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A MEXICAN AMERICAN'S INTROSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY AND
EMBODIMENT OF THE LESTER HORTON TECHNIQUE

By

Fernando Carrillo

presented in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Dance

Hollins University
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Dedication

I am forever grateful to Mrs. Carmen de Lavallade for her mentorship and support. We share a special friendship. I would like to dedicate my thesis work to Mrs. De Lavallade for always being a guiding light.



Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my parents for always being open minded and allowing me to live life without limits. I also would like to thank all the teachers I studied with who were instrumental in my growth as an artist and teacher. Thank you for allowing me to step into new territory with your full support. At Hollins University, I thank Jeffery N. Bullock, Melinda Rawlinson, Orfeas Skutelis, and Maurya Kerr.



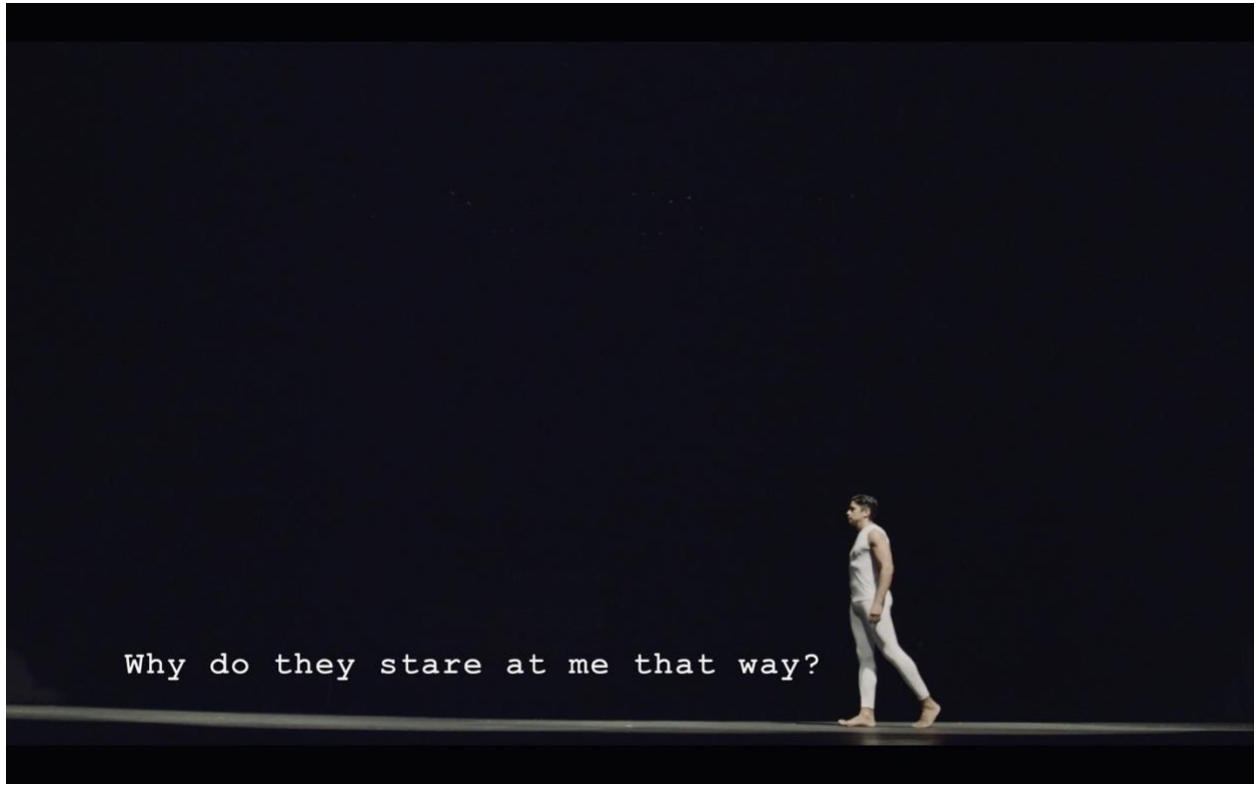
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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I analyze the cultural complexity I embody as a Mexican American. By revealing and naming the invisible power dynamics of white supremacy through a multiplicity of perspectives, I explain and give examples of stereotypes imposed on me and how it benefits whiteness. Having adapted to American culture, I have created a cultural multiplicity that has steered me away from my Mexican culture. I express the conflict of my consciousness when I feel I do not belong in specific spaces because of my heritage or tokenism. The embodiment of the Lester Horton Technique is my passport to navigate through life as a Mexican American as it opens doors to dance institutions and spaces, which can be challenging in becoming a part of their faculty or group.

I share what it was to have been a native of the borderlands between the United States and Mexico. Being born in El Paso, Texas, and being able to travel across the border to Mexico multiple times per week gave me a sense of belonging to two cultures and two countries. Growing up with a dual cultural identity has allowed me to see life through multiple perspectives. As I get older, I become more aware of my cultural identity and the oppression I face because of my heritage. It has been an interesting dynamic, having to code-switch subconsciously to navigate life and find a place I can call home as I try to become a part of society and gain visibility.

I have created a visual manifestation of my thesis where I see myself through the gaze of the oppressor in society and how I embody my cultural identity. In this creative manifestation, I explore the exhausting feelings which take a toll on me and can be draining. I seek to transmit the sensation of wanting to shed the stereotypes and toss them away from me. I work through the inner conflict I experience, from having to assimilate

to institutionalized whiteness to fit into their groups. I embody the process I encounter throughout my life as I try to belong and feel I am a part of society. Because of the stereotypes imposed on me, sometimes I may lose out on opportunities, and sometimes I am the token. They welcome me with open arms in ways that benefit the oppressor. The white institutions accept me into their spaces because I become an individual who can fill in a position of diversity due to my Mexican American heritage. In the creative manifestation of my life, I embrace the emotions and the mental process of code-switching and bear witness to the gaze of the oppressor.



MEXICAN BORDERLANDS HISTORY

In the 1800s, Anglos moved into Texas, which was still part of Mexico. They drove the Tejanos (native Texans of Mexican descent) to move out of Texas as they became a more significant number. Their illegal invasion made Mexico go into The Battle of the Alamo to try to keep their land. In 1836 Texas became a republic, and Mexico lost their land, making them foreigners overnight. In 1846 the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California were taken over by U.S. troops in an invasion. This U.S.-Mexican war pushed the border 100 miles south toward El Río Grande. Two years later, they built the border fence dividing Mexico and the United States. The Anglos stripped the Indians and the Mexicans of their land despite being firmly rooted. Mexicans in the U.S. felt forced to look at the border as a metaphor for what it means to exist in two different cultures.¹ Being aware of the history of how the U.S. took away part of Mexico's land allows me to understand why I am viewed as an immigrant or as the "other," someone who is of a marginalized group.

