

EATING FROM THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE: THE IMPACT OF VISUAL CULTURE
ON THE PERCEPTION AND CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC,
SEXUAL, AND GENDER IDENTITY

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This study explores the way that visual culture and identity creates understanding about how the women in my family interact and teach each other. In the study issues of identity, liminality, border culture, are explored. The study examines how underrepresented groups, such as those represented by Latinas, can enter into and add to the discourses of art education because the women who participated have learned to maneuver through the world, passing what they have learned to one another, from one generation to the next. Furthermore, the study investigates ways in which visual cues offer a way for the women in my family to negotiate their identity. In the study the women see themselves in signs, magazines, television, dolls, clothing patterns, advertisements, and use these to find ways in which to negotiate the borderlands of the places in which they live. Although the education that occurred was informal, its importance is in creating a portal through which to self reflect on the cultural work of educating.

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CHAPTER 1

MORNING

Somewhere over the rainbow
Way up high,
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby.
Somewhere over the rainbow
Skies are blue.
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true.

E. Y. Harburg

1.1 Introduction

The light through the window was grey and pale. There was the smell of rain in the air, and the clouds looked heavy and dark. The wind blew slowly and it was slightly cold. The day was just beginning and already it seemed like the day was half way finished. Through the open window, one could see a view of a garden growing in the backyard. It was full of chili peppers, tomatoes, and watermelon. It was the typical garden for a typical family, a poor family, living in the dusty New Mexican desert. The breeze continued to blow through the window of the small adobe home. A small figure appeared. The shadow of a woman, she looked old, but was only twenty-seven. Slowly she moved about the small kitchen. From the wall, she removed a large aluminum bowl. It was a little rusty on the outside, but inside it was shiny and bright, as though it were still new. From the kitchen cupboard, she pulled out a rolling pin, one that looked like it had been used for a hundred years. Indeed, it had. These two things she put on the kitchen table. Slowly she moved about, putting one bare foot in front of the other. Her feet showed the signs of too many years of being barefoot. They were calloused, and looked as though every step would cause her pain. It did. From under the table, she

pulled out a large can filled with flour. Slowly she poured some flour into the bowl. Then, slowly, she pulled out another can, this one filled with shortening. She leaned over and grabbed a handful, and mixed it with the flour. Once this was done, she hobbled slowly to the kitchen sink. Now the wind was blowing slightly harder through the window, and in the distance, she saw lightning. It looked like it would rain any time soon. The clouds were dark and huge, heavy with rain. They were beautiful colors, purple, dark blue, light gray, and even a little pink. They were as beautiful as they were scary. She couldn't help but get lost in the beauty of the clouds. She let her mind wander. Suddenly, she was brought back to reality as the scalding hot water fell on her hand. She pulled her hand away from the faucet and waived it around in the air hoping to cool it. She grabbed a glass from the cupboard, and filled it with water. She returned to the bowl and poured some of the water in. Slowly, she began kneading it, adding more water a little at a time, just enough to make a dough. Once the dough was done, she formed them into little balls. She took one of these little balls and rolled it flat with the rolling pin. Then, she took another ball, and rolled it flat too. When she had three rolled flat, she took one to the stove, where there was a griddle heating. She placed the flattened dough on to the griddle quickly, being careful not to burn herself. She let it cook while she rolled out another ball. She kept rolling the balls out, one by one, until she had a stack of cooked tortillas. She was making tortillas this morning like she made every morning. She made them, her mother made them, and her grandmother before her. This was a tradition. This was a way of life. To her, this was just another day.

1.2 Traditions and Memory

The kitchen was full of laughter. It was where the day usually began. Women were huddled around the table, around the stove, moving in and out from kitchen to dining table in a dance they'd danced many times over. There was a large bowl at the center of the table that served as a counter in the small cramped kitchen. Ingredients were poured into the bowl, flour, water, lard, salt, each woman taking a turn in commenting on whether it was enough or too much. Gathered around them were their daughters, some eager to learn others turning their noses at such menial labor. Women in my family taught one another, but there was more than just the passing down of recipes being taught. My grandmother believed that you could tell a lot about a woman based on the tortillas she made. Tortillas that were too thin and too brittle were usually made by women that were stingy. Tortillas that were fat and small were made by women that were self-indulgent and lazy. Tortillas that had too many scorches were made by women that were careless. In her belief, tortillas were supposed to be light--light in color, not too thick and not too thin, large, and perfectly circular. If a woman made tortillas that were ugly, then that meant, as my grandmother believed, she didn't care about her family. How was anyone supposed to eat an ugly tortilla? The lessons continued in the kitchen. Each woman discussing their own preferences in tortillas and commenting on each others. They laughed with one another, and learned from one another. Theirs was a world scarcely penetrated by men. Most of the older generation had limited contact with the English-speaking world they encountered in America. Still, in their homes, they had a community that surpassed any opportunities they may have had outside of it in terms of learning. They taught one another. They learned from one

another. Television, books, magazines, and films acted as their portal to the outside world. Because many of the women in my family were relegated to the role of caring for the family, participating in functions outside of the home was very rare. Functions such as attending school, city council meetings, parent teacher organizations, or church were limited. Many of the women saw these as spaces that were not meant for them. The limitations were often based on their limited proficiency in English.

Education occurred within the informal setting of the family, and the creation and dissemination of knowledge acted as a foundation for identity (Daiello, Hathaway, Rhoades, & Walker, 2006). Understanding the complex intersections of sexuality, gender, ethnicity, social class, and culture that occur in informal settings such as the home and family are important in creating pathways into art education. Understanding the ways in which the women in my family interacted with one another and taught one another offers insight for art education by providing ways in which underrepresented groups, such as those represented by these women, can enter into and add to the discourse of art education. Latinas, like the women in my family, have learned to maneuver through the world passing what they have learned to one another, from one generation to the next. These women not only passed traditions but ideas and philosophies through which their culture helped articulate a sense of self. These women lived in a country much different from what they were accustomed to, many having immigrated to the United States (U.S.). However, the difficulty in negotiating their identity was compounded by living on the border in both a literal sense and a figurative sense. These women were often in a place where they could not really abandon all of their traditional ways of living, not that they wanted to, but had to acclimate to being able

to exist in a Mexican sense and an American sense. They often traveled back and forth, and in some cases, where they lived on the border, the lines were blurred immensely, often going back and forth more than once a day. Visual cues offered a way for them to negotiate their identity. They saw themselves in signs, magazines, television, dolls, clothing patterns, advertisements, and used these to find ways in which to understand themselves and the place they were living. The impact of the way in which these women have educated one another had a profound effect on the way in which they learned to understand themselves and one another. Although the education that occurred was informal, it was education nonetheless, and its importance is in creating a portal through which to self reflect. Understanding through the personal narratives these women provide allows insight into the development of identity and how it can be constructed through cultural practices (Goodman, 1964; Mio, Trimble, Arredondo, Cheatham, & Sue, 1999). Identity as it manifests through behaviors, beliefs, values, as influenced through visual culture can offer information for art education as to the way identity is multi-dimensional. Also an important issue brought through these women's narratives is the idea that there is sometimes a discrepancy between the way individuals see themselves and the way they are perceived by those in dominant society. The discrepancy can occur within the culture as well, where perceptions are incongruous with one another that results in dissonance that can create or force identity to change or adapt (Mio et al., 1999). It is within the idea of perception of their identity and the visual culture that surround them that these women formulate understanding about themselves and their relationship to each other and the outside world.

The tradition of making tortillas was one that was passed down generation to generation, although in my family, with the beginning of my sisters' generation the tradition was not wholly embraced. My mother relates some of what she remembers about the days in which the women lived together and tried to pass the knowledge to the next generation. In her memory, my sister Maricela stated that she was never going to make tortillas, and if men wanted tortillas that they would just have to make them themselves. With a little bit of amusement, my mother remembers my sisters tempestuous and defiant nature, and was reminded of her own refusal to make tortillas. Though, later in her life, she understood the importance, and continued the practice. My mother remembered my sister Leticia commenting on how she wanted to learn because of the tradition, though she remarked that it was probably only due to her close connection to my grandmother. My mother was also quite proud of the fact that Leticia's tortillas were the roundest, lightest, and prettiest tortillas that any of her relatives made. In fact they were so good that many of my relatives requested Leticia make tortillas for celebrations such as *quinceañeras*¹, *bodas*², and *cumpleaños*³.

1.3. Ethnicity and Culture

Ethnicity and culture are difficult to define. One way in which ethnicity can be viewed is by defining a group by the cultural traits that members share (Barfield, 2000). Culture and ethnicity are tied to one another, as are gender, sexuality, class, language and other traits that defy conventional labels. Ethnicity, gender, culture, sexuality, etc.,

¹ A traditional party held for a girl's or boy's fifteenth birthday similar to a sweet sixteen party in the United States. Quinceañeras are an important rite of passage for youths in many Latino communities where a family can spend thousands of dollars on one night of celebrating.

² A wedding celebration.

³ A birthday celebration.

are not easy to simplify as monikers of identity and taking only one of these identifiers as a singular leads to ignoring and neglecting differences found among the individuals within a group (Trimble, 1995). As the women within this study show, living in a liminal space often requires movement throughout multiple states of being. Defining an individual by reducing their identity to a singular state of existence creates a lack of clarity in understanding, and can lead to misunderstanding between dominant and dominated groups. By simplifying an individual's state of being, or identity, based solely on superficial similarities allows groups to be homogenized, ignoring their underlying complexities. Identity can encompass more than one singular name or categorization. Within my family, although the women were part of a larger group, they represented a smaller section of that group. They existed as women in the U.S. and sometimes identified with dominant U.S. culture, but at other times, they embraced the traditional identities from their Mexican heritage, with which they were familiar.

My mother's early life took place half in Mexico and half in the U.S. Her family lived in Presidio, Texas, a border town. Although she lived in the U.S., the school she attended was in Mexico. She was brought up with many Mexican traditions, making tortillas being just one of them. Much of what she learned she learned through my grandmother, and later, through her sisters and daughters. She lived in an area where at times, she was accepted as a Mexican, and at others was ostracized for being American. Sometimes, she was accepted by the people she felt were from her own culture, and at others, she was not. This speaks to a discrepancy between the identity of individuals and their perceived identity. The children with which my mother attended school often commented on her difference, and as she remembers, they were not

always accepting. She felt conflicted about herself and her identity as though she did not belong in either. Dominant culture, in many spaces, not just the U.S., can have the propensity to suppress and at the same time appropriate from other cultures (Giroux & Simon, 1989). Her experience as an outsider within a culture that was unable or reluctant to decide my mother's place led to redefining herself as a woman. Though she grew up in a traditional home, where tortillas were made, she did not press her daughters to follow that example. In fact, she decided that some traditions were better left on the other side of the border. My mother decided that, in her opinion, there were too many *María's*⁴ in the world, and she changed her name, dropping the moniker. Growing up within a liminal space gave my mother a perspective that allowed her identity to manifest as a result of the behaviors, beliefs, values and norms outside of, and because of cultural boundaries. Though identity can be constructed as a result of cultural practices (Goodman, 1964; Mio, Trimble, Arredondo, Cheatham, & Sue, 1999), sometimes identity is constructed in spite of those practices (Ferdman, 1990).

The women in my family came from a low socio-economic background. Many of them continue to live their lives in rural areas or small towns. Although some live far from one another, they continue to connect to each other, most recently, through Facebook and e-mail. Furthermore, they have had different experiences with living in the U.S. As they negotiated their identity within the U.S., they were influenced in part by those things encompassed by the term visual culture, including fine arts, advertising, film, video, television, apparel, and other forms of visual or visualized forms (Freedman, 2003). One of the intents of this study is to examine the way in which the women in my

⁴ In many Latin American countries including Mexico, the name *María* was a traditional name given to women as a way of commemorating Mary Mother of God in the Catholic Faith. It was a way of inspiring those that bore the name to remain virginal and pure

family constructed their identity through the terms contained within the concept of visual culture. By examining the ways in which these women constructed meaning for themselves, and in turn, their identities, a more detailed understanding of what shapes their perceptions of self and other will provide a basis through which art education can be re-imagined.

1.4 Informal Education and Narratives

The impact of visual culture on the way in which these women perceive gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity, womanhood, maternity, misogyny and power is an important key to the way they understand their world. How this understanding is made contributes to the ways in which informal education works in connection to formal education.

