adapt to the death of their mother while also using it to communicate, negotiate, and even establish a self-identity in dialogue with their mother's self-identity.

This study also provides deeper insight to the social surrogacy theory proposed by Derrick, Gabriel, & Hugenberg (2009). This theory proposes that to avoid feelings of loneliness, people sometimes seek out social surrogates, or nonhuman social objects (such as food) to stand in for the emotional bonds they're missing or craving from familiar relationships. "Comfort food" is such an example of a social surrogate. This study provides further evidence to just how someone might use food to stand in as a surrogate in times of not only loneliness, but also distress, illness, and even celebration. Chávez uses her mother's food to heal and comfort herself in her mother's absence and she also uses it to celebrate or mark special occasions. The food not only serves as a surrogate mother but also as a reaffirmation that she is a daughter.

Finally, most research that has been conducted on mother-daughter relationships and food make connections between the mother-daughter relationship and eating disorders or other health concerns. In these studies a mother's negative or controlling relationship with food is usually identified as contributing to the daughter's similar relationship. This study contributes to the discussion of the positive influence/legacy a mother may have on her daughter's relationship with food and how that relationship may extend into other areas of the daughter's well-being. This study also takes a woman's relationship to food beyond body-image and health and into the emotional and even spiritual.

Limitations

This study touts recipes and cookbooks to be tools of legacy, intimacy, and identity; however, recipes and cookbooks also have limits and dangers that were not discussed in this thesis. First, exactly because recipes and cookbooks are tools of legacy, intimacy, and identity, some women prefer to keep the knowledge to themselves, refusing to freely share, publish, or otherwise distribute the knowledge. One woman told Avakian (2005) that she'd become livid when non-Armenian friends tried to cook Armenian food. "I felt like I was being robbed of my —what made us special, I think," she told her. She added that the food was "all we have left" and that it should be kept to themselves to protect their legacy (p. 266). Another woman said she refused to give out her family recipes to protect the intimacy and sacredness that goes along with the way the women in her family prepare food, which is:

Almost like it's a secret code that preserves family integrity and cultural integrity that I don't want to give away ... it's like a sacred act being able to prepare this food that grandmother after grandmother after grandmother has prepared ... [it] helps [me] feel connected. (p. 266)

And just as food and recipes can be elevated to the sacred, they can be brought down to the profane: to corporate commercialism. Betty Crocker and Ann Pillsbury (fictional human predecessor to the Pillsbury Dough Boy) are examples of corporations using recipes to advertise to women and to encourage them to buy their products. Both women were/are fictional human faces for commercial food corporations (Betty Crocker "works" for Gold Medal Flour) and beginning the 1950's, the women began sharing recipes, calling for specific brands of ingredients, with every American woman within

earshot (Shapiro, 2004). The intimacy they were trying to foster had a financial legacy tied to it — and with recipes relying on multiple processed food items, health and cultural legacies were also at stake and vulnerable.

Cookbooks, by their very nature, also presuppose some degree of literacy and, argues Appadurai (1988), an effort on the part of a “specialist” to standardize the kitchen, transmit culinary lore, and to otherwise guide the journey of food from marketplace to table (p. 3). Appadurai argues that this makes cookbooks “not only structures of production and distribution and of social and cosmological schemes, but of class and hierarchy” (p. 3). His criticism of cookbook is that they allow women from one group to explore the tastes of women from another group while simultaneously allowing the women to be represented to one another (p. 6) and these representations are often controlled by a class/hierarchy of women with the privilege and power, but not necessarily the inside cultural knowledge, to write the books in the first place. The result is a watered-down “body of food-based characterizations of the ethnic Other” (p. 15); of the women, the ingredients, the occasions, and even the experiences, that make up the dishes.

Finally, this study only addresses what could be considered a healthy mother-daughter relationship. There were no accounts of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. The study hinges on Chávez’s intimate relationship with her mother and her mother’s recipes and so it would be worthwhile in the future to examine mother-daughter relationships in which the mother is absent (physically, emotionally, etc.) and/or in which recipes are absent (the mother doesn’t cook/doesn’t cook well). It would also be worthwhile to examine the relationship daughters have with food when they grow up in an

undernourished environment—whether due to the absence of a nurturing mother-figure or the absence of nurturing food. Studying what makes food “nurturing” would also be interesting. Does nurturing or comforting food come from stories and memories of someone lovingly preparing the food for us, or can the stories and memories of someone lovingly going out to buy the food for us also make food nurturing?

APPENDICES

Tacos a la Delfina

Preheat oven to 350 degrees

2 pounds hamburger meat (lean but not too lean)

1 small onion, diced

Fresh garlic

1 can (15 ounces) sweet green peas or potatoes or corn.

Comino/ground cumin to taste (use sparingly as it goes a long way)

Salt to taste

Garlic powder or more fresh garlic, to taste

Oil for cooking tortillas

A family pack of 3-dozen corn tortillas

Shredded cheese, such as Longhorn, Monterey Jack, Colby, or mild Cheddar

Fry the hamburger with the onion and fresh garlic. Drain the peas, potatoes, or corn and save the juice. Add the vegetables to the meat and mash it all together. Add *comino*, salt, additional garlic and saved vegetable juice. Simmer.

Heat oil in a skillet. Allow the meat mixture to cool while you fry the tortillas in just enough oil to soften them.

Fill the tacos with the meat filling, about 2 tablespoons, rolling them into cylinders, *cara*/face to the inside (the *cara* refers to the side of the tortilla that hits the skillet first—it is always darker than the other side).

Place the rolled tortillas onto a cookie sheet and bake until crisp. Sprinkle with cheese and serve.

Lucy's Raisin Cake

Preheat oven to 350 degrees

2 cups raisins
2 cups water
1 cup sugar
2/3 cup shortening, like Crisco
2 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp nutmeg
3 tsp baking soda
2 cups flour

Put raisins, water and sugar in large saucepan and bring to boil for 5 minutes. Add shortening and turn off burner. Add cinnamon and nutmeg. Let cool until just warm. If you forget the time just slightly warm raisin/mix till shortening melts again.

Add baking soda. It will foam. Stir till mixed. Add flour. Mix (stir with a spoon) lightly till all flour is wet (will look like regular cake batter). Grease and flour cake pan. Put in glass or metal pan and cook at 350 degrees for 30-35 minutes till toothpick comes out clean. Cool and enjoy.

Bonnie's Huckleberry Muffins

Preheat oven to 400 degrees

1 c. oatmeal
1 c. milk
1 egg
¼ c. oil
1 c. flour
1/3 c. sugar
2 t. baking powder
¼ t. salt
½-1 c. huckleberries

Combine oatmeal, milk, egg, and oil. Set aside for 15 minutes.

Combine flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Make a well in the center of dry ingredients. Add oat/milk mix until moist, mix will be lumpy.

Bake 18-20 minutes. Makes 12 muffins.

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