Mexicans in America are often overlooked and made invisible in society and have the stereotype of being the ones doing the jobs considered substandard. I feel I am not fully from Mexico or the United States in terms of my culture and social structure. I am a mestizo person of Indian and Spanish blood, and I feel like an outsider within two countries, two languages, two social systems, and two cultures. In my case, living with a Chicano/mestizo consciousness makes me part of the *mezcla* (hybridity), which has created a third space: the mestizo consciousness. I can join both identities together and work out a synthesis, "its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps

¹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands = La FRONTERA: The NEW MESTIZA*. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2021), 29.

breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.”² I identify deeply with what W. E. B. Du Bois stated, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”³

MY REFLECTION/MY AWAKENING

Individuals have identified me as racially ambiguous throughout my life, and I have been the subject of ignorance and assumptions from individuals trying to guess what my race is or what is my country of origin. For example, individuals of any race have asked if I am of Mayan descent or might think Aztec decent, but most individuals guess I am mestizo. I have grown accustomed to the assumptions I constantly hear about my identity. The feeling of never being able to fit in fully in any culture feels I carry it with me on a subconscious level which does not come to the surface until suddenly I am asked about my identity. My inner thoughts are in Spanish, and I must assimilate that I am 100% with the English-speaking crowd on the spot. When I am with a Spanish-speaking group, I find myself playing catch up when a conversation comes up about politics or when it comes down to dancing to music in Spanish. The rhythms are unfamiliar to my sense of rhythm, and I can appear to them as Americanized and detached from my own Latin culture.

My dual cultural identity constantly creates questions about how I see myself in society. Most of the time, I am not aware others see me differently than what I think I

² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands = La FRONTERA: The NEW MESTIZA*, 102.

³ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Strivings of the Negro People.” *The Problem of the Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, 2014, 67–76. <https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823254545.003.0004>.

represent. The way I view myself is as a competent, intelligent, and logical individual. Someone who fits into any social setting, but when I encounter the stereotypes which imply; that I may not speak English or that I may not be from America, or that I am an immigrant from Mexico, it disrupts the way I view myself. As Frantz Fanon writes in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The fact is that the Antillean does not see himself as Negro; he sees himself as Antillean. The Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively and intellectually the Antillean behaves like a white man. But in fact, he is a black man. He'll realize that once he gets to Europe, and when he hears Europeans mention "Negroes" he'll know they're talking about him."⁴ I don't, however, allow the stereotypes to destroy my confidence. I am faced constantly with assumptions I do not belong because of the stereotypes that have been imposed on Mexicans in America by the oppressor, white supremacists. The category society has determined for me perpetuates my invisibility. Because I have adapted to two different cultures, I assimilate to the white man's behavior in specific spaces and switch to my Mexican American behavior in other situations. It happens without being aware I am changing. When an individual confronts me with white supremacist values, it can be a harsh reality to know that individuals see me as the outsider and the alien that does not belong.

In specific spaces, I experience a feeling of privilege that has been created by whiteness. This so-called privilege is something I feel being of a minority group. Because white institutions do not hire or give many opportunities to minorities, when one of us is allowed to become a part of their space, it can feel like a privilege. The reality is that feeling of privilege is known as tokenism. When I am the token, I feel confused about

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (London: Paladin, 1970), 228.

who I am, and it makes me wonder if my American side is allowing this opportunity or if my Mexican side is giving me access? Is my cultural identity being used by them to fill in a space needed to claim they comply with DEI⁵ policies? Continuing to educate myself gives me the ability to view situations from different perspectives and be able to navigate through the social structures of white supremacy and racial oppression. Oppressions are fluid, and they can take various forms, and you cannot always pinpoint the root of the oppressive problem. As Jarod Sexton stated, "supple, elastic, expansive, ambiguous, continually altered and bringing in new elements."⁶ If I can see things from different angles, I can analyze them, face them, and I can try to avoid being a victim of oppression by having the option to choose if I want to take part or not.

COLONIZED BODY/DECOLONIZING MY BODY

In academia, I need to make whiteness visible to create a space where there is an equal opportunity and a more inclusive curriculum of diverse cultural dance forms. As a minority in institutions where whiteness is prevalent, I notice the normative is on European cultural values, which enable white people to become the standard. My presence in institutions makes a difference because, as a Mexican American, I am representing many of the minority students and cultures. They do not see themselves in higher positions and do not have cultural representation. These students are misunderstood or overlooked; I was once one of them, and I had to assimilate to whiteness to exist and belong in their spaces. "With whiteness so pervasive that we see

⁵ Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

⁶ Crystal U. Davis, "Laying New Ground." *Journal of Dance Education* 18, no. 3 (2018), 120–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2018.1481965>.

no other variations, it becomes a canopy so large that it blocks the light that feeds new growth.”⁷

The terminology used in these institutions is Eurocentric and belongs to the dance forms of ballet, modern, and contemporary dance. Cultural dances are "otherized" and referred to as "ethnic dance" or "world dance." Terminology created is to separate these cultural dance forms from the mainstream or what is considered the norm. Also, the term "Black dance" exists within these institutions, but there is no such thing as "White dance." Being aware of the terminology used is vital for understanding the oppressions and the disadvantages imposed on people of color in these colonized institutions. By understanding and identifying the oppressions, I can disrupt these systems and Eurocentric ways of thinking and perceiving. Some individuals are not aware of the lens of whiteness imposed onto them and making them see life through whiteness and not how everyone would see it through their own experience and see it as ordinary. I see the Eurocentric ways of thinking as a system to keep whiteness in power. This knowledge helps me navigate academia and pay attention to individuals of different backgrounds and cultures to give them the visibility they deserve and understand their perspectives. I have been proactive in speaking to students to help them make choices and decisions based on their goals instead of allowing them to have a single universal perspective that might not be fit for everyone. In general, I enjoy having conversations with people to unveil individuals' true calling in life and how it compares to what has become standard. There is always some hesitation from students because they feel uncomfortable voicing their opinions. Still, once we begin a dialogue, we agree that most of us are not following our

⁷ Davis, "Laying New Ground," 120.

true personal beliefs. Many individuals tend to conform to the narratives imposed by whiteness which continues to keep them oppressed. Also, depending on the race, gender, or culture, their personal experience with white supremacy has a different level of impact in their lives.

NAMING THE GHOSTS/NAMING THE SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

Systems of oppression are adaptive and constantly changing, essentially to benefit white people. I feel I benefit from being the token even though it is a power dynamic of oppression. I have experienced some disadvantages, but I think I have experienced a benefit that other individuals may disagree with through my perspective. Some individuals may see their reality and always think they are the suffering victim, but I choose to see it as someone benefiting by way of DEI policies. Identifying this is important to me because, throughout my life, I have acquired a personal dilemma that exists from bearing witness to always ending up being the token to only benefit whiteness. Still, I use it to benefit me, and I can advocate for others once I get my foot in the door. It is an interesting dynamic when it happens; I am welcomed with open arms and doors for me to access spaces where many people of color or minority groups do not usually have easy access. When this happens, I accept it and move forward to continue succeeding in society and trying to hold agency. I begin to wonder how this would benefit this institution. Then start to look at the situation through a different lens I have acquired due to my dual cultural identity, the ability to step into another space where I can analyze problems from a different angle. I realize my brown body is there to take up space in a white institution which is a tool for oppressing people of color. When this is

happening, I assimilate to fit in with confidence and remain with a strong focus. At the same time, an inner conflict develops within me as it becomes clear that the systems of oppression are at work and constantly benefit white people.

I try to think of ways to help stop this cycle, but if I decide to act and reject these offers, I will then find myself outside of society, being invisible, marginalized, and feeling like I am not in motion. I don't want to become invisible and remain unnoticed in the community. I want to feel I belong, and I deserve a chance just like everybody else in these spaces of whiteness. I am Latino, and my community is exhausted from constantly being treated like we are disposable and the only thing that matters is that we produce. Eduardo Galeano's poem gives a perfect example of the Latino experience in America: "Who are not human beings, but human resources."⁸ By pushing to move forward in life with my inner conflict, I can potentially influence the hierarchy in place and help create more opportunities for people of color. Demonstrating I can execute my duties with expertise and skill, I can be an individual of color who represents the individuals of color who are being overlooked and dismissed due to the lack of exposure because the oppressor has not allowed visibility.