An important part in understanding how knowledge is transferred between groups is in the way personal narratives fostered learning. Most of the women in my family related what they knew in terms of a story. Often, they utilized stories to make the lessons they were teaching more enjoyable. Stories were also used as a way to impart knowledge that may have been difficult to understand, especially between generations where context was necessary in order to enter into meaning making. My mother utilized story telling in order to impart a sense of where the women in my family had come from, and also as a way to instill a sense of independence. My aunt Lupe, utilized story telling in order to impart philosophical, and moral beliefs. Her stories were often the most fantastic, but also the most interesting. I remember hers the most. The act of telling stories reflects the way people understand the world in which they live. They are re-codified experiences, reinterpreted and recreated so that the underlying knowledge can

be disseminated and understood. Narratives reshape the lives of those to whom they are made available. Women in this study are made more accessible through the use of narrative in order to make their experiences less about being viewed from a sterile non-invasive distance, and more about being placed in the spaces these women negotiate in order to frame their identity (Richardson, 1997).

Memory plays an important part in the creation of narratives, stories, and the informal transfer of knowledge (Richardson, 1997). Much of what is remembered becomes entangled with personal meaning and is indiscernible from actuality. Memory, in the form of a story, is preserved for its moral, ethical, or philosophical content rather than as a testament of truth. In many cases within my families storytelling, truth is mixed with embellishment in order to create a story that is interesting, engaging, and more apt to captivate its audience. The embellishment acts only to create interest, and in some cases, to enhance meaning and understanding when typical language is insufficient, i.e. metaphor, simile, fantasy, myth. That is not to say that what is contained within the narratives is irrelevant because it is false. Using these tools allows the information contained within the narratives to become meaningful, open; audiences become more receptive to the information if it is engaging.

The relationship between the women in this study reflects the way they have educated one another informally about negotiating the world in which they live. Their perceptions of identity reflect the beliefs and understanding that have been formulated and influenced by culture, ethnicity, gender, age, and sexuality. How they perceive themselves and how they perceive one another is informed by the beliefs that they share and those that they bring to bear on one another.

Individuals in formal education settings experience learning in ways that are inseparable from the social, cultural, and gendered understandings they have learned previously. They respond to school in a way that reflects their own cultural, gendered, and social understanding. Language constructs their understanding as well, in a way that can make conventional education settings inaccessible. In some situations, individuals may come to feel that they embody the stereotypes that are prevalent in dominant culture. For example, if a student does not speak the dominant language, which in the U.S. is English, then the student may feel marginalized by stereotypes that suggest lack of English proficiency is equivocal to lack of intelligence (Anyon, 2005). Students who experience marginalization or feel less valued due to their cultural, social, or gender identity may create their own norms and values within the school setting, which can result in the rejection of school-based meanings (Weis, 1994). Narratives serve as a way to illustrate the way in which these women have experience education both in a formal setting and informal setting. The stories that they tell show how they have incorporated and reinterpreted the visual world in the construction of knowledge that they have passed to one another and between generations. Through the use of narratives I show how the women in this study have negotiated their identities, their learning, and found ways in which to subvert beliefs that may have come to suppress their perceptions about their culture, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and language.

1.5 We Too Are Storytellers—Analysis of Data

Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to retell the stories of the research participants. Stories are retold through the analytic mind of the researcher (Kong, 2002).

Stories are an account, meant to enrich the experience of the reader so that they are better able to understand the underlying components of who they are. Narratives are not meant to relay information in a simple and direct manner.

Narratives in the study are formed from the perspective of the research participants and influenced by the things they see, read, and hear in their everyday lives. In analyzing their stories, I focused on understanding what was conveyed and how. People link events through narrative (Bruner, 1987; Richardson, 1997). Stories in the study are an attempt to show what meanings, beliefs, and understandings the research participants have about themselves and the world around them because they are “ the primary way through which humans organize their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes” (Richardson, 1990, p. 118).

The narrative categories I focused on in this project and which were based on the research questions and emergent data were: 1) issues of empowerment, 2) personal ideas of otherness, 3) acculturation and points of resistance or acceptance, 4) sexuality in relation to traditional conservative perspectives found in women of Mexican heritage, 5) gender in relation to traditional gender roles, 6) how their perception of themselves was influenced by visual culture, 7) how they negotiated their identity within gender, ethnicity, sexuality, language and culture, and 8) how their informal education played a part in their understanding of the world. Based on feminist authors such as Judith Butler, Laurel Richardson, Patti Lather, and bell hooks, post-marxist authors such as Patti Lather, Chantal Mouffe, and Ernesto Laclau, and poststructuralist frameworks from Foucault, Lacan and Derrida, I culled data from the women’s stories that help illustrate the complexities of their identity and the interrelationship between how they see

themselves, how they perceive that the world sees them, and how their perceptions might be influenced by the visual world.

The narratives are situated within the idea that the outside forces, as well as internal ones, have an effect and make a difference on individuals' perspective of ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. According to Laurel Richardson (1990) narratives are capable of demonstrating how individuals see their experiences, goals, and intentions. The use of narrative allows individuals' ideas about their culture, identity, and society to be comprehensible to those who read their texts. Stories that are told by and about individuals humanize, so that the reader is able to empathize with what is being read, no longer treating the individual as a disembodied voice. Individuals interpret their world and their experiences in relation to time. Time is made understandable through narrative, and in a narrative, time exists outside of conventional temporal measurements like those provided by clocks and calendars. In a narrative, time is not linear, understanding then, is also non-linear, and an individual's story is expressed as "extended awareness of the past and the future within the present" (Richardson, 1990, p. 22). The stories in the study represent an attempt to link human knowledge that relays experiences from the perspective of the tellers in relation to larger experiences. For example, the stories presented in the study are a way to illustrate how identity is influenced by the visual world, and how informal education is connected to cultural understanding that then informs how individuals experience formal education.

Narratives also allow both the reader and the teller to contemplate the effects of their actions within the scope of their lives as well as seeing ways in which the tellers have altered the direction of their lives. Narrative is everywhere; it is present in myth,

fable, short story, epic history, tragedy, comedy, social histories, fairy tales, novels, science schema, comic strips, conversation, and journal articles (Richardson, 1990).

The poststructuralist nature of the study however, focuses primarily on how the participants' stories illustrate the struggles that the women in the study have had in negotiating the liminal spaces found within hybrid cultures. Some of the issues that arise in their narratives are the constantly fluctuating interstices of identity and how this produces a complex understanding of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and culture.

The narratives in this study were composed through interviews with the participants, where each was allowed to expound on questions that I asked. Though the bank of questions was the same for each participant, I tried to create an atmosphere where they felt they were allowed to digress from the question and relate in ways that made sense to them. As an example, in a question to my mother concerning what she enjoyed about art class, she was allowed to answer based on her understanding of art class since she came from a place where art was not a regular part of the school curriculum. Data was gathered using electronic media including e-mail, blogs, audio, and video recordings as well as physical artifacts that included artwork, pictures, clothing, textiles, and books. During the collection of their stories, I kept notes on what was being said, body language, and any memories that I might have had that surfaced based on what they were telling me.

For the study, women's narratives are a primary source of data. These narratives serve to illustrate the ways in which the participants understand their lives and countermand the narratives that act as a way to diminish these women's experiences in society. I am reluctant to use the term data because I feel that the use of such a term

diminishes the value of their narratives and continues to further subjugate the women who participated in the study. Referring to their stories as mere data reflects a tone in which the participants are distanced from the research that aims to create intimacy. Treating their stories as data undermines the importance and voice of the women's personal narratives by treating them as a data point that is fixed, coherent, and easily understandable. The information found within the interplay of narrative told and the way in which it is told is crucial to relaying meaning. Data in a positivist approach to inquiry suggests truth. From a poststructural perspective, narrative inquiry does not produce absolute truth, but an elusive perspective of truth. Narratives can be related from several points of view. Stories, like those contained within the study, are written in order to facilitate entry into the way the women think and understand their world. They are not meant to be read as an exact record, biography, or history about whom the story is written. The narratives in the study are not meant to be an exact retelling of what actually happened in the person's life. Relaying a discernable truth is not the main purpose of a narrative, but rather, to describe, with as much flexibility, the very complex way in which individuals experience their lives.

Narrative truth is always elusive so it is important to understand the content of the stories from a perspective of the narrator's point of view. The narratives in the study are constructed in a way that explores the personal investments the storytellers have made in representing themselves. The women's lives in the study are to be understood from a perspective that the way they experience themselves in and throughout the world in which they live is messy, complex, and deep. Storytellers' lives are involved in such deep and complex interrelationships with the world around them that a completely

comprehensive narrative that summarizes everything that relates to their construction of identity is not possible within the scope of the study. The women whose narratives serve to elucidate a partial understanding of the way in which identity is formed, deconstructed, and reformed involve their desires for a particular kind of self-representation that is interwoven into the structure of the stories. Also, within the study, meaning is conveyed through my own perceptions and memories of the women who participated. My story is as much a part of their story as theirs is mine. During the interviews, and construction of the project, I allowed my memories and understanding to become intermingled with their stories. In several instances, my memories served to remind them of circumstances and events that they had forgotten.

The purpose of narrative inquiry in the study is to facilitate understanding by making experiences relatable and easy to enter. As an educator I believe that making connections to experiences helps create a point where knowledge and learning become intermingled. Stories create spaces where meaning can be made. The stories in the study were created by distilling from the various sources of information and were conducive to illustrating the connection between visual culture, gender, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, language, and identity. In the study, the storytellers often departed from the initial question asked, and were allowed to do so. Often, their path to answering the question became a much more rich and telling narrative than if they had remained fixed on the question. Even though the women in the study were intent on participating positively, they voiced what they felt they needed to say. Because of the nature of my relationship to these women, they are my mother, my sisters and my nieces, they were less hesitant in reminding me that these were their stories, and they

wanted them to represent their understanding. As an example, my oldest sister made it absolutely clear that she wanted to see what I wrote about her so that she could make sure that I was representing her thoughts accurately. In one instance, she added to part of her narrative. Although I wrote it using my words, she insisted that I include her particular views. As another example, when I interviewed my mother, she insisted that I not translate the Spanish words that she used.

The interviews for the study are tools for gathering the stories and then retelling the stories for the purposes of relating the stories to readers so that they can be understood within the structure of academic research. The approach I took in structuring the stories within the greater project was to interweave the stories within the research project. The intent was to create a bridge between often ethereal quality of theory and the more tangible and accessible qualities of a story. The nature of storytelling created a structure for the study that departed from a more traditional one so that the flowing, elusive qualities of the stories would not be lost within the heavier qualities of theoretical frameworks.

The criteria for these narratives are presented in the form of stories that function as a way to immerse the reader into the experiences that the women in the project have had in their lives. The stories are presented in a literary fashion, so as to make them more accessible. Their narratives are intertwined with their beliefs and sometimes intersect with personal mythologies, cultural cosmologies, and personal truths. Within this narrative, I concern myself with the process of production and how the stories that the participants tell are ongoing, continual, and always in flux. Their stories are always in an ongoing process of production and transformation.

The study was an endeavor to understand the complexities of identity and how it departs from and assumes homogenous representations such as stereotypes and gender roles. Themes explored in this study are framed from the participants' perspective, and how they interpret themselves and the world. Their views are situated in the language they use, which in the case of this study is Spanish, and how it informs their interpretation of the world and themselves. Identity is further complicated through the participants ideologies which are influenced by the everyday gendered and cultural moments they experience in their lives.

In analysis of the stories being told by the participants, I created categories where I searched for words related to the criteria that I had chosen. I endeavored to use their voice as authentically as possible, and when their stories lacked information that fit the nature of the study, I used my own to fill in the gaps. The stories in the study are meant to allow the individuals to explain themselves to others in a way that creates a context for the way the participants make meaning for themselves and how they understand the world around them (Connely & Clandinin, 1990). At points in the study, what the teller related was mixed with; 1) cultural myths that became a part of the teller's understanding, 2) language that approximated the teller's understanding in translating concepts from Spanish to English, 3) folk tales and cosmologies that influenced the teller's understanding of the world, and 4) cultural reinterpretations of media and artifacts that are part of visual culture. The study includes the result of interviews that I had with the participants that were summarized so that they could be structured into a cohesive narrative that helps elucidate the reader's understanding of the individual participants. The intent was to provide the reader with examples, in a

readily accessible format, of the participants' perspectives about their identity and place in the world. The recounted experiences may include elements of reality and surreality that blends time, place, and memory together from the teller's point of view. Truth is relative to the teller's perspective. The stories represent a way to access how meaning is made and how identity is understood by the teller through interpreting; 1) the everyday, 2) the autobiographical, 3) the biographical, 4) the cultural, 5) the metaphorical, and 6) the collective story (Richardson, 1990).

One of the major themes is the way in which the women in the study explain, trouble, and confront discourses that have relegated them to one state of being. The analysis of their stories and the retelling of them based on the listed criteria is a way of interpreting their experiences so that it is reflexive, and multi-voiced. The women in the study were chosen due to their proximal relationship to me, and as the researcher with a prior relationship to the women, the analysis became complicated by my own memories. I was able to interpret what the women in the study were saying in a way that another researcher may not have been able. However, because of my relationship to the women, their narratives reflect my perceptions as well. The study also reflects the way in which I have seen the women in my family explain, trouble, and confront the hegemonic norms that they have encountered in their everyday lives. I insert my voice within the study as well as their own. The narratives presented in the study are as much mine as they are the women who participated. The study reflects both the women in my family and my own identity.

1.6 Participants

The descriptions that follow are a way for me to introduce the women in the study. The use of astrological signs and signifiers is a way to begin addressing the ways in which individuals are viewed, how they view themselves, and how they reject, depart and subvert definition. Astrological signs are but one part of the traditions that women in the family used in creating meaning for one another. The women in the study believe in cosmology that is based in part on traditional symbols and meanings found in Mexican culture, and are intermixed with popular symbols and meanings found in magazines, newspapers, books and television. These descriptions are not an all encompassing whole, they are a way of illustrating a small portion of who the women in the study are.

1.6.1 The First Sign

My mother was born on March 23, 1950. According to her American birth certificate, she was born February 7, 1949. She viewed this as her first encounter with *gringolandia*⁵ trying to reassign her identity. She acts like a typical Aries being loud, headstrong, ego-centric, into sports, independent and opinionated. She has always been an individual, and has always let her feelings be known, whether through her own voice or someone else's. Her name is Socorro, which is Spanish for succor. My mother acted as the matriarch for the family after her own mother died, issuing edicts and orders from her throne in her kitchen. Acting in such a way she earned a nickname, *La*

⁵ A popular term used by women in my mother's generation that refers to the U.S. and U.S. institutions.

*Patrona*⁶ which was given to her by the family due to her bossy and unwavering nature. She has lived in a liminal space throughout her life. My mother's early life took place half in Mexico and half in the United States. She and her parents lived on the border between Texas and Mexico, and they constantly went back and forth. My mother was born a U.S. citizen, but went to school in Mexico. As she grew older, her parents moved to New Mexico. As a teenager, my mother's life consisted of living on a farm, cooking, cleaning and at the age of 17, marriage. She learned much of what she knew through my grandmother and through television, media, and through the women in her family, namely her daughters and later her granddaughters. Much of what she considered "the white way" or "what white people do" she learned through what she saw and experienced every day. Even though her understanding of English was limited, in her stories she recounts how she is able to interpret the world through sensory cues, visual, tactile, auditory, etc., to create meaning for herself and those she educated.

1.6.2 The Water-Bearer

Leticia is an Aquarius and as eccentric in her ideas as most who were born under this sign. Like many other Aquarians, she embraces her inner child with a ferocity and intensity that has filled much of her living space with toys. She, like many of the women in my family, lives in a liminal space. Her identity is formed from the complexities of contending with the traditional dogma of her Mexican heritage as well as both embracing and being suspicious of American ideas. As an example, she had to learn both English and Spanish fluently; Spanish in order to communicate with my parents,

⁶ Spanish term that means "female boss" or "female owner" and in this sense used as a term of endearment.

English in order to communicate with dominant society in the U.S. She was often the translator for my parents. There were many occasions where my sister acted as the intercessor between community officials and my parents; she dealt with the landlords, the principals, teachers, doctors, etc. As a result she had to act maturely, and reach adulthood at a very young age. At a certain point in my academic career, she was the one I went to for help with homework, filling out school applications, and help with choice of careers. One of the things I remember most about my sister is her love of art. She would bring drawings home from school, and many times she would let me copy them, as much as I was able to. My introduction to formal school art was through her, and I wanted so much to grow up to be as smart and talented as she. She was the good daughter in both my mother's and my father's eyes, and she would often serve as the ballast upon which my sister Maricela was judged. Leticia's dream of going to art school was never realized, giving up on fanciful dreams and succumbing to the practicality of earning a living in order to supplement our family's income.

1.6.3 The Archer

Maricela is the second oldest of my siblings. She was born in December and is the only one of us that was born in a different town. We, my brother, my sister and I, were born in Roswell, New Mexico, her birth coincided with a change in our economic status. We were no longer poor and destitute, just merely poor. She is the diva in the family, perhaps due to what she believes to be attractive qualities that make her appealing to men from Mexican heritage. Her hair is dark and her complexion light, with matching light colored eyes. However, her looks are not the only thing that attracts

men, it is her innocent, almost naïve, nature. That is not to say she is unintelligent, far from it. Her intelligence is often a detriment, and Latinos find that to be her least attractive quality. Growing up, she always played with me, my brother and my male cousins and she was a fearless and athletic tomboy. She was not afraid of men, or of being neither too feminine nor too masculine. As she grew older, she was pressured by her mother and her father to acquiesce and adhere to a role my parents felt was more traditional. Having been half way to a degree in early childhood education she gave up her academic career, the weight of an abusive spouse, familial pressure and three children too heavy to allow her to continue. Her choices were hard, and she felt as though she lived in my sister's shadow. We often read books together ranging from women's stories from the middle east to novels that my mother labeled smut.

1.6.4 Castor and Pollux

Amanda, is a Gemini. She embodies the individualistic and changeable qualities that are typical of her sign. She has wanted to be everything from astronaut to teacher to wife to deejay. She is my oldest niece, and has been under my care off and on since I was thirteen. Amanda is independent and a very strong woman. She is married and has retained her last name which she refuses to change because she feels that taking a man's name is akin to becoming his possession. Even more, in her fierce sense of independence, she gave her son her last name. Amanda's explanation is that she carried her child, gave birth to him, and dealt with the joys and pains of pregnancy; since it was she who carried him and contended with his birth, then the right to name him is hers alone. In her opinion, when her husband gives birth then he can name that

baby anything he wants. She is very far detached from my mother's generation and Amanda's thoughts and feelings often conflict, directly, with my mother's. She does not speak Spanish fluently, but does understand and enjoy the importance of that part of her cultural heritage. She does not cook, but she has placed her husband in charge of learning my mother's recipes in order to impart the family's knowledge and culinary traditions.

1.6. 5 It Is Her Nature

Elizabeth is an intense and strong personality in my family. Family members either like her, or dislike her, and no middle ground exists. As my second oldest niece I have no choice but to like her. When she was six years old, she told me I liked her. She is a Scorpio and her opinions, her independent thinking, her sense of morality and tradition rival those of my mother. Feminist in her own way, she has chosen to pursue a career as a wife and a mother, and defends her position to do so. She has been questioned by her friends as to why she would want to stay at home when there are so many other fun things to do, like parties and traveling. Her response is always that it is just as much work to take care of a home and family as it is to have a career outside of the home. She says she would like to be like my mother, in charge of her home and the welfare of her family, to keep alive the traditions that she has experienced. However, Elizabeth's interaction with her grandmother is often framed in very different interpretations of tradition and womanhood, which results in adversarial an relationship.

1.7 Dissertation as Literature

Researchers like Tom Barone (1995) have used creativity for the purposes of creating research that is non-fictional and effectual in addressing social inquiry making an argument for the value of arts-based texts as legitimate sources of educational research and knowledge. As part of my inquiry, I will employ the use of metaphoric, evocative language and literary formats that are often found within the realm of creative literature, though my use of a literary style in this dissertation may provoke a tendency towards non-scientific and therefore questionable research, it is nonetheless not unprecedented. Arts-based research can be defined as a systematic use of artistic process in various forms that include literary such as literary essays, novels, novellas, short stories, prose, and verbal poetry among others. It is more specifically defined as a form of qualitative research that employs within the inquiry process and the research text the premises and principles of art (Given, 2008). Arts based research allows inquiry through artistic expressions in different forms as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies. This methodology enables the an approach to qualitative inquiry that undertakes the realization and communication of complex subjective realities, personal truths, and individualized voices and place them within a cohesive context that would otherwise be limited by conventional methods of scientific approach. Janet L. Miller (2005) examines arts based research from an autobiographic, auto-ethnographic, perspective in which she examines her own teaching, and the teaching of others through self-reflective practices. Her self-reflective work examines teaching practice and employs imaginative literature and personal narrative to examine the construction

of self. Maxine Greene (1995) also confronts the realization of self and its incomplete nature through self-examination, autoethnography, and autobiography. Greene's research focuses on the role the arts play in understanding difference, experiences, and social change. Like Miller and Greene, part of my research will be reflexive in nature, looking at the point in which my life intersects the lives and identities of the women who are participants in the study.

In relation to feminist narrative, it is impossible for me to exclude my voice, as it is inevitably entwined with the voices of my family; we are connected through time and space by shared familial, social, and cultural memories. Although some arts-based research has a tendency to focus on and attempt to reflect more accurately the creative process, the literary process to be employed in this research is intended to provide a better understanding of the participants' experiences through the use of metaphor and vignettes which are methods that attempt to give the reader further insight into the participants' state of being.

1.8 Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of the study will be to understand the formation of identity and the relationship to visual culture among three generations of my family, and examine the ways in which they negotiate their identity through the narratives of their lives. The questions that I have developed for the study revolve around the relationship between the construction of identity and how the women in the study situate themselves within a hybrid space. Perceptions of identity are investigated in the way the women in the study

interact with one another and the complexity of cultures in which they exist. The questions I address in the study are:

- 1) How have the women in the study constructed and negotiated their identity?
- 2) How do the women in the study understand and situate ideas of womanhood, maternity, misogyny and power?
- 3) How do the women in the study resist postcolonialism, acculturation and hegemony?
- 4) How have the women in the study engaged with informal education and how has informal education interacted with their perception of self?

1.9 Narrative Inquiry and Critical Ethnography as Design

For the purpose of the study, I have used narrative inquiry in conjunction with critical ethnography as a method of gathering data. These methodologies are compatible with one another in answering questions of the subversive nature of identity, sexuality, and gender as they exist in a dominant, often oppressive regime. Because of the relationship of these methods of inquiry to relations of power, gender, and identity to post-Marxism I discuss them in more detail in Chapter 9. The study relates well with these methodologies as visual culture too has roots in anthropological research from which critical ethnography also emerges. The reason for choosing narrative inquiry and critical ethnography for the study is in creating a rich description of the experiences and stories of a culture sharing group comprised of five women in my family, and the perceptions of unfairness and injustice within their domain. Critical ethnography creates an opportunity to approach the study as a critique on the social aspects of dominance,

power, privilege, and authority and questions the conditions for existence within a particular context—in this case visual culture—that have shaped the environment in which the women in my family have constructed their identities (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Madison, 2005). Narrative inquiry creates the opportunity to relate the stories of women who have been marginalized by society and how their perceptions of identity and the world around them has constructed their sense of self, purpose, and education. Critical ethnography seeks to determine and dismantle how culture works within inequality and resistance as a whole through a rich descriptive approach. Narrative inquiry humanizes the struggle that the women in the study experience as they encounter inequities, power struggles, and how they resist.

CHAPTER 2

WHERE ALL THINGS BEGIN

Everything is food food food
Everything is food to go
Everything is food for thought
Everything you knead is dough
It is food
Everything is food.

Harry Nilsson

2.1 Mother is the Name for God

My mother sat at the kitchen table, unmoving, her hand on a cup of coffee. This place where she sat, this table that she remembered from better days, the tradition of morning coffee was all that was left. From the living room, she could hear the soft teary muffled voices of condolence, consolation, and bereavement. Her oldest brother walked into the kitchen, red-eyed, though restrained, he poured himself a cup of coffee, and sat next to my mother. "We're orphans now," he said, in a very matter of fact, very male and gravely voice. "What are we going to do now?" My mother sat, silent, tears streaming down her face. Stoic, but clearly in the grips of severe devastating sorrow.