The inner conflict that I carry with me stems from oppressions imposed on me and causes me to suffer. Still, it is from witnessing this experience where I see myself used as a token, and the establishment that considers the "other" is leaving them the outsider without opportunity. Becoming the token is imposed on me by individuals who see me as an immigrant or someone who does not belong in their spaces. I become the

⁸ Eduardo Galeano and Mark Schafer, "The Book of Embraces Poem The Nobodies." Essay. In *The Book of Embraces*, edited by Cedric Belfrage, 73–73. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton), 1992.

individual who will represent diversity for the entire program. These institutions find ways to continue to oppress by keeping a person of color as a supplementary and not an essential part of the team. Because they do not want a person of color holding agency, they only hire them to fulfill a mission statement regarding diversity they have made on their institution's website. I continue to experience the stereotypes of someone who might have a language barrier or someone who does not belong in higher education. I am someone who carries a unique skill, the Horton Technique, and that I have characteristics that will benefit their institutions. I am accepted, and the doors are open for me to step into their institution and become part of their space. Within their system, they find ways to keep me in a part-time position or as an artist in residence and give a white individual the promotion of a full-time job. These situations occur through microaggressions; they lead you to believe you are an essential part of the team. The belief in inclusion clarifies that they own the table, and you are allowed to sit at "their" table. The term "being included" implies that I am an outsider and do not hold agency as I am a temporary extension allowed to participate.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS: TWO SOULS IN ONE BODY

Identifying myself can be complex because most of the time, I think in Spanish, but I speak English. This dynamic is hard to understand if you are not bilingual or someone who grew up in the borderlands of two different countries. My childhood experiences molded me into the person I am today, and they had a significant impact on my consciousness. Being able to code-switch from English to Spanish according to a situation happens as an impulse, and I don't realize I do it. If I am walking on the street

and I run into an individual who speaks Spanish, or I hear individuals speaking Spanish, something triggers my mind, making me feel at home. It creates a comfort zone, and I quickly identify with the individuals speaking Spanish and have a sense of connection with them. Speaking English also feels natural to me because I grew up speaking Spanish and English simultaneously, although I have acquired a slight accent because of my upbringing at home. My entire family said nothing but Spanish, but we spoke English when we would step outside of the house. When I am in a community of Latinos, I feel I can assimilate and fit in, but there are times that I do fit in but not to a degree to say that it is my culture. The Latino community views me as someone who is not quite Latino, and I become aware that I am Americanized. When I am within certain groups of English-speaking individuals, they tend to think I am not American because of my slight accent. They say I understand everything, but something about me makes them believe that I am not from America. As Fanon writes, "I am overdetermined from the outside. I am a slave not to the "idea" others have of me, but to my appearance."⁹ When speaking English, I feel fine, but sometimes I feel I don't belong 100% to the culture because of my Spanish thought process. It reminds me that I have another cultural identity. The ability to navigate smoothly through an English-speaking country or a Spanish-speaking country is easy for me. Still, culturally it is where I am faced with conflicts because my inner thoughts tell me that I don't belong completely to either culture or space. Particularly in a space where whiteness is prevalent, and I am the token. "The real world robbed us of our share. In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body

⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 175.

schema. The image of one's body is solely negating. It's an image in the third person. All around the body reigns an atmosphere of certain uncertainty.”¹⁰

MY AWAKENING/MY EMPOWERMENT: OR, BECOMING A SUPERHERO

Throughout the years, becoming aware of how individuals of power view me helps me realize I am a minority who is bilingual, educated, and who has a particular skill that is in demand which I can use to help me empower myself. Being able to embody a technique like the Horton Technique, which has disseminated throughout the United States at significant institutions and around the world, has given me my superhero power. This skill I have can open doors that can be difficult for an individual of a minority group to access. When I am teaching the Horton Technique, I feel a sense of relief from all the noise and commotion society causes because of my identity or heritage. It brings neutral freedom of expression to any space where I teach. Institutions witness this nonspecific dance form which can fit into different environments and pass their criteria. I suppose I identify with the Horton Technique because of how I see myself in other social spheres. I feel like a chameleon because I can switch language or cultural identity to fit in different settings. The Horton Technique makes me feel like a superhero when I can break stereotypes by having access to these spaces.

Also, when an institution needs my cultural identity, and it allows me to have a foot in the door, I go ahead and go with the flow to be able to participate in their space. Because I teach the Horton technique and I am a minority, I will use my two qualities in a positive way for me to become part of society. I want to become a tenured professor at a

¹⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 167.

university and be able to represent minorities. I am a minority, and I know how important it is to have someone to look up to in these settings who shares the same culture or values; it can make a big difference in someone's life. Suppose I am in a position where I can positively influence other artists or students. In that case, I want to take accountability for my power and allow others to learn from me and help empower them and help them achieve their goals. I get exhausted from seeing people of color and minorities permitted to have only the crumbs and never a complete piece of the pie. I tend to attract attention primarily because of my heritage or the Horton Technique I teach in academia, and I get hired to train as an adjunct. The fact that I do not have a masters degree yet is a way for them to justify why they cannot offer me a full-time position. Once I have my MFA degree, I might realize I do not have many options for positions open for people of color like myself in academia. If I can take advantage of my Mexican American heritage to fit into the criteria needed to meet their requirements, then that is what I will have to do. I will use my heritage as a power dynamic to attain a position. It is hard to imagine that a cultural identity could be the only factor to help achieve a position as a professor. Ultimately, I am hoping I am hired for my abilities and for what I have to offer.

PRIVILEGE OR TOKENISM

What might appear as a privilege to me is a form of oppression from white supremacy. When an opportunity is given to me to become a part of an institution made up mainly of the White race, the prospect might seem of great value to me because I am from a marginalized group. I get hired because I offer an outstanding ability, and it

appears I have made it into the top ranks. Because the white establishment considers me from a minority group, I don't have the opportunity to hold agency in a white institution. The chance I get a chance, I refer to it as a privilege. This so-called privilege is a frame of mind I created because society has me thinking the White race is superior, and if given a chance to become a part of them, then it feels like you become part of something exclusive that is better than your race. When this happens to me, it is a power dynamic of tokenism. When an individual is selected because he is simply a minority, it could be a case where the institution is required to demonstrate they are inclusive of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Tokenism becomes evident to me when I am the only one that is not white, and most of my colleagues are white.