Dawn had been cold that morning, and rain was pouring. Clouds hung low, like upside down egg cartons in the sky. The sun was in the east, where all things begin, and loomed low on the horizon, barely piercing the cold grey veil. Cold pellets of icy water hung in the air like bees or gnats, biting our faces. Grayness seemed to permeate everything, even the bright yellow of my grandmother's house, which, on that day, seemed subdued and sullen. Inside the adobe home, the smell of coffee worked against the cold and dank. The scent wound its way throughout the house; the cold of the day wasn't the only thing that needed warming. The faces in the house were as grey, dank,

solemn and lifeless as the day. In the midst of the solemn gravity I watched my mother sum up her courage and put her feelings aside, just as she had on countless other occasions, and console her brothers and sisters in the passing of their own mother. As I watched, I let my mind wander. My mind's eye walked past the wobbling table, around my elders who sat on its entourage of mismatched chairs, and through the kitchen door, behind a makeshift curtain door. In this memory, this half dreamlike shade, my grandmother welcomed me along with the scent of tortillas, beans, fattening goodies, and the all too familiar waft of fresh brewed coffee. She stood in the doorway, holding a cup, as black as the ash that heated the stove, and surrounding her, were the women, her daughters, in the perpetual dance of days, preparing food, cleaning up, and getting ready to make more food, all the while eating food.

Everything revolved around food; without food, there would be no work, without work, there would be no food. My grandmother, like all the women in my family, ruled from the kitchen. Food was the soma of our lives. We received our meals through the women in the family. Their work was our sustenance, and my grandmother was at the center.

As I continued to watch through the hazy shade of memories, I was sitting in the midst of my family's mourning. My mother, in her homemade dress, which she styled after one she had seen while shopping, in her up-to-the-minute coif, consoled, and comforted. I remembered why her name means "succor" in Spanish. On that day, she was the blanket upon which the family relied; she warmed them on that cold wintry day. My memory turned as I watched her, and now we were sitting in the day before. We were in a hospital room, though heated, equally cold and sterile as the wintry day

outside. The day was crisp. The trees were leafless. It was a winter day, cold, dreary, and oppressive. My mother always hated snow-less dry winters and how they felt to her as if the very hand of death had stripped the life out of everything. Even color was not allowed to live. Everything looked muted in the dingy cold. Usually, this time of year was my mother's favorite. Christmas was only three days away, although this year, that was not enough to provide solace. The view from the room in which we were sitting with my grandmother was no more inviting than the bleakness outside. I looked out of the window, watching the clouds undulate like slow moving herds of grey buffalo. My grandmother lay on the hospital bed, laden with the effluence of morphine and antibiotics, and my mother sat next to her, listening to her drug induced ramblings. My mother simply smiled, and reassured her when moments of clarity appeared. In the end, it was my mother and grandmother, together in birth and death, sharing the mysteries of life and passing, not alone, but with one another.

2.2 History

Now it was my mother that filled the house with the scent of coffee and comfort. My mother was strong; she was stubborn, and solid. Like earth, one did not ask her to move, one coaxed her, and allowed her to move on her own, slowly. She stood, like granite, in the face of tradition and often an adversary to my grandmother's understanding of womanhood. Within the inner sanctum of my family, she became an alpha, but unlike women who had come before her, she did not rule from the kitchen. She was an active member within the family, and the immediate Latino community. She was also the bridge between the family members living in the United States, and those

still living in Mexico. She was not only mother to her children, but to our cousins, our aunts, and our uncles. Like many mothers, she too was appreciated and neglected, welcomed and pushed away. Sometimes I wondered if my family were all just a bunch of teen-agers throwing their tantrums when my mother didn't do as they wanted, but instead, gave them what they needed. My mother's strength came from her children, from her husband, and from the family. Although at times she was pushy, adamant, and resolute in her behavior; like the earth, she was the foundation upon which the family rested its values, hopes, and dreams. Her strength enabled others to be strong. Her example gave the women in my family the possibility to act of their own accord, and to begin to understand their place in the world. My mother helped them understand the possibility of living as a woman of Mexican heritage in a world that was different and sometimes unaccommodating to difference. My mother transferred her strength to the women around her, her sisters, her daughters, her nieces, and granddaughters, dragging them into the reality and modernity of the world around them. My mother was not the anticipation of spring, or the jubilation of summer. She was, the harshness of winter, and the preparation of autumn. Her experience with the world was one of disappointment, struggle, violence, and fear. She constantly pressured the women in her family to educate themselves and think for themselves. Though she persisted, her advice was often met with resistance and complaint. My mother did not comfort the women around her with cushiony arms, or apron strings. Her consolation was in words, advice, and a call for action. Encouragement was the only weapon she had, hoping to impress upon her sisters and daughters the predicament they would be in were they to base their existence on a man. Often, she would comment on their decadent lifestyle:

“These girls today just want to live their lives at the *pachanga*⁷, or strapped to the arm of a man. They don’t want to take care of themselves. They think that life is like the stupid *novelas*⁸ they watch, full of drama. They don’t realize that one day they aren’t going to be as beautiful as they think they are. When they lose their figure we’ll see how far their looks will take them. When a man doesn’t want them anymore, what are they going to do? What they need to do is take some of the money they’re using to waste on the men they date and use it to get an education, or buy a house, or something else besides a good time.”

The relationship my mother had with her family was a complex and overreaching one. Her voice was loud, it echoed and rippled through her children, her sisters, and her entire family. And when it echoed, it reverberated against the cultural walls that were often set against these women. She was often the advocate for the women in her family. She set herself against their husbands, brothers, and authorities. She was always the first to be called when a woman was experiencing trouble with her husband. She offered her home as a sanctuary for those in her family that were in dire need, including the women who had been abandoned, abused, or both by their husbands. My mother held her family members to a high standard, but when they failed, she was there to help them. On several occasions, she even stood between her family and God, though not in a literal sense. She did not adhere to the staunch Catholicism in which she was inducted during her youth. Nuns at the school she attended in her youth would

⁷ A *pachanga* is a slang word for a party that is usually rowdy and hedonistic.

⁸ *Novelas* are Spanish soap operas that often run like mini-series and whose main characters are complex women. They are a favorite form of entertainment for many Latinos both in and outside of the U.S. Watched by both men and women alike, *novelas* carry with them many overt and underlying messages. There are many archetypes to be found within *novelas*, and the stories that they tell are often rife with morality.

constantly punish her for asking too many questions. She remembers, “They would get mad at me for asking why women couldn’t be priests, why nuns couldn’t get married, and why I had to confess my sins especially if I didn’t know if I was sinning or not. They would make me kneel in the chapel saying rosary after rosary, but I didn’t care. They would leave me there alone, and when they were gone, I would just get up and play around the chapel. Sometimes, I would leave and go to the candy store that was right around the corner from the school. They didn’t even know. But I used to get so mad. They would always try to make me and my sister share supplies, and books even though my dad had paid for us to each have some. One day I got so mad I pushed a kid out of the desk my dad had rented for my sister. There wasn’t any place for her to sit, and I didn’t think it was right for her to go without since her desk had been paid for.”

My mother’s sense of identity was highly influenced by the pride she felt towards our family history. During the Mexican Revolution, my family played a part in the resistance movements in Northern Mexico. Preserving her heritage was important to my mother, as well as passing this heritage on to her children. She felt that her children should know the Spanish language, and also know about their own family’s history. Many times during my life, she recounted the stories of the *Revolucionarios*⁹ many of whom were uncles, cousins, and even her own father. The rural and isolated nature of the land in which her family lived was perfect for mounting sites of resistance. She was very proud of the fact that her family stood their ground and refused to be dominated. On one of her usual visits to Mexico, I accompanied her, at her request, so that I could become better familiar with my relatives. We entered a small concrete block home, with dirt floors and two rooms; one served as the kitchen and the other served as the

⁹ The revolutionary heroes of the Mexican Revolution

bedroom, living room, and storage room. There, in the kitchen, lit by a single light bulb that hung from a brown extension cord dangling precariously over the center of the room, I met one of my great aunts. The smile in her eyes was as bright and deep as my mother's; in fact, it was as though I were looking at an older version of her, looking at a vision of what my mother was to become. My aunt smiled at me, with a grin, wrinkled, aged, and full of secret wisdom, and smashed my face between her rugged and meaty hands. "Oh Coy, this one I haven't seen since he was running around naked at your mother's house. He's so handsome. Where's his brother? Did you bring him?" she said in a voice booming with happiness, and a touch of tequila. "No, I didn't bring his brother, just my baby. I wanted him to come and visit so that he wouldn't forget his family," my mother answered. "Oh but I miss my *tejoncito*," my aunt replied. I looked quizzically at them both and asked, "What's a *tejón*¹⁰?" My aunt laughed, "Oh, your mother hasn't told you about the *tejones*?" she boomed, still smiling. "*Tejones* are us. We are *tejones*. It's what your family is. Well, except for you--you are not a *tejón*. You are too small, and too delicate. Now your brother, he's a *tejón*. Your cousins, Eduvijes's kids, they are *tejones*. Even your sister Lety, she's a *tejón*. But you, you are like your father. You are not a *tejón*." I looked at my mother, a little dejected, and she looked at me with understanding. "A *tejón* is a badger. That is what they called our family during the revolution because we were hard to move. We stayed in our houses, and held our ground. We are stubborn. We do what we want. We move when we want, and we are mean when we are provoked," she answered with a little bit of pride. My aunt added, "And yes, don't forget, we're built like *tejones* too--big, and bulky, strong, and ugly," she

¹⁰ *Tejón* is Spanish for badger. This was a nickname given to my family members who participated in the Mexican Revolution because of their tenacious personalities, and their tremendous girth.

laughed. I was a little disheartened. I didn't fit in, and felt as though I wasn't really part of the family. On the way home, my mother saw the introspective look on my face, "Don't worry *mijo*¹¹, she didn't mean to hurt your feelings. It was actually a compliment. You know why *tejones* are stubborn? Because they only see what they want to see. Being stubborn also comes with a price. Being a *tejón* also means that you have to be *cabezudo*¹², and you are not that. You are too smart to be a *tejón*, and too kind. *Tejones* like your cousins are rough, they're *desgraciados*¹³, and *groseros*¹⁴ sometimes. And the men, they are too macho. You are like your father. You think about things. *Tejones* act first and think later. You aren't like that." I asked my mother if she was a *tejón*, to which she replied, "Sometimes I am, sometimes I am not."

My mother's sense of family history influenced the perception of her identity. There were wide interpretations of the revolutionary movement in Mexico, and some revolved around myth, memory, and perception. These mythic memories resulted in a constructed reality of what the revolution in Mexico was, and the parts that many had to play. Different revolutionary movements created different traditions, some from re-imagined memories and others from invented. My mother's memory was no different, as these traditions of reinventing historic events were pervasive throughout Mexico (Benjamin, 2000). Her memory, however, is no less real. The parts my family played in the revolution, whether real, fictionalized, or a little of both, have become part of my mother's cultural memory, and influenced the way in which she perceives her sense of self.

¹¹ This is a diminutive term that means "my son" and is a combination of *mí* – my and *hijo* – son.

¹² A word that means hard-headed to the point where neither logic nor reason is understood.

¹³ A word that literally means "without grace" and refers to giving in to vices and primal urges.

¹⁴ A word that refers to a person who is uncouth.

2.3 Elemental

Mornings were always the same at my house. The day would start with mom in the kitchen having coffee with my father as he prepared to go off to work. The television, ever present, was tuned to the news. When my father left, my mother, as a matter of routine, would put it on the programs that would start our day. Our morning schedule ran by the programs that we watched. As we prepared ourselves for school, my mother would sit in the living room, waiting for each of us to finish getting ready. Every school day was the same, my brother would lament not being able to watch the *Three Stooges*. Our nick name for him was Curly, a character from the show, because he resembled him in girth and intellect. My sister Leticia, was the first to get ready, and always had her books, supplies, and lunch prepared for the day. The final step in Leticia's routine was to comb her hair. Because of its length, she needed my mother's help, which my mother did gladly. As Leticia sat in the chair, positioned so that my mother could continue to watch television, my mother would speak and Leticia would listen. My mother carried on a conversation as though she were a stylist at a salon. As she watched *I Love Lucy*, something would inevitably trigger a memory. "You know I used to have a dress like that. When I was younger, I remember seeing the girls going to school wearing a poodle skirt. I wanted one, but we were too poor to afford one. So one day, I decided to make my own. It really wasn't that hard. I borrowed one that a friend had, and I used it to make a pattern. And then, I embroidered the poodle on it all by myself. After I made one, your aunts wanted one too. So I made one for each of them all in different colors. They were so beautiful," she remembered. While Lucille Ball made a spectacle of

herself, we would continue to get ready. Leticia's hair appointment would take as long as the whole episode of *I Love Lucy*.

After that show was over, and Leticia's hair was done, my sister Maricela took her turn. My mother was very particular about the way her daughters presented themselves at school. Appearance was everything, in her opinion. Although we were poor, there was no need to look the part. Being well coifed and well dressed was essential in any tax bracket. After all, poverty had not kept her from being in fashion. What she could not afford, she made, or bought second hand. The second program of the day was *I Dream of Jeannie*, a television show that both of my sisters hated, almost as much as they hated *I Love Lucy*. And while my mother combed Maricela's hair, she continued to converse. "Oh, I used to have that couch. I loved it so much, it was the most comfortable one we ever had. Do you remember, it was the one you and Leticia used to sleep on when we first moved to Roswell. It was so expensive, but luckily, I knew the owner of the store and I managed to talk him into giving me the floor model." My sister Maricela could barely contain her boredom, and she was irritated with my mother's insistence on pulling her hair so tight her eyes started to water.

My mother's memories were tied to the programs she watched. Her favorite show was *Little House on the Prairie*, because it reminded her so much of her life growing up along the border. Although she was born in the 1950s, life in the rural and desolate border was very similar to what was portrayed on the show. My mother even remembered her family's only mode of transportation was by horse and buggy. She also loved the show because it was the way in which my sister Leticia taught her how to speak English. When the show was on during prime time, my mother loved watching it,

but had a very difficult time understanding. She wanted to know more, and had finally made the decision to learn English. My sister Leticia, helped her along, by translating what was said, and also giving her some contextual clues by relating imagery on the show to imagery my mother could understand. Their lessons progressed throughout the whole series, my sister helping my mother along. After she became a little more confident, my mother wanted to try reading, so my sister borrowed the set of *Little House on the Prairie* books from the library. Together they read the books, and with the imagery from the television show, my mother slowly learned how to read, speak, and write basic English.

2.4 Water My Blood

My mother's relationship to her daughters and granddaughters who are a part of the study is one that is nurturing, guiding, mutual, loving, antagonistic, adversarial, and most of all, very complex. The way the women in the study see one another, and how they see themselves is linked to the ways in which they have taught one another to see. Vision is constructed through culture, language, gender, and other factors, and the perceptions the women in the study have formed are influenced by their constructed vision. The relationship of vision to language and culture is central to field of visual culture where the "vision itself is a cultural construction; it is like a language that you learn to speak" (Dikovitskaya, 2005, p. 244). Although my mother is the nexus through which all the women in the study share their relationship, she is not the progenitor of the way in which they see themselves and each other. The perceptions they have constructed are reciprocal, each influencing how the other sees, hears, acts, and learns.

This is important in understanding the way in which informal education can work, and the way in which individuals can engage with visual culture.

There was a tarot card that I always used to look at that reminded me so much of my sister Leticia. The first time that I ever saw the card was in a book that my sister Maricela had checked out from the library. She was enthralled with divination at the time, looking for meaning in her life. This card was my favorite, possibly because it reminded me of the *lotería*¹⁵ card by the same name; I always thought it was lucky. The card in the book depicted a woman that sat near a river holding two pitchers, one in each hand. The woman in the picture poured water from the pitchers, one on the bank next to her, and the other back into the river. This reminded me of Leticia, and her relationship with my mother. I would always imagine my sister, kneeling at the bank of a river, pouring knowledge onto the earth and into the river. The earth was my mother, and sometimes the water would make its way down the cracks and into its depths. At other times, the water would cascade and pour back into the river, mingling with the other lost words of wisdom.

My mother and my sister had an odd relationship. At times, it was difficult to see who was the mother and who was the daughter. Leticia was always much more practical, and much more content with the everyday, the normal, the conventional, and the quiet. My mother, on the other hand, enjoyed the possible, especially for her children, and was always pushy when it came to their success. Fitting in was no different. My mother believed that in order to be a part of a community that you had to fit in, that you had to try to accommodate those around you, not make waves, and to blend

¹⁵ A bingo like game that is often played in Latino households. Sometimes the game is played for money. The game is played like bingo but instead of letters and numbers, the player uses a set of pictures. These pictures come with *dichos* or words of wisdom that are used to teach morality and ethics.

in. Most of her life had been spent doing just that. She didn't understand my sister Leticia, or why she was so resistant to getting her done in a modern fashion, or wearing up to the minute clothes. My mother had always done her best to do just that. When she was younger, though she came from poverty, she did what she could to maintain her looks in a fashionable way. She would often look at fashion magazines like *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Redbook*, and do her best to look like the women in the pictures. There was no money for going to the salon, so my mother taught herself to cut and style hair on her own. She became proficient enough at doing her own hair that soon afterward other women in the family came to her in order for my mother to do their hair. She also used the magazines as reference material when creating her own wardrobe. Most of the clothing she wore during her young adulthood she made on her own, using what she saw as a template. She remembers, "Oh yes, I was very good at copying the things that I saw in magazines or in store windows. If something was a little hard for me to copy, I just remade it until it looked like what I saw. Sometimes, I would go to the store and look at a dress to see how it was made, then I would go home and try it until it came out right," she recounted as she talked about her sense of creativity. "Sometimes I would go to the fabric store and there would be a nice piece of fabric that I liked and I didn't know what I was going to do with it, but I knew I liked it. So I would buy it and save it for when I found a dress or a blouse that it would look good in."

During my sister's teenage years, my mother's opinions about making clothes changed. As money became readily available, being fashionable became even more important for my mother prompting her desire to buy the best for her children. Cost was not the only factor in clothing that she bought for her family. Clothes also had to pass

her rigorous inspection as to quality and durability. She also knew fabrics, and was keen to stay away from things she knew would be shoddily made and in poor quality. But, above all, the clothing had to be in style because, from her perspective, fitting in meant being in fashion: “When you go outside, you should look your best. You may be poor, but being poor doesn’t mean you have to look like it. What you can’t afford, you should know how to make. Your clothes and your hair, the way your face looks-- those are the first things that people see. You should make sure those are the best they can be, and clean. People make up their minds about you the moment they see you. That’s what I do. If a person is dressed in ugly, dirty clothes, and looks like they haven’t bathed, then I don’t want to go near them. People judge you by the way you look,” she would often say, repeatedly throughout our lives.

My sister Leticia did not agree. In her mind, style transcended fashion trends and fads. Much of her ideas about what to look like and how to dress came from the old movies that she used to watch. Leticia always believed that there were certain items of clothing that a person must own, and that in having those items trends, would never be a burden. “All people really need are some pieces of classic clothing, like, for example, a nice white shirt, a pair of linen pants, a black skirt, a neutral colored scarf and so on, all in traditional classic cuts-- no bellbottoms, no halter tops, no hip huggers, just plain old traditional style. If you have those things, you’ll never need anything else. Oh, yes, and you should always stick to good fabrics, silk, linen, cotton, denim, leather, nothing polyester or man-made,” was her advice.

Both she and I remember a day from our youth that illustrated the complicated relationship that my sister Leticia had with my mother. I remember the day was hot and

muggy. It was an August afternoon, and we, my mother, my two sisters, my brother and me, were at the mall. We were shopping for school clothes, the ritual that had started when the second of my two oldest sisters, Maricela, hit puberty and found that hand-me-downs and homemade clothing were no longer acceptable in junior high. So we were shopping, and I indulged in my mother's preoccupation with my oldest sister. My sister remembered this day as well, and recounted a conversation she had with my mother: "Why don't you try this one on. It's just your size," she was holding up a pair of pants. "I don't like those. They aren't going to fit, I can tell, they aren't cut right." Leticia remembered why she had said that, "I told her that because I could tell, I knew they were the right size, but they were cut for women with no butt. She just wouldn't listen. It was like talking to a rock. In the end, I just let her pick what she wanted. They would just sit in my closet until she forgot about them." "I remember that day. You started crying and I didn't know what was going on," I commented. "Yeah, I was crying because I was so mad. She was always trying to get me to wear clothes that were 'in fashion' but I didn't like them, and I knew they weren't going to fit. I mean, I knew I was fat. Why couldn't she see it?" she continued. "Of course it didn't help that Minga (our aunt) was there. It was like they were fighting to see who would have the trendiest daughter. Besides, I hated shopping, and I didn't want to be there to begin with. What was wrong with homemade clothes? I was ok with going to the fat girl store too. Why did it matter what I wore? I was the one that was going to be wearing it, not her. She always wanted me to fit into clothes that just weren't meant for big girls. She was always obsessed with the way I looked."

Clothing was just the nexus at which my sister Leticia and my mother shared the bulk of their differences. My mother and my sister shared a very complex relationship. My sister passively resisted my mother's advice. Appearances were very important to my mother when it came to my sister. Leticia was a representative of the family, and according to my mother, she had to look the most presentable, as she was often the one who dealt with the world outside of the family. There were many occasions where my sister acted as the intercessor between community officials, authority figures, bill collectors, landlords, principals, teachers, and doctors, and as a result, my mother pushed her to act and speak in a certain way. Much of my mother's ideas about how to deal with the world came from watching television.

"Now when you talk to them, remember, you're not Lucy, so don't act like an idiot," she would say, although not as often as her favorite saying when dealing with the world "God'll get you for that, Walter."¹⁶

I remember the day my sister Maricela brought the tarot book home. We looked at it as she showed us the card pictures and read the meanings behind them. We laughed as we read the cards that represented each of us. Temperance was the card that represented Maricela. Water flowing back and forth, in balance, yet transforming. To me the card was so noble, and so much like her. Leticia's card was the star, again, water flowing, productively. My sister was very much like the woman in the card. I always thought that her efforts were wasted in trying to change my mother. I didn't understand, pouring water on the earth seems like a wasted action, the earth will either drink it up, and leave nothing behind, or will turn to mud. I shared this bit of insight with

¹⁶ My mother was often fond of repeating and using catch phrases from her favorite television programs. Often she would use them to relate an underlying meaning. This phrase was from the television show *Maude* that starred Bea Arthur.

her many times throughout our lives. “Why do you listen to mom? If you don’t agree with her, just tell her. Sure she might yell, and get angry, but at least you let her know how you feel. Why waste time trying to wait for someone to change? Better they should know where you stand,” I often said to her.

“Oh Andy,” she would sigh, a smile on her face, “Sometimes it’s better to say nothing.”

“Oh Tish,” I countered, “You’re just *aguada*.”¹⁷

She laughed, “That may be, but water will always go where it wants to.”

“Not always, you can dam it up or stick it in a pitcher,” I said.

“Water only gets trapped when it wants to be, but it is never stopped for very long. Water finds a way around. Water is a very powerful element—you just don’t understand it. That’s why you always react. And when you react, people are able to control you. You should be like water,” she said.

And my sister was like water, in everything she did, including her relationship with my mother. When my mother would push and work at trying to change my sister, she would bend, and her course would change, in a manner that my mother could not follow. My sister became the teacher, and soon after Leticia reached adulthood, the nature of their relationship changed. My mother stopped trying to make my sister wear the clothes she wanted her to wear. My mother stopped trying to push my sister into the career she wanted her to follow. Instead, my sister began to gently push my mother. Leticia advised her on resuming her education, pushing her to learn English and then afterwards, continue on her way to obtaining her G.E.D. My sister even began to

¹⁷ A term in Spanish that refers to a person who is passive, who goes with the flow. Literally the term means “like water.”

manage my mother's money, and advise her on first, beginning a savings account, and later, what to do with her savings. Like the woman on the card, Leticia lived in a liminal space, caught between two worlds; between being a child and an adult, between being Latina and American, between being strong and being weak. And my mother, though she was more like the earth, was caught in a liminal space as well.