Becoming part of an environment where an individual is one of the few people of color and the majority is white can continue to perpetuate the marginalization and racism within the hierarchy establishment of white supremacy. It becomes a symbol of power and control where the individual of a minority group continues to feel alone, and the outnumbered person has a limited chance to hold agency. An individual in this situation might become a tool to help the institution receive grants or benefits by demonstrating they are inclusive of minority groups in their establishment. The person selected as the token to fill in a spot can feel a sense of accomplishment yet at the same time can feel undervalued or unworthy. An outsider who wants to become part of an institution can easily view it as a privilege for that individual to have access because of the lack of opportunity or access to it. It becomes a way for whiteness to appear as an exclusive group and superior to the marginalized groups. Some individuals might not take the opportunity if they know they will be the token of the group. It can have terrible

implications of being chosen simply because of your heritage and not your talents or skills. Tokenism can also harm individuals' self-worth, knowing the basis of their selection is only to check a box required by the government or the institution to adhere to DEI policies. This tokenism can be harmful to either the chosen individual or the rejected individual. White institutions have been doing it for years and have become the norm, and society accepts it without questioning its effects. The obligation of having the token to fill the lack of diversity is standard practice and has made tokenism institutionalized. It is not a privilege to be chosen to become a part of a white institution if it is by way of tokenism. If the individual has the skills for the job and happens to be of a minority group, it should be celebrated and not categorized as tokenism. Recognizing a person's abilities can help strengthen agency and confidence in individuals who are brave enough to put themselves out there to demonstrate they belong in any space. I believe I am one of those individuals who are constantly up for the challenges we (BIPOC)¹¹ face from being the group's token. I intentionally gravitate toward these types of settings because I gain motivation from being able to carry myself with confidence and deliver good work, which makes those around me who don't think I belong reflect on their stereotypes and perhaps question their assumptions.

Institutions also exist where most of the members are people of color and are in the practice of tokenism within their minority group. My own experience and observation of those around me have caused me to view being the token as a way to hold power or survive. From my point of view, being of Mexican American descent, I can relate to both sides of tokenism from being the chosen one or the rejected individual. The

¹¹ Black, Indigenous, People of Color

microaggressions I experience because of my heritage make opportunity feel like it is a privilege. The lack of visibility or representation Mexican Americans have in the arts has caused me to characterize tokenism as a privilege. The opportunity to get a job or a position that is difficult to attain can feel like a blessing even when it is a power dynamic from the oppressor. I think the oppressor should feel it is a blessing that they can have a person of color working for them. The need for them to hire an individual to be the token might be to benefit their policies. We, minorities, also have power, but most individuals are not aware of how to use these power dynamics. Sometimes, being the token is better than being left out and staying in motion and visible. Because of the lack of representation, only a few Latino bodies are allowed to remain visible. It is the way society has pushed the dynamics of tokenism. You cannot have too many of a different race, or else it can overshadow the individuals who are to the part of the oppressors. I have had to navigate my artistic journey with a dual cultural identity and always being the group's token. I have always been the token as my colleagues never got the chance to have a foot in the door. I have always been allowed to fully step inside these circles of exclusivity, which can appear to be a privilege.

Can an individual remain sane and happy in a situation where he is being used as a token, knowing that their position is always at risk? Does one invest more of himself to prove he can handle the job well? The pressure of always having to prove myself creates an inner conflict the same way my cultural identity does. I have trained myself to stay strong and consistent in these situations to execute the job to the best of my ability. Even if I am aware I am not an essential part of the group, for example, when a mistake happens, it is noticed with greater magnitude than others working alongside. Every action

becomes magnified, and you begin to feel you are always under a microscope. You feel like individuals are keeping an eye on you, and it creates a self-surveillance mechanism within you to function with as much efficiency as possible.¹² When I step into these spaces, I feel the tension around me because I am the only Mexican American. There is a feeling of the gaze always aimed at me from different directions to see how well I execute my job, but there are the stereotypes present because of my cultural identity.

Fanon describes my inner thoughts as I walk into a new space:

The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed. Once their microtomes are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it's the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species.¹³

I don't come across to them as what they expect or what they have assumed of me. The smiles, greetings, and conversations seem a bit synthetic from some individuals, and I can always tell when I am revealing something about myself that does not fit their preconceived ideas.

I notice an element of surprise present in their faces. The conversation becomes a revelation to them when I navigate through discussion or interviews and most often with solid facts because of the exposure I have had throughout my life. I don't want to come across as someone who is a threat to them, but often it begins to appear as if that is the case. When it starts to happen, I experience a feeling that I should be ready to take on more challenges for the job than necessary. I prepare myself for that storm that I always must go through. I don't know if other individuals experience this, but I know it is an

¹² Michel Foucault and Alan Sheridan, "Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison Part 3 Docile Bodies." Essay. In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books), 1995.

¹³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 175.

experience that feels very familiar. I don't allow anything to throw me off, and I remain solid and steady as more and more responsibilities come my way. I enjoy what I do, but there is a point when I realize I am being tested or made to demonstrate up to what degree I can handle before I break down. Fanon expresses a similar situation to my experience in an excerpt of his book:

I knew for instance that if the physician made one false move, it was over for him and for all those who came after him. What, in fact, could one expect from a Negro physician? As long as everything was going smoothly, he was praised to the heavens; but watch out—there was no room whatsoever for any mistake. The black physician will never know how close he is to being discredited. I repeat, I was walled in: neither my refined manners nor my literary knowledge nor my understanding of the quantum theory could find favor.¹⁴

I feel like a machine that must produce and not give in to failure. I will not fail; I must produce results and achieve the goal. This experience often comes along with these job offers where I am the token of the group.

Many aspects of society can affect me because I am a minority. I try not to carry that baggage with me because I navigate through life with the purpose of my art in mind. My dancing is what clears all the negativity, which can potentially have more profound psychological effects on me. I am lucky to have this defense mechanism that protects me from harm. It is the reason why I enjoy teaching and dancing the Horton Technique. Although we are all part of this vicious social construct and victims of oppression from white supremacy, we need to continue to stay aware of the power dynamics which have been in place for many years to dismantle them. We need to change the way we gain access to these spaces founded under white supremacy. I have a responsibility to continue to create new pathways to penetrate these limited spaces where I don't have much access.

¹⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 178.

The more we call out the oppressor and what they established but remain invisible, we can help dismantle these unjust oppressions.

CONCLUSION

I am experiencing a catharsis that I have not tapped into in the past. By all the information I have gathered throughout my research, I can express my inner conflict in words as I have never done before. I understand the causes and effects of my positionality and the invisible oppressions and power dynamics in society. My Mexican heritage in the United States is almost invisible, but I feel I have pushed my boundaries to gain some visibility. Living my life being unaware of disadvantages imposed on me simply because of how someone else perceives me has been something I have been able to cope with without pinpointing what it is or where it is coming from precisely. I learned how to navigate through different spaces solely based on intuition and constantly must internalize my conflict without being able to talk about it. I now feel I can start a dialogue and give good input regarding systems of oppression. I observed my process that I have always been working alongside Whites or African Americans and not people of my Latin heritage. I am aware of how invisible Latinos are in the dance world and how limited our platform is with not much representation. I began to feel frustrated because I felt even more invisible since most of my research sources were from White or African American authors. I have no intention to separate my research by race, but it was an observation that has given me a different way to live by and view society. As Frantz Fanon wrote, "All forms of exploitation are identical, since they apply to the same "object": man."¹⁵ I

¹⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 136.

found a new perspective, and I cannot allow distractions to penetrate my mind and help perpetuate the separation and alienation of diverse backgrounds. Oppression is oppression, and we should call it for what it is because any way you view it, it is wrong and harmful to any individual.