2.5 Synopsis

My mother's perception of herself was influenced by the world in which she engaged with on a daily basis. Her identity was formed through the subjective way in which she perceived: 1) the physical environment like clothing, books, furniture, television programs, 2) the social environment like the relationships between herself and her family, 3) the abstract environment like ideas of good versus bad, domination, and success. All of these contained socially constructed meaning for her, which in turn defined her perception of herself, and of her family. These factors influenced the way in which she chose to act to implement change for herself and her family. Her identity is formed most directly through her interaction with her family and the outside world. Although she understood herself in one way, she did not neglect that the world perceived her another way. For example, she experiences the liminal quality of her identity during her youth at school. She remembered, "I loved going to school when I was a little girl. I was lucky because your grandpa thought it was important for kids to be smart, and he had a good job. He made sure I had money for my books and my supplies. Back then, where we were, you had to rent your desk, and pay for your spot in school. You also had to pay for your books. Even though we paid for our books, we

didn't get to keep them or take them home with us. It was really like we were renting them. My mom didn't like that. She always tried to keep me home because she needed help with the kids, or cleaning the house, or working on something. She always tried to give me something to do so I would stay home and help her. But I loved school a lot, and when she tried to make me stay home, I would just sneak out."

Her memories of school delineated her difference. She remembers, "I wanted my children to go to school, and never be afraid of learning. I wanted my sons and daughters to have everything I didn't get to have. If I could have finished school I would have. I remember when I was going to school, some of the other kids would make fun of me. I remember one day, there were political rallies at the school; it was time for elections. Many of the kids at school belonged to the PRI¹⁸ and they were all talking about how their parents were going to vote PRI. I said I was going to vote PRI, too, and they laughed at me. They said, 'no you can't vote PRI because you're American. You can't vote at all.' I was so upset, I told them 'no, I'm Mexican, and I can vote PRI if I want.' But they said no, that I was American and that's all I was." She laughed at her youthful naiveté, "You know, they were right. I was American, but I didn't know it until I was older. But now, when I think about the past, I remember that the girls I was friends with would always love coming over and eating at our house. They would say, 'wow, you're lucky. You get to eat like this all the time.' I didn't know what they were talking about, but then I figured it out. They were talking about the food my mom made. They had never seen pancakes, cornbread, fried chicken, or hamburgers before. They

¹⁸ One of the Mexican political parties. The letters PRI stand for Partido Revolucionario Institucional which, during my mother's youth, was a socialist party.

thought we were rich because that's what we ate all the time. I didn't know any different because my mom always cooked like that ever since I can remember.”

The shifts in my mother's identity, both in the pride she had for her Mexican heritage and adopting cultural norms that were present in the country of her birth and home, the U.S, can inform art education in understanding individuals that exist between the borders of certainty and order, and hybridized identity (Giroux, 1996). When my mother spoke of her family history, her memories were always influenced by her American perception. Her reflections on beauty and appearance were largely influenced by what she saw on American television. The imagery she encountered on television, both Mexican and American, contained stereotypical representations of women. Her unique experience of living within her hybridity illustrates the individual struggles for self definition which she encountered in her life (Dikovitskaya, 2005). By focusing on the specificity of the conditions of colonialism, patriarchy in the female experience of the women in the study like my mother, educators can begin to understand the difficulties individuals experience multicultural conditioning (Anzaldúa, 1999). By addressing the ever changing construction of identity that exists in within the realm of education, curricula can be developed that articulates and acknowledges the struggles individuals experience in defining themselves. Identity is not limited to one specific criteria or group. Many individuals experience some sense of liminality or hybridized identity and are not limited to people from Mexican heritage. My mother's experience shows the difficulty in defining herself in light of Post-Chicano movements where individuals are immersed in the politics of identity. Many individuals also experience liminality and grapple with the effects of cultural imperialism according to the forces that shape and influence their

identity. How individuals resist, oppose, negotiate or accept assimilation is also influenced by cultural understanding (Darder, 1998). My mother would never identify herself with being *Chicana*, though, throughout her life, she was often labeled that way on both sides of the American/Mexican border. Her beliefs challenged what it meant to be a person of Mexican heritage living within the U.S.

When thinking about her identity, my mother discusses, "I am an American. I can't go to Mexico and say that I'm Mexican because they will get mad at me, or make fun of me. But here, I can say I'm American, but sometimes I don't think people believe me. They see me with my brown skin, and my Spanish last name and think I must be a wet-back. They think because I have an accent I don't understand, or that I'm dumb. But it's the same thing in Mexico. They laugh at me when I use different words from them. These were the words I grew up with, so I forget sometimes and use them. They call me *Chicana*, and I don't like that. Because being a *Chicana* means that you're a trouble maker. That you're low class or that you're a gang member. Just because I speak Spanish and my heritage is Mexican doesn't mean that we're all the same. When someone calls you a *Chicano* they're making fun of you. The word is not a good word. I always tell everybody I'm an American, even the people in Mexico. I don't believe in what the *Chicanos* believed in; all they cared about was themselves. They don't understand that people are different, even people with Spanish last names."

A crucial part of creating multicultural practices in art education that acknowledge the part visual culture plays in developing identity is important so that stereotypical norms are not perpetuated under the guise of normalcy. Struggles in defining individuals serve to impede education and the liberation of disempowered communities

(Hernández-Linares, 2002). When hegemonic norms are allowed to persist in education, they only serve to perpetuate stereotypes. Informal education exists, and often ideologies that incorporate misogyny, homophobia, and prejudice may already be prevalent within cultural groups. Failing to understand the constantly shifting nature of identity and how it is informed by informal learning creates the potential for disempowerment, neglect, and misdirection.

Focusing on making sure individuals fit into the correct cultural boxes where contents, forms, and definitions are preserved perpetuates the misconception that multicultural education is capable of presenting an authentic representation. All individuals come with their own identities, and creating curricula that addresses the individual rather than the group is essential in pedagogy that treats culture as accessible rather than an obstacle.

CHAPTER 3

GRAMMATICA NECRONOMICA—LANGUAGE OF THE DEAD

Raindrops keep fallin' on my head
And just like the guy whose feet are too big for his
bed
Nothin' seems to fit
Those raindrops are fallin' on my head, they keep
fallin.

Burt Bacharach

Outside the cold October sky hung low, heavy billowy clouds that looked like upturned egg cartons. Rain pelted the windows in a smooth and steady rhythm, as though nature was tapping its nails in impatient anticipation. The wind blew in exasperation as me and my mother worked in the warmth of our family mobile home. The rust colored shag carpet was littered with brilliantly colored shapes. There were hexagons, pentagons, squares and triangles in many different sizes. Made of fabric, the shapes twisted and turned upon one another like Technicolor leaves. The clicking and clacking mechanical sound of a sewing machine hummed like a soothing lullaby as I sat on the floor near my mother's feet. The scissors, silver and cool to the touch, were heavy and unwieldy in my hands, although I held them as steady as I could. My job was to follow a pattern, to cut the cloth into the shapes my mother desired. There I sat, near the sewing table, cutting cloth after cloth, and shape after shape. Another of my duties was to arrange the shapes by size, and color. I thought to myself as I arranged the cut pieces that the patterns and swirls on the cloth were beautiful. They looked to me like miniature landscapes on which I imagined mythical creatures parading in and out of their scenes. My mother would move me and the cut cloth to the kitchen table, and put on our favorite record. While the music played in the background—Dolly Parton had a

beautiful voice—we would sit around the table with the pieces and put them together in different combinations. We would make flowers, and houses, even sailboats and trees. The cloth pieces held no loyalty as we manipulated them into what we desired. Carefully my mother would hand me pins, and I would attach the pieces to one another. Those were my favorite days, me and my mother, making shapes out of cloth. I always enjoyed seeing the finished product, a quilt we had made together out of pieces of memory.

3.1 Corpses and Cadavers

The closet door felt like an iron gate in my seven year old arms. I could barely turn the door knob on the rusty, tattered door. It had replaced a curtain, only days before; my father found the door thrown on the side of the road, and it was the perfect size, more or less. The closet had become a storage place for old dead things—my father's broken tools, my mother's outgrown dresses, toys that no longer worked, bits and pieces of memories long forgotten but that refused to go away. I pried the door from its resting place, the smell of rust clinging to my hands. Carefully, I wiped my hands on my pant legs, making sure to take as much of the dust and rust off. My mother had sent me in to get some cloth; she was making a new quilt for me. I looked up, and on the shelf, there they were, dresses in multicolored hues. There were polka dots in pink and purple and white, blossoms in colors that nature never intended, and stars in bright blue and yellow and green. I remembered cuddling up to the stripes in one dress, going shopping with the purple blossoms in another dress, and I remembered the green dress the most, it had been the last one I saw my aunt wear before she died. The closet of

disrepair and obsolescence, where these bits of cloth were banished, was a sad tomb for these dresses. Limply they laid on the shelf, like lifeless corpses, waiting to be embalmed, the cadavers of old and broken memories. The dresses longed to rest. Instead, these lifeless bodies of past endeavors would be resurrected with repurposed and renewed life. The clothes would be sewn into new memories, and live long afterwards, in a place and time they were never imagined.

I lingered, feeling the different textures and textiles, crispness of one, the softness of another, all the while, imagining the rose scented perfume that she always wore. The cobwebs swayed as if entranced by my memory. Slowly I pressed my favorite on my cheek and remembered her smile and her laughter. It was her stay-at-home Sunday dress—her Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, everyday stay at home dress. In the bosom of her laughter, her humor, and her gentle nature, I felt safe and secure. And now, she would be part of a new memory, and a piece of her would be close to me every night, her comforting girth once again keeping the boogey man away. I brought the dresses to my mother. When she saw them, her eyes welled, and I saw the memories flow past them, just as they had through mine. At that moment, we were connected; my mother, my aunt, and myself. Our memories, though different, found a way to come alive, to reconnect with our individual visions of the past. My mother held up a red, white and blue striped dress. She asked me, "Do you remember this dress? I made this dress for your aunt a week before you were born. She needed something for a wedding she was going to go to, but she wore it to the hospital instead. She held you for the first time in this dress. I think I'll start with this one." I remembered that dress. I didn't tell my mother, but I remembered it. It was the dress she always wore on my

birthday. Secretly I was embarrassed by it, because it was worn, and full of small holes; some in places that revealed her bra straps. I hated that dress. It was polyester. It looked like Maude¹⁹. I hated Maude. But now, now I knew why she wore it, and it filled my heart with shame.

Linking pieces of knowledge, I imagine, is like piecing together a quilt. The vision of the past can be romanticized. Quilts, like stories and texts, organize simplify and re-codify knowledge and reflect their creator's vision. Narratives, like quilts, are constructed in a social setting and can represent the connections among people. As an art form, like narratives, the quilt gives voice to the voiceless (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). Narratives in the study are an integral part of the lives of the women. Each piece of their stories is interwoven within the narratives they create for themselves and each other. The narratives found in conjunction to quilts suggest the many varied journeys the owners of the pieces experienced in their lives as the storyteller weaves them together. Quilts and narratives share the capacity to serve more than one purpose, besides the obvious one of keeping a person warm or relating a story. The inspirational moment for both may come from a special event that needs commemorating, a birth, a wedding, an anniversary, or it may be a way of imparting family history to the recipient as a way of sharing part of the family or inducting the member into the family. Both can act as a photo album, where each piece is correlated to a specific date and time or an important event, or a story that tells something specific or is specific to a particular person. Storytelling becomes a collaborative way of knowing or a collaborative endeavor for understanding a place in a family's history, and a family's identity. According to Philton

¹⁹ Maude was a fictional character played by Bea Arthur who was known for being an independent, outspoken, and liberal woman living with her fourth husband Walter. Norman Lear created the character.

(2002) a narrative is important in the establishment of the historicity of a culture or group because “the exploration of the past, often leads to a reclaiming of the past and to developing new understandings of the past in light of the present, and the present in light of the past” (p. 3). The point of telling a story about a situation is to weave together facts in a way that illustrates the teller's point of view, which is congruent with his or her beliefs. It is a way of making sense of the world on one’s own terms, formulating understanding through creating personal meaning, connecting others’ ideas, and constructing knowledge out of the narratives and coming to know of others (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry creates spaces where individuals are able to experience being captivated by the discourses created, and places where they are able to engage with the world in a state of reciprocity between the storyteller and the audience; both are engaged in a receptive position of individualized creation of meaning (Barthes, 1981). The connection between practice and theory, between formal and informal education, are maintained in stories that relate how knowledge and belief are made (Britzman, 2003). Discourses such as feminist narratives promote women’s voices as producers of significant cognitive activity where the processes of knowledge and belief construction are mutually implicated (Code, 1998; Ngo & Britzman, 2010). In the realm of art education, just as language and culture frame understanding, there are discourses that are “historically grounded...dynamic statements and images that have the power to legitimate and create knowledges, identities, and realities” (Ngo & Britzman, 2010, p. 10)

3.2 Story-Telling and Metaphor Research

Stories are a way to convey a personal truth or perspective. Often stories require the suspension of disbelief. A story teller uses a story to take the listener to a different place. The author creates this world, which lives while the author is creating it and while it is existent it is very engaging. The story requires that the listeners trust the story teller in order to suspend their disbelief (Richardson, 1997). Metaphor is an important tool of a story. There is specific information in the story, which can be thought of as the thread. Metaphor creates the potential for infinite strings of meaning creation to occur between the story and the audience. Instead of being limited to a relationship where one text can only have one meaning, metaphor facilitates multiple entryways into interpretation where knowledge is no longer unilaterally disseminated, but becomes multifocal, and collaboratively constructed (Flower, 1994).