My cultural identity to me is universal. I will not allow society to put me in a box and make me feel I only belong to specific spaces. I grew up with an open mind and outlook in life, and I want to stay that way. Obstacles might try to shift my perspective, but I do not allow it to happen. The experiences I have expressed are happening to individuals in our society. Perhaps many of them do not know how to explain what they are experiencing, just as I felt before this thesis research. I accept full accountability for living my life with blinders and not naming the white supremacy dynamics happening to me or around me. I can remember the harsh reality of the microaggressions from white supremacy when I tanned my skin to a much darker tone. From one week to the next, my experience was that of another person in another body. It was unreal to hear the comments from individuals who felt they had every right to ask or say things to me which came from a rooted prejudice/racist place. When my skin is a lighter tone, individuals view me differently, and the comments I hear from them are entirely different toward being an immigrant. I understand what my skin tone implied and why they viewed me as another person. The color of our skin is a problem for individuals before they get to know anything about us. I want to continue to educate my students and peers if I notice any of these negative oppressions among them. "Is there in fact any difference between one racism and another? Don't we encounter the same downfall, the same failure of man?"¹⁶

¹⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 133.

Awareness is essential to be able to fight and destroy the established hierarchy of white supremacy.

CREATIVE MANIFESTATION



My creative manifestation has been a personal artistic negotiation with myself. I was having to try different ways of approaching my thesis and finding ways to analyze and express my theory through a creative collaboration with media and movement has been challenging and, at the same time, rewarding. I have felt frustrated, enlightened, confused, rewarded, and a sense of discovery, allowing me to open creative outlets that I have not tried much in the past. In the beginning, it was a little daunting trying to manifest through movement what I wanted to express because the movement can be interpreted differently by different individuals. In the end, it must be what I truly feel connected to and what I think is coming from a sincere and honest place.

At the start of my creative manifestation, I wanted to embody how the Horton Technique is part of my muscle memory and has become an inscription of gesture. The process was a bit too analytical that it felt like I was advancing too slow with limited ways to express myself through movement. I continued to investigate the inscription of gesture of the Horton Technique in my body and began to experiment with different environments. I thought the idea was good, but the approach was not demonstrating what I was thinking. I started to connect my identity with the dance technique I practice and

embody. It was then that I realized my cultural background was very much a big part of the history of the Horton Technique. I read about its history and how the technique and the choreographer Lester Horton had given my Mexican heritage a platform and had representation in Lester Horton's choreography. I felt proud to have chosen this technique since my early days of dance training.

I became more interested in my culture, and the more information I looked up, I found myself disconnected from Mexican culture. I unveiled information about my culture and became the focal point of my creative manifestation. I became very interested in talking about the Horton Technique and how it has helped many people develop as beautiful, versatile dancers. I knew there was more about this "aboutness" to my thesis. The aboutness became apparent, and the lens shifted onto my cultural identity. I wanted to share how the Horton Technique helped many dancers of diverse backgrounds and how Lester Horton was always inclusive of minorities. I find a strong connection with Lester Horton because I am a teacher, and I always make sure I treat my students without bias, prejudice, or judgment. I am also aware that everyone learns differently, and I try to be a progressive thinker when I teach everyone.

At this point in my process, it became clear my cultural identity was the focal point, and there was so much to investigate. So many layers to pull information from my personal experiences. My research allowed me to mirror my face and see my reflection, seeing myself for who I am and who I represent in society. My ideas came from the research of oppression from white supremacy, which affects me in my daily life. My research began to be about my cultural identity and how I embody the Horton Technique. This topic seemed more suitable for what I wanted to say and express. From my

experiences, I found out about many oppressions we experience, but they are invisible. My creative manifestation sheds some light on a topic some individuals will find a connection to, and perhaps they might be experiencing the same as I have but might not know how to put it in words. It can be difficult to express something that you do not see or something always there, but we become numb and accustomed to those power dynamics that oppress individuals. We end up accepting it without questioning the system.

I am a Mexican American born in the United States and grew up speaking Spanish. I was born in Texas in the borderlands, and I belong to two different countries and two languages. It allows me to process information in two different ways, and I mostly think in Spanish, but I speak in English, and I was not aware of how the oppressions affect me. My research became rooted in the history of the United States on the disadvantages and oppressions imposed on Latinos, African Americans, or other minority groups. I read about slavery and the Jim Crow laws, which significantly impacted the African American community. I also read about the Civil Rights movement and the resistance individuals confronted with from white supremacists in this country. The oppressions I read about in my research affect me. I am a minority and someone who is considered an immigrant. In Frantz Fanon's book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, he writes about the psychoanalytical and inner conflict a victim of oppression must deal with. Many individuals do not realize they are being oppressed and do not know the internal conflict in the subconscious. I am a victim of oppression, and I did not know it; I thought I lived a privileged life. Because of my position in society and being part of the arts, I was in constant motion, feeling like I had the freedom to do anything I desired. When

reading the book *Borderlands* by Gloria Anzaldúa, I found a great connection with the text, and to my surprise, I have been navigating through life with invisible blinders. I was not fully aware that power dynamics in society keep minorities at the inferior and whites superior.

As my research developed, I began to peel layers of my life. Every layer of my living experience strongly connects with every unjust historical event. I started to think about my position in society to become aware of my identity, how the oppression systems try to control me, and how I am affected. I dove into more research which has me questioning the true intentions of the individuals I work for. Looking back, it is now clear to me I was being used, and at the same time, was given opportunities. My research has triggered me to ask myself questions as I am still processing the information that applies to me. My creative manifestation started to go in the right direction at this point. My focus was more precise, and I had something valid to share that was very personal. There was a powerful connection to my research when I had to tap into unique history, and I was willing to confront it and see it for what it is.



My aboutness in my thesis reveals my double consciousness, having two different frames of mind and a connection with two identities. I process information in Spanish and communicate it in English is a unique way of life to share and reveal how it happens. The other part of my creative manifestation tells how I experienced microaggressions and oppressions in my life. My body and my presence are an excellent place to gather information for my research. Putting myself in places that society does not think I belong to informs me quickly from the reactions I receive from those who think I do not belong. At this point in my creative manifestation, I began to think about the stereotypes that trigger bias and prejudices. Instead of shying away from situations where I might be considered the other, it is better to step in with confidence to help break the stereotypes and give me a chance to show who I am. If I stay away, no one will ever know my true self. I must make sure that I don't change myself to please others, and I must follow my goals with conviction without allowing obstacles to alter my course. I continued working on my project to share this information, and I started feeling motivated to take it to another level and not hold back. Because dealing with this stereotype can make me feel uncomfortable because that is the aboutness that I might be trying to protect myself from. I suppose I never faced the imposed stereotypes because I avoided them to disassociate myself. The stereotype that I get mainly is that I am an immigrant and might not speak English. If I faced my stereotypes in the past, I would do it in a tranquil, "no big deal" manner which made me seem like I was very passive about it and easily influenced. But if I speak up about it, individuals realize I have a strong mind and an obvious idea of what I want, which makes some people close up or stay away from me. I kept thinking

about my creative manifestation, and the more I realized who I am and that I have been protecting myself to navigate smoothly through these spaces of oppression.

I recently analyzed my relationships with people, friends, or colleagues at work; I better understand why alienation happened. I was not sure why it had happened to me in certain situations. Particular groups or individuals who impose stereotypes on me because they don't want to associate themselves with someone who fits their stereotype or someone, they cannot oppress. When I speak to individuals, I'm apparent and confident about who I am, making individuals uncomfortable because I don't fit their stereotypes. They don't know how to deal with me. As I began to put my creative manifestation together, I knew I needed to be alone and isolated in the space. That is one way I experience life. When it comes to a professional working environment or in a social circle, I make people feel uncomfortable when the attention comes to my direction. Many individuals prefer to stay away from me when I get attention because they drown in their silence—seeing someone like me attract more attention than they do. After all, I do not fit the image of someone who would overshadow them. I end up feeling like I am alone physically and mentally. When I am thinking in Spanish, I realize I switch to another space, and when I speak, I join back in the environment.

A section in my creative manifestation where I am walking in slow motion outside the street represents those moments of stillness as everything moves quickly around me. The moment of serenity is when I transport myself into another space because I subconsciously think in Spanish. I am processing the stereotypes or oppressions I face. The images flashing through my mind represent chaos and confusion of not understanding what has transpired because I have been unaware of these oppressions.

The flashes that appear are black or white, the white represents my thought process in Spanish, and the black represents my English-speaking side. The flashes represent the experience of having to think in Spanish and process information quickly to communicate in English. Also, they represent part of the struggle of my inner conflict. Dealing with a reality of imposed stereotypes, I must constantly prepare for them as I get ready to step into a new space and be pleasant.

I have experienced social patterns of when and where oppressions occur. When I become aware of these patterns, I can prepare for what I encounter. As I walk towards the building where I teach, I think in Spanish, and thoughts go through my head about who is going to be at the facility, who will I have to deal with, what questions will they be asking, am I going to feel like an outsider in this environment? I know what will happen again, and I walk in with confidence. I feel all eyes on me, and I can feel the tension of the stereotypes imposed. I feel like I am wearing a stereotypical Mexican costume set on me without a choice. Everyone around me seems to get along, and they see each other as ordinary or "normal," but when they look at me, they see someone who is exotic or rare to their environment. The Mexican costume is a bit of an exaggeration, but it demonstrates my presence's impact in some spaces. I walk around like nothing around me is happening even though I know there are many doubts about my presence. When I step into the dance studio to teach, I feel the gaze coming from some individuals, and they see me as the Mexican stereotype as others see me as someone with great ability. To those who see me as a positive role model is refreshing to have someone like me holding a position that someone of color does not often regulate. I often feel the two dualities in my reality. As I teach, the Mexican costume is present, and there is the Mexican individual

with regular clothes. That duality also represents my consciousness. I am thinking in Spanish and communicating in English. It means my identity with Mexico and with the United States, two countries at one time, two mindsets at one time, two people in one body in front of the students.

The split-screen when I am wearing black and white represents the duality I embody. When I dress in black, it is my English, American side. When I dress in white, it is my Spanish, Mexican side of my identity. I walk on a strip of light, which signifies I need to stay in my lane when I am in these white spaces to remain in their group. Frantz Fanon is quoted in *Black Face, White Mask*, "It demanded that a man behave like a man. It demanded of me that I behave like a black man—or at least like a Negro. I hailed the world, and the world amputated my enthusiasm. I was expected to stay in line and make myself scarce."¹⁷

I feel my dual identities are separate, and there are times when I merge them. When it happens, I feel like I belong in any space because it allows me to forget that I am an outsider, and my mind does not have to think in Spanish and speak English. It is a moment when I experience freedom, a catharsis that empowers me, and I feel the weight of the stereotypes off my shoulders. I do not know when it happens, but it is probably when my accent is noticeable. The color of a person's skin can influence society; it is unfortunate to say when my skin is lighter individuals in these spaces where I teach are more open to my presence. The accent and skin color trigger individuals to impose stereotypes on me by prejudice and racism stemming from white supremacy. The hierarchy of white supremacy causes them to judge people by the color of their skin or by

¹⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 173.

their heritage. These negative influences persuade individuals, so it is essential to be aware of these power dynamics.

The section where I am walking speaking Spanish is what I think when individuals question where I'm from if I'm in the correct building or if I am the janitor. If they did not impose the stereotypes, they would know I am at the right place, and I am there to teach the master class. When confronted with resistance, I begin to think, how can they not know who I am? I am Fernando, and they are expecting me, so I get confused, and I tell myself, well, it is too bad, but I must move forward with my life, so I should not let it matter and allow it to destroy my enthusiasm. It is interesting to return the same questions to individuals the same way. If they ask where I am from, I ask them where they are from. If they ask where my family is from, I ask them where their family is from. These moments are a learning experience because they realize how silly or harmful it feels. I often apologize for being asked those types of questions once they recognize it because it does not make any sense to them by asking them the same questions. I can give them insight into how they can make an individual feel if they are not aware of the negative impact they have on them.



I wanted to create an experience of an "out of body experience" for myself and make it visible for others to get a sense of how others view me. I thought the Mexican stereotype would create that scenario because I don't see myself as an immigrant. When I realize individuals around me see me in that light, it confuses me. I thought if I am going to see myself and give an example of the realization that occurs, then I need to be in an ample space where I am isolated, representing my mind space. I chose the black box theater because it would be perfect to set it up as a place where I can step into the spotlight and make the stereotype visible. I suddenly find myself sitting down, contemplating what I am doing here, why they view me in that way and want to know what it is. I reveal my reflection in the mirror to myself. I see myself as a stranger, someone unfamiliar to me, but as unknown, as it is to me, it is very

familiar to those individuals who impose the stereotypes on me. I wanted to have the gaze of the oppressor walk around me as I saw my reflection. The oppressor continues to see me from all different angles. I touched my face. I began to look at myself and discover these traditional Mexican clothes. The hat, the mustache, the shawl, they all represent that image society sees me in. I am showing how the surprise creates an impact that makes me want to shed this image. The inner conflict is figuring out what I do with this; how can I clear the stereotype off me? I begin to take the idea off me, and I toss it to the side. I feel I am back to myself the way I perceive myself. I look around, and I step away from that spotlight which is the mindset that is telling me to let it go, move on, and continue with my life.

I try not to carry negative feelings or images with me in my everyday life. If I allow the oppressors to infiltrate my mind and make me feel weak, I will fail, and perhaps that is their goal. I quickly tell myself I must focus and stay strong and leave it behind to keep my confidence and dignity. As a Mexican American, I sometimes feel I must make extra work visible. Once I have their attention, I must demonstrate my competence and step up to any challenge to maintain my visibility. There are moments when I feel defeated. When this happens, I don't allow others to see that side of me because I might miss out on opportunities, or they might tarnish my reputation and leave me out of the inner circles.

When I worked in institutions where most of my colleagues are white, I found out very early in my dance career that I seemed to have an easier and more pleasant way of navigating within the organization when my skin tone was lighter. Going on tour was the same experience as strangers would think I am easy to approach after the

performances. When my skin was darker from tanning, I remember hearing comments that I was getting too dark. On tour, audience members would rather speak to other dancers even though I had just danced the lead in the ballet. I felt invisible, and I could not understand how I was being praised on stage and receiving all this applause. When they met me backstage at the reception, they were not receptive or willing to talk with me. I would find myself mostly by myself or with one of my colleagues feeling ignored. It was an inner conflict I had to deal with because I thought I had given an outstanding performance they enjoyed but shut down offstage. The feeling of being isolated is not a stranger to me. I sometimes hear the phrase, "if you are going to be at the top you are going to feel alone." I suppose there is some truth to that because when you strive and push to be your best to be at the top, you entirely emerge in your art form, and you do not have any time for any social distraction. But at the same time, I know I was doing my best when dancing these ballets with these companies, but the isolation came from stereotypes, prejudice, bias, or judgment. White supremacy oppression is invisible and can show up anywhere.