Stories carry with them the capacity to convey emotions and build community. Often stories are told and retold, and though some things may change, understanding is made possible through the meanings that the listener creates (DuBose-Brunner, 1994). Most stories are not created on the spot but are developed. When a story is told it is meant to illicit feedback from the audience.

An individual's culturally constructed understanding of language is based on his/her experiences in everyday existence. In this sense, the reality constructed out of the composites of visual and linguistic texts is the only reality that an individual can know (Barthes, 1981). The sense of self is composed of how the world is interpreted by the individual. Storytelling acts as a way to order content and meaning in a way that can serve as a possible path to developing personal identity. Like storytelling, art can also

be a way in which individuals explore personal meanings in order to reconstruct something for themselves. Reinterpreting and appropriating imagery is a way to reinforce creativity. Much like the way my mother had a story for each piece of clothing that went into making a quilt, she related the story in a way that was conceived of her own reality blended with some historical accuracy, which created a foundation for the way in which she and her family saw themselves.

Metaphor depicts themes, ideas, and concepts that convey meaning in a way that becomes accessible by a larger audience. The women in the study constantly use metaphor to address concepts that might be difficult to relate any other way due to cultural and linguistic barriers. Ideas of truth, and reality are re-established in the imagination that becomes a significant way of communicating ideas that may otherwise be difficult to understand, or difficult to confront. In the study, the use of morning rituals is used to depict the banality of daily life, and the complex relationships between mother and daughter. Metaphors are a way of making ideas significant and are able to move in and throughout culture, allowing knowledge to be dispersed in a way that is open to interpretation, further removing meaning making away from structuralist frameworks (Richardson, 1997). Metaphors are a way to deviate from the binary oppositional representations that are a part of modernist philosophies. The way language is used and interpreted re-establishes discourses in a position where context includes the creator of the metaphor and the one who is listening to the story and allows for bi-directional meaning making; the story-teller and the audience interact with one another in the creation and definition of the metaphor. When the story-teller is not actually

present, the audience enacts the story-teller's role, and interprets the story, which then becomes re-interpreted in subsequent re-telling.

Storytelling creates the possibility of creating narratives that impart meaning. Storytelling contains the potential to speak to different audiences. Voice depicts the issues of inclusivity and exclusivity of knowledge contained within a story. The women in the study are able to shift consciousness, to perceive themselves in multiple ways, allowing for multiple voices. Voice is emblematic of the larger issues that lay on the fringes of a story's actual text (Belenky, McVicker, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Hurtado, 1996). In research, voice and metaphor evoke the recognition of the ways in which women understand themselves, and their world; women's ways of knowing are revealed, although the revelation is sometimes shrouded in metaphor (Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1996). Furthermore, stories, voice, and metaphor give a reader insight into the way in which the teller understands the world, but the transfer of meaning is not always perfect. There is no true way of completely knowing what an individual is truly perceiving, but storytelling, metaphor, and voice provide clues (Belenky, McVicker, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The ambiguities found in storytelling are necessary, so that listeners are able to create their own understanding and meaning.

New avenues to seeking knowledge, understanding, meaning, and interpretation and the reciprocity stories have on the creation of identity are possible through the promotion and establishment of conversation and dialogue as research practices. Rather than detachment and established distance persevering in the process of researching individuals and their cultures, finding ways in which to illuminate issues that

have served to suppress or repress women's ways of knowing is an important part of the narrative process. By integrating the knowledge and voices of women in the story's that they tell, new knowledge can be created (Greene, 1990). In art education, the integration of personal narratives, stories, metaphors, and voice are essential in the development of education practices that liberate and acknowledge difference rather than maintain, hinder, or homogenize individual identities. In connection to multicultural education practices, the teller's voice should be seen as more than a person's point of view, the stories individuals tell utilize metaphor to depict their sense of cultural voice. An individual's sense of self is intertwined with the language, understanding, and perspective of the world and his/her cultural, gendered, sexual, and ethnic identity (Belenky, McVicker, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

3.3 Blow Flies

Cher: Lucy, you know I don't speak Mexican.

Lucy: I NOT A MEXICAN!

Cher: Great, what was that all about?

Josh: Lucy's from El Salvador.

Cher: So?

Josh: So, it's an entirely different country.

Cher: What does that matter?

Josh: You get mad if anyone thinks you live below Sunset. (Heckerling, 1995)

Wheels creaked as they rolled down the marbled corridor, past wooden doors that stood like giant sentries, ominously staring down upon the passersby, daring them

to walk into the rooms within which their secrets were held. A small woman, dwarfed by the redwood slabs, fished in her pocket, jingling through the key ring that served as her passport. Brass met brass as the key turned with metallic groaning; the knob reluctant to give in. She pushed the door open. As it glided on the carpeted inner room, the door muttered a sound meant to remind her to keep the sanctum's secrets. Silently humming to herself, the woman began to work, in her systematic way—dusting the shelves, polishing the seat, and emptying the trash. As she emptied the waste basket, a note fell to the floor, on it was a telephone number, and a name, neither of which was surprising to find in an office building. Things were never as simple as that in this workplace. The name belonged to another office worker, written on hotel stationary, which of course would not seem suspicious had the paper not tumbled out with a receipt for a hotel stay in the middle of the day, a six-pack of beer, and a box of condoms. The woman tutted to herself, shook her head and placed the two pieces of paper in the larger garbage container attached to the trolley she was pushing. She vacuumed, and finished her work in that office, pulling the door closed behind her, and again, it reminded her to hush. The wheels creaked again, as she moved to the next door, she wondered what she would find in the trash bin. She opened the door, this one more insistent as it resisted her bracing itself against the carpet. As always, she was greeted by the occupant's face in a photograph with her children and her spouse. She enjoyed cleaning this office, it smelled like lilacs, and seemed to be alive. She gave this room extra care, polishing, straightening, vacuuming. As she was leaving, she looked to the photograph once more. She looked at it with the pity only a mother could give. The look a mother gives when her child is involved with things beyond her control—elements that are bad for her

child, yet she is unable to act. The woman sighed and muttered something to herself—a small prayer. As she left, she wondered if she should leave the two pieces of paper she found on the office floor. She reminded herself, however, that she could not afford to get involved in the office politics, no matter how heavily it weighed upon her conscience. Inevitably it would fall on her shoulders, as one or possibly both conspirators would blame her for her careless cleaning—she could not afford to lose this job. Doing the right thing, in her mind, meant possible consequences that would not only affect her, but her family as well.

As the cleaning woman, my mother, left the office, she looked down at me as I quietly helped her arrange materials on her trolley. I was her helper. She said many times she loved my company, that she needed me because she would get so lonely. I was her protector, my father would tell me, since he could not be there; it was a son's duty to care for his mother's wellbeing. In reality, I was there because she could not afford child care, nor would she allow it if she could—a woman's duty is to her children, those, other than family, cannot be trusted to care for something so precious as a child. I walked with my mother as she cleaned the offices at the mining company where my father worked. My mother cleaned the offices in the morning. She was meant to clean while many of the occupants were out at the job site. At times, infrequently, someone would come to their office early, or stop by to pick up a file. They would walk past us, neither smiling, nor greeting. We were invisible. I don't think most of them even knew my mother's name. We were just like flies she would say because we can be ignored, or swatted away. Our job here was to look after the garbage of other people's lives. To

clean up the messes others left behind. Although ambrosia came in many forms, we would eat the shit they gave us, in fistfuls if we could and do it all with a smile.

Like many women of color, Latinas in the U.S. have worked primarily in two occupations, agriculture and domestic work (Segura, 1994). Within these occupations, Latinas have been able to create for themselves conditions that are fertile areas where resistance can occur. Domestic work has allowed women to see their white counterparts from perspectives that are largely obfuscated from males within Latino populations because domestic work is mostly relegated to women in Latino populations. Women of color, like my mother, are often allowed into intimate portions of other people's lives. Not uncommonly, my mother often witnessed domestic strife, and indiscretions in the line of her work. The offices and homes she cleaned allowed her to be unseen in these personal spaces. Her employers often carried on their daily lives, in front of her, as though she didn't exist. The domestic workforce has allowed Latinas to form strong ties with the children they have nurtured, as well as with their employers (Gutiérrez, 1990). In their roles as domestic workers, Latinas have managed to gain an understanding of practices and ideas that may not have been made available to them had they not had the opportunity to work in these environments. The knowledge they gained is then readily transferred to their own children, for whom they are often the primary care givers. Latinas in this capacity, act as conduits of knowledge and ideas that persist and transcend cultural barriers, to a certain degree, as what they see, hear, and understand is based largely on their own interpretations (Segura, 1994).

At a gathering, some of the women in my family were together in order to help one of my cousins get ready for her new baby, a Mexican version of a baby shower. I

remember them laughing and gossiping about the families for which they worked. One aunt discussed how messy and disgusting some of these *gringos* were for having dogs indoors; she hated cleaning up the dog mess that came with her job. Another remarked at how lazy her employer's wife was for not cleaning her house or looking after her child even though she didn't have a job. They formulated an understanding of their employers based on what they were able to see. Because they were treated as invisible most of the time, they were able to bear witness intimate moments they might never have otherwise. It was not uncommon for their employers to fight with one another in front of my aunts as they continued their daily routine. But what these women knew were secrets, the moments of life meant to be concealed from the world. It occurred to them at times, during their discussions, the havoc they could cause without the need to speak the language. A slip, a tiny innuendo, would be all that was needed to create the cascade of repercussions that would contain within them the potential to disrupt the very lives of those that employed them.

Often the women in my family who worked in domestic spaces outside of their home were treated as fixtures equivocal to a vacuum cleaner or dishwasher. When an individual is treated as an object, hegemonic norms become easier for dominant groups to define a group perceived as subordinate. When cultures, are viewed as less than civilized or undomesticated, they are easily positioned in the context of needing correction; the dominant group is there to save them from themselves. Many times during my mother's and my aunts' employment in domestic middle class suburbia, their employers would give them their unwanted clothes, their left over meals, or their slightly broken possessions. I remember my anger when one of my mother's employers gave

my mother “better” food because what I was eating was just bad for me. What I was eating, a *taco*²⁰, looked horrible to her, but what she gave my mother to feed me looked unfamiliar, and unappetizing. Seeing the look of horror and disgust on my face prompted my mother to delicately but pointedly pinch the underside of my arm as a reminder not to be rude. She accepted the meal for me, but, when we were alone, threw it away. She told me, “Don’t eat white people food because it’s bad for your stomach.” There is a reluctance in multicultural education to understand that both dominant and subordinate groups create each others' identities, others' histories, and others' reality by relating them in opposition to their own. Both the dominant group and the subordinate group act as definers, creators, and liberators.

3.3.1 Before the Damsel/flies She is a Nymph—Liminal Spaces

If there’s anything more important than my ego
around, I want it caught and shot now.

Douglas Adams

Modernism frames identity within rigid and immovable boundaries. When culture is placed within the framework of modernist definitions, culture becomes an instrument for domination. Culture is confined by modernist views because identity is organized within borders, which act as a means to define individuals and categorize them for the purposes of maintaining social order. In most educational institutions, the assumption is that all students will move from home, and onward to school, eventually into a life as a fully realized adult who is conscious of their choices (Fitzclarence, Green, & Bigum,

²⁰ A taco in Mexican households is not like the taco one gets at Taco Bell. A taco is a typical lunchtime meal, more similar to what Americans recognize as a burrito. Typically, a taco is a flour tortilla filled with leftovers from a previous meal.