I chose specifically for my creative manifestation the song "La Llorona" by Louise Martinez Serrano, interpreted by Angela Aguilar. The lyrics talk about a very well-known Mexican legend, a woman named La Llorona. She drowned her kids in the river, and she is forever crying for them to come back. "La Llorona" is a traditional song in Mexican culture. I never paid attention to the lyrics, and it reminds me of how I navigate through life and do not pay attention to the oppressions which affect me and surround me. I was looking for music that would be deeply rooted in Mexican culture, representing my personal experience. As I listened to the lyrics, I

realized the deep meaning behind them and how closely metaphorically I can connect them to the storyline of my creative manifestation.

“La Llorona” by Louise Martinez Serrano, interpreted by Angela Aguilar

Salías de un templo un día, Llorona
Cuando al pasar yo te vi
Salías de un templo un día, Llorona
Cuando al pasar yo te vi

Hermoso huipil llevabas, Llorona
Que la virgen te creí
Hermoso huipil llevabas, Llorona
Que la virgen te creí

Ay, de mí Llorona, Llorona, Llorona
De un campo lirio
Ay, de mí Llorona, Llorona, Llorona
De un campo lirio

El que no sabe de amores, Llorona
No sabe lo que es martirio
El que no sabe de amores, Llorona
No sabe lo que es martirio

No sé qué tienen las flores, Llorona
Las flores de un campo santo
No sé qué tienen las flores, Llorona
Las flores de un campo santo

Que cuando las mueve el viento, Llorona
Parece que están llorando
Que cuando las mueve el viento, Llorona
Parece que están llorando

Ay, de mí Llorona, Llorona, Llorona
Llévame al río
Ay, de mí Llorona, Llorona, Llorona
Llévame al río

Tápame con tu rebozo, Llorona
Porque me muero de frío
Tápame con tu rebozo, Llorona

Porque me muero de frío

Dos besos llevo en el alma, Llorona
Que no se apartan de mí
Dos besos llevo en el alma, Llorona
Que no se apartan de mí

El último de mi madre, Llorona
Y el primero que te di
El último de mi madre, Llorona
Y el primero que te di, ay

1. The first verse talks about seeing La Llorona walking by, and I am using La Llorona as a metaphor to represent the Mexican image others know of me through their stereotypes.
2. The second verse talks about the Mexican traditional sleeveless blouse/shirt called "huipil," and it resembles the shawl I am wearing.
3. The third verse talks about being from the Mexican farmlands where these beautiful plants have big leaves. As I lift my head and reveal my face with a significant Mexican hat, I am a connection to the roots of Mexico.
4. The song's fourth verse speaks about the torture you feel when you genuinely believe in something and are willing to sacrifice your life or anything for it. That section of the lyrics represents my dancing and embodying the Horton Technique. I love what I do, and I would not give it up for anything.
5. The fifth verse speaks about the flowers at a graveyard having something about them, but you cannot pinpoint it—a metaphor for the invisible power dynamics of white supremacy.
6. The sixth verse speaks about how the wind blows the flowers, and there is a certain sadness to them. They seem like they are crying. In this section, as I look up,

it is the exhausting feelings of having to deal with the microaggressions and the oppressions of everyday life which begin to take a toll on me, and wear and tear begins to show. Sometimes I feel I must remove myself from these spaces and take the time to recharge before going back into these exhausting experiences society brings upon me.

7. The seventh verse asks to be covered with the shawl because she is cold. I connect this with the isolated and cold mindset I transfer into when I think in Spanish in an English-speaking environment. A feeling of wanting to be an insider and not the outsider.

8. The eighth verse speaks about wanting to be taken to the river. I am showing my frustrations from my inner conflict, and I wish I could wash them away, but there is no time to stop and reflect on clearing my mind because life is moving so fast. I carry that subconsciously in my mind, and if I do not unload, it can stay there and continue to bring me down and tear me down.

9. The ninth verse is when I am in my dual cultural identity, the black and the white and a strip of light, and the song says I carry two kisses in my soul. It is a metaphor for having two identities and two languages in my soul. The lyrics also state that one cannot remove it from the soul.



Throughout my thesis research and creative manifestation, I observed that there are many deep layers to our existence, with a lot of meaning behind every action we make and every reaction we receive. There is a sense of closure with coming to terms with who I am, what I represent, how society perceives me, and my position. How society treats and perceives me depends on my positionality. When I am in a situation without holding agency, I get fair treatment, and they are pleased to have me around. I believe it is because I am inferior, and the boss is in power. If I am inferior, they welcome me, and I am not a threat. When I push to gain agency to become a leader and step up into a higher position, I face resistance, and the support is absent. I become a threat to their system, and it feels the oppressor does not want me to have a voice or gain power. It becomes evident to me, and I understand why certain situations continue to

repeat themselves as I now can view it as a pattern. I always wondered why things kept happening and functioning similarly in different environments and why they welcomed me but were not allowed to opinion or create change.

As an artist and an educator, I see myself in a position of power. My body and presence carry a lot of history and representation when I step into a space. As an artist, I had to find a way to work from the inside out instead of a superficial way of working from the outside in my creative manifestation. Being able to look inside me and draw information from within, I had a sense of unloading some of the baggage I had carried, which I was unaware was there. The more I investigated and put myself in a position of vulnerability; I became open to unveiling layers that I have used as a protection mechanism. It was an unfamiliar experience for me. When I create work, it is hardly ever about myself. It always relates to a historical event or an idea where I gained inspiration. There have only been a few times when I created a project based on a personal experience. For my creative manifestation, I had to look deeper at myself and analyze how I see myself in society. It felt like I was looking in the mirror at my reflection to find meaning and valuable personal information for my creative process. To gather truthful information, I had to be honest with myself and use what I saw as a resource to inform me which direction I would go. At the beginning of my process, I felt I was heading into a simple approach, and I thought I needed to dance to express what I wanted to say. I could not think of other creative outlets, and I felt limited creatively. When I began to pay attention to my subconscious and let those thoughts and feelings surface, it was a cathartic experience because ideas started to flow. My movement did not stem from a dance class or dance positions used in a class setting but rather from a human being in

society. I did not have to do anything more than to be myself without performing. I tapped into my authentic self, and it naturally directed me into the simplest ways of moving. The pedestrian in me was dictating how I would show each section of my creative manifestation as I felt more connected and focused because there was no choreography to my movement approach. I also wanted to make sure my personality could come through because I think it has a lot to do with the opportunities presented to me. If I am sincere, then there is nothing else to think about or doubt because if I am liked and accepted, I don't have to worry about trying to please anyone.

Developing my creative manifestation gave me a deeper insight into opening a dialogue without coming across. I am unaware of individuals' experiences, and I can understand and empathize that one person's oppression could also be my oppression. We are all human beings, and we are all connected in different ways. I don't want something done to me; why should I accept it for someone else. I don't have to put myself in someone else's shoes to know that an unjust action against anyone is not acceptable.

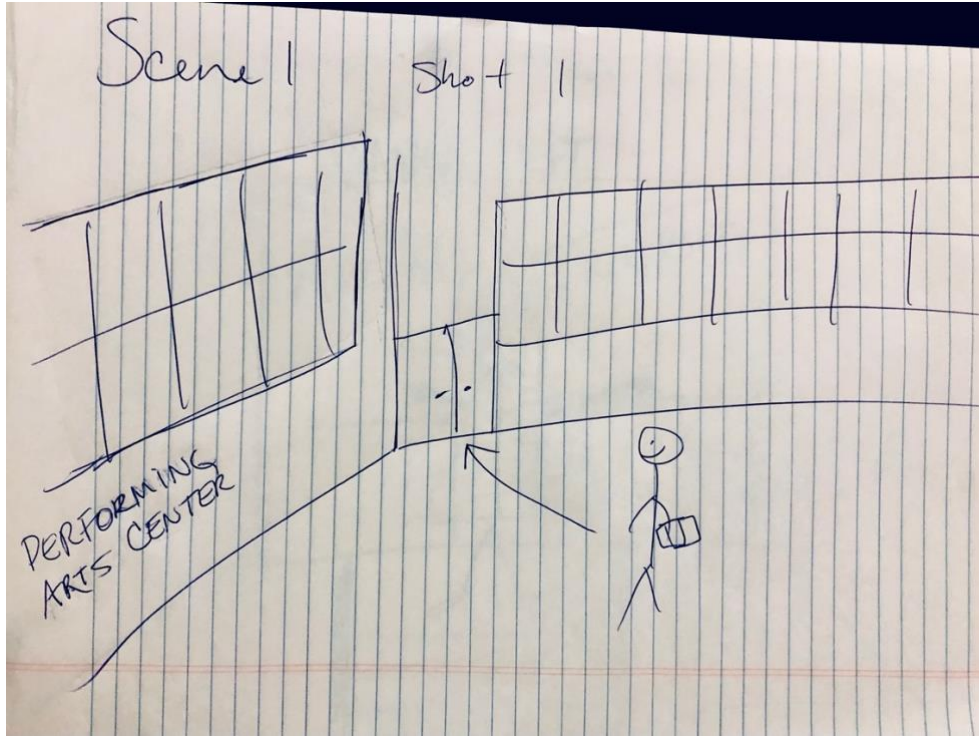
Coming to terms with my cultural identity, I now see it is a beautiful attribute I have acquired from my parents. I have a unique dual life experience that enables me to connect with more diverse backgrounds and cultures. My identity might be complex, but it makes me understand myself better. It is something I needed to make me feel grounded. I can see the value in who I am as an individual in society. I want to reach out to family members to share my thoughts on our cultural identity and hear their side of this living experience. I want to find out if they are aware of or have never thought about it. Perhaps I can help them understand themselves better. For myself, talking to my mother or my father about this experience will enhance our relationships because it will create a

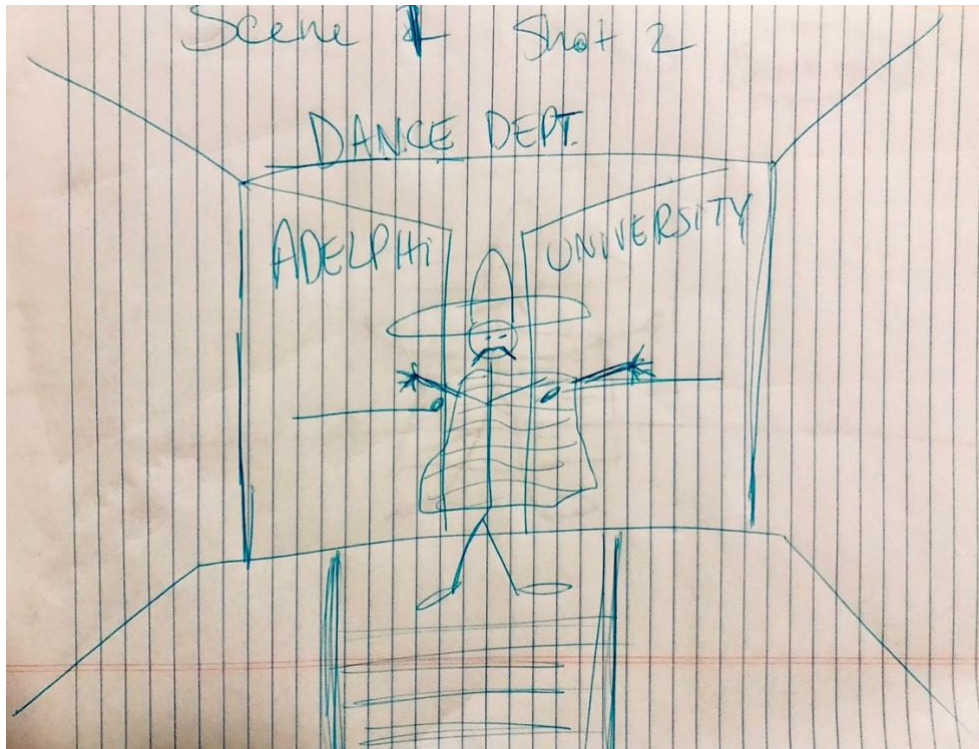
dialogue about our history and family tree. I can develop a stronger connection with my parents and family members.

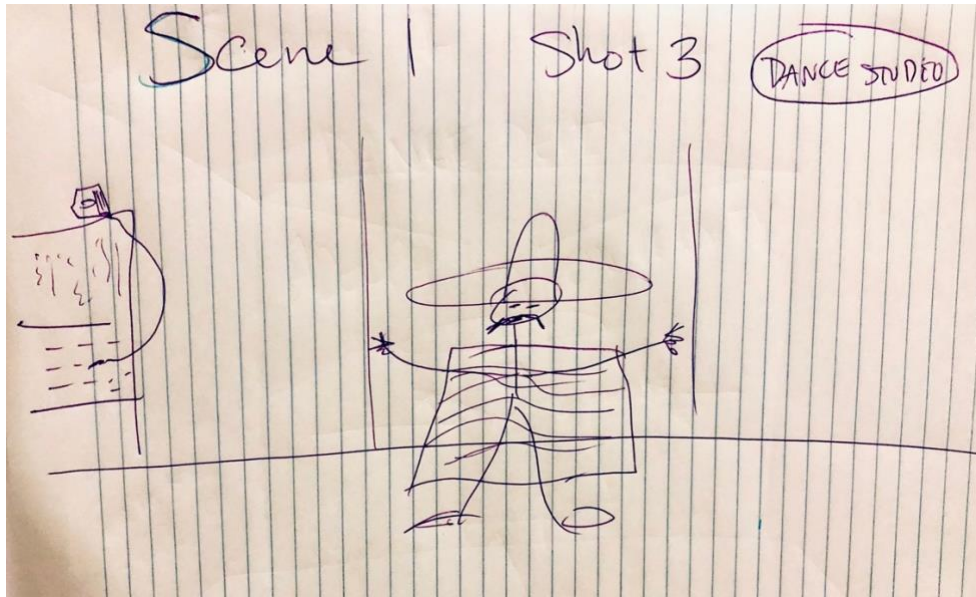
I feel blessed I am not damaged from my life experiences, and I can see life for what it is and not ignore my cultural background. I feel empowered by my artistic journey, which has opened doors to many opportunities, but it is now opening doors for me to share my true self without hiding behind an image. The image imposed on me by individuals is what they will get precisely without any shame or any insecurities. I will embrace my identity, and wherever I go, it will be what I present with pride with hopes that it is accepted and not looked upon as a negative. My cultural identity is not harmful, and I hope those around me are inspired to embrace who they are because they will see me embracing myself for who I am with freedom. Everyone deserves to feel free and proud of who they are. Looking into my history has made me feel bold and proud to have my dual identity of being Mexican American.



Supporting Material







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