1995). The systems that are put in place within modernist frameworks of identity lead to relationships between groups that become points of subjugation, subordination, and inequality. Borders prohibit the possibility of multiple narrative exchange; instead, experiences are contained within perceived universal and oppositional binary systems (Giroux, 1991). It is difficult for cultures that exist in liminal spaces to move within these modernist systems, or are often ignored and associated as aberrational byproducts of culture, defined as inferior cultures or sub-cultures as though they were sub-human. European culture within modernist philosophy is set as the epitome and center of civilization, further detaching those cultural groups that depart from European influence or setting up systems where colonialism is a preferred system of identity construction (Sheets, 1999).

Postmodernist ideas of culture depart from the tendency to constrain culture by narrow definitions. Conflicts occur between postmodernism and modernism in ideological views of culture and identity. These conflicts arise when cultural boundaries that include physical, social, gendered, or religious boundaries are viewed as flawed, impossibly universal, and arbitrary in postmodern perspectives. Culture is redefined as a fundamental part of the unstable social and historical continuum and is reframed as positions of representation and power, shifting identity. Authenticity of heritage, history, and social practices are challenged as multiple narratives filter into the reconstruction of cultural memories. The intersections of culture, power, history, memory, gender, and sexuality significantly redefine the concept of identity and how it moves through these and many other factors that increase the changing conditions of perception and knowledge (Lyotard, 1984).

Knowledge can also fall within the confines of suppression and domination. Worthwhile knowledge is fixed within the tangible, domesticated world where there is a clearly defined authority. Authoritative knowledge is containable, and accessible by those with the fundamental training with which to access it. Subjugated knowledge temporarily suspends the connection to authoritative entities and resists domination. Knowledge that exists outside the bounded and accepted normative arenas of academically and politically sanctioned realities acts as a place where the interstices of rebellion and potential revolution are created. Border cultures act in this stead, creating liminal spaces where knowledge can flow in-between the structures that are implicitly placed to deter it (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981).

Border cultures are able to appropriate knowledge and become simultaneously subversive and reconsolidate hegemonic norms to create a re-idealization of conventional standards. Viewing groups as autonomous individuals capable of self-making or self-determining their own identity is a product of humanist thought, but the concept of border-culture allows an understanding of individuals not being self-actualized; their identities are partially formed for them, and they, in turn, resist through the appropriation and redefinition of those identity standards. Without the standards to act as a balance, or without the presence of standards, there would not be a need to resist. Agency cannot be simplified as a controlling authorship that has no significance to the development of identity. Power and subjugation go hand in hand with resistance and subversion. They feed each other and exist in constant flux; what is subjugation can become power and what is subversive can become normative and return to their previous states within and throughout a continuum. Domination does not set a sure

course for the future of resistance, and power is not an instillation that creates an inevitable chain of events that progresses systematically from one form to the next.

3.3.2 Metamorphosis—Poststructuralist Woman

You will be required to do wrong no matter
where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to
be required to violate your own identity.

Phillip K. Dick

Poststructural feminist theories, found in qualitative inquiry, emphasize problems with social texts and discourses and find fault in their logic. The world of lived experience can never truly be represented fully and perceptions of identity can only peer into one or two fleeting scenes, one or two pieces that make up the whole. The world can never truly be represented as it is in constant flux (Cooper, 1997). Feminist narratives do not intend to portray the world as a solid, immovable object, the center of the universe around which all things move. The multiple narratives found in feminist research allow perceptions of identity to move beyond the static ideas and notions that can cement groups of women in a constricted existence. Stereotypical mindsets have the potential to dictate codified norms where women live at home, have many children, have little to no education, and serve as nanny, cook, maid, and concubine. When perceptions of identity like these are allowed to persist, women's roles are diminished and serve to reinforce practices of subjugation. The unique experiences to be found in feminist narratives allow women to have the voice to explain, trouble, or confront discourses that have relegated them to one specific state of being. Allowing feminist narratives to persist and encouraging the momentum found in discourses of identity

displace dominant norms and allow the potential to replace them with other criteria including the reflexive, multi-voiced text that is grounded in the experiences of oppressed peoples (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). By challenging discourses where identity is defined for individuals, it becomes possible to move away from modernist assumptions that impose structural laws and theories unbefitting marginalized individuals or groups, or do not adequately address issues of social justice (Lather, 1991).

Laclau (1996) suggests that looking at localized narrative, or the singular instances that occur within small articulate voices, then it is possible to understand the connection these singular voices have with larger systems. He suggests that there is implicit universality to be found within the concrete single instances of everyday life. Poststructuralist thought often adheres to the skepticism that there is a universal, or that there are possible narratives that explain everything. In modern philosophy, the existence of a binary relationship between a signifier and a signified object is in opposition to the poststructuralist idea of the transitory nature of things. Oppositional objectification is limited, and found within both Laclau's and Butler's (2000) ideas on agency and the postmodern, signifier-signified relationships are marshaled into groups that produce significance, meaning, and create a way for these relationships to be unified into identities that can be communicated to others. These are by no means all inclusive, and are not meant to be closed systems immune to contestation nor are these systems of representation meant to conceal or obfuscate potential dialogue. The signifiers of identity, framed by this belief, produce the possibility of social movements, and do not refer to a pre-given already constituted identity. When objects, groups, and

individuals are named or categorized, the features of the descriptors are fundamentally flawed and unstable, which opens up categorization to new hegemonic rearticulations.

A woman should not be consigned to recognize exploitation where there may or may not be any existent. This could promote a woman falling into false assumptions of another woman's subordinate position (Collins, 1986). To align all women under the pretense of functioning only in opposition to maleness would be presumptive. What would be stated in this form of thinking is that women can only be identified or that their identities can only be constructed in conjunction with masculine identity. Women are what men are not; women cannot share the same space as men-- masculinity precludes femininity in women and femininity precludes masculinity in men. Under these auspices, it would be very difficult for women to align themselves with one another in order to challenge and change the system of dominate norms (hooks, 1984). This can only work if there is only one master discourse that dominates the matrices of objectified individuals as they come into being, or recognize their existence. However, in poststructuralist discourses, an individual is capable of being a locus of not only one, but many possible matrices of being.

3.4 Synopsis—When the Sparrow Sings, A Soul He Brings

I once had a sparrow alight upon my shoulder for a moment, while I was hoeing in a village garden, and I felt that I was more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn.

Thoreau

Birds sing in cages. Their song, like the song of springtime, chirps and cheeps that any other time would be harbingers of happy sunlit days, of soft breezes that wisp

through blossomed branches. This day, their song twitted through the air with a tinge of melancholy. These birds were not finches or parakeets or canaries nor any other bird accustomed to the life of gilded privilege. These were birds my father's mother had captured in her garden. There were sparrows, and magpies, and even a cardinal. Their cages were prisons and their songs were pleas for pardon. My mother and I sat on the low iron seats amongst the plants and flowers of my grandmother's garden. We were cradled by fronds and petals reminiscent of a tropical rainforest. She loved greenery, and nature--her plants were huge and cradled in various pots and containers, bound and restrained by ropes and wire; she could have been the de Sade of horticulture. We sat and talked—well I sat; they talked. As was the custom, my mother performed her weekly duty of visiting her in-laws and offering her service as cleaning woman, taxi driver, accountant, delivery driver, interpreter and arbiter. Sitting there, listening to my grandmother's various woes and turmoil, dramas and political views, the birdsong rang louder and louder. After the first coffee, the customary drink served at all social occasions, and sweet pastries, my mother, finally perturbed and irritated by the sad longing tweets and half-hearted chirps, spoke to my grandmother.

"Why do you keep these birds in cages?" my mother asked.

My grandmother responded, "Because, I love how they sing. I love the birdsong and want to have it around me all the time."

My mother responded, in a tone that was very brusque, "These are song birds; they're not meant to be in cages. They're wild, and need to be free, so that they can sing for everyone. Their song is meant to be heard by all. It is a sin to lock up these birds. You should know what it's like to be kept in place, wanting to move, to go

wherever you want to go and not be able to. Isn't it enough that you've lost your freedom?"

My grandmother was quiet, and spoke very little else after that. Our conversation weighed down by the specter of haunting songs still emanating from a hundred little cages. After our visit, on the drive home, my mother returned to her thoughts of birds and cages. "I don't understand why anyone would want to keep such beautiful creatures in such a horrible place. They looked so sad. I wanted to set them all free." Tears welled up in her eyes as she spoke. Although she contained herself, she continued,

Of all God's creatures, birds are the most beautiful. They tell us when it's going to be cold, they sing to us when we're sad, they wake us in the morning, and keep us company at night. They tell us when good things are coming, and they warn us when bad things are on their way. Why would anyone want to keep them caged? It's a sad, sad thing to do. One day she'll see; your grandmother. She'll see. God will punish her and she'll see what it's like to want to sing and not be able to, to want to fly and be kept on the ground.

Like caging songbirds, neglecting women's voices creates the potential for subjugation. New forms of ideas, thoughts, and insights are limited and contained, removed from the possibility of creative discourse among women and the individuals they might inspire. Allowing women to speak for themselves is part of feminist research. By allowing multiple voices, the story they tell becomes much more rich and moves even further away from an authoritative voice. To say that there is no authority would be erroneous, as I recognize that my own decisions as to what questions to ask, and the final telling of the story is my own. Though my intent is to maintain the original voice and structure throughout retelling the stories, inevitably it is through my understanding that they are filtered. Because of the social constructions of sexuality, ethnicity, and gender

are connected to dominant, often patro-centric hegemonic norms, it is important to see where individuals, in the case of this study these women, are able to find places where they empower themselves and form practices that disrupt these norms. These narratives are capable of becoming political, as personal understanding, and subversive constructions of culture, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc, collide with the dominant structures that are meant to secure and limit these behaviors through well placed structures. Through the promotion of multiple voices and multiple perspectives, the possibility arises for individuals to contradict or at least interact with objectifying schema that are already established. By embracing women's voices, involving them as participants in research, the new knowledge they are able to share alters ways in which others are able to perceive them. Perceptions of women are altered, and the ways in which they may be subjugated are revealed so that those participating in this discourse are also able to see how the domination of women effect other aspects of society, or members other than women (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). By doing so, it is possible for narratives to lead to the study of new topics that might necessitate new forms of inquiry with which to study them. As Butler (1999) stated, gender is not a naturally occurring state of being, genetically one can be male or female, but gender does not necessarily align with anatomy. The repetitive preformed established norms are what become viewed as naturally occurring practices in dominant society. The semiotic codes, or structures found within a societal group are the boundaries within which identity is meant to be contained. Engaging with multiple voices and multiple perspectives, the discourse that these bounded system set in place can be subverted.

3.4.1 Singing the Song

I sing the body electric
I glory in the glow of rebirth
Creating my own tomorrow
When I shall embody the earth.

Wade Lassister

The purpose of the study is to give the women in my family the voice to explain, trouble, or confront discourses that have relegated them to one specific state of being. Using narrative inquiry allows me to move beyond positivist criteria of evaluation and replace them with other criteria including the reflexive, multi-voiced text that is grounded in the experiences of those who might not have the opportunity to share the knowledge that may be contained within their stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In allowing the participants of the study to share their stories, and include their voices in the creation of new knowledge, the goal is to move away from positivist assumptions that might impose structural laws and theories that may not fit marginalized individuals or groups, or adequately address issues of social justice (Lather, 1991). Silencing women's voices has the potential to reinforce the progress towards creating emancipatory practices narrative inquiry hopes to engender. The women in this study, however, may be able to elucidate the places where subjugation and misrepresentation may have occurred in their own lives.

Women's ways of knowing can illuminate the most traditional of subjects, illustrating the complexity of understanding that can come from many sources. Being able to focus on the nature of understanding, knowledge, and perceived truths allows women to perceive themselves as thinkers and knowers. Metaphor links thinking and knowing with the capacity to articulate thoughts and feel heard (Butler, 1993). Silence

can be interpreted as quiet acquiescence to a perceived authority, surviving in obedience to powerful and authoritative entities with punitive power:

Silence is a powerful weapon when it can be controlled. It is akin to camouflaging oneself when at war in an open field; playing possum at strategic times causes the power of the silent one to be underestimated. (Hurtado, 1996, p. 382)

Women in silence are often perceived as deaf and dumb with little ability to think beyond their station or situation (Belenky, 1986). In silence, women can be perceived as having little awareness of the power of language for sharing thoughts and insights. However, silence can serve as a point of resistance. Women can wear silence as a mask, allowing the perception of acquiescence or subservience so that subversive agendas can remain hidden, allowing them to conduct their own agendas without fear of persecution or punishment. Silence does not necessarily indicate submission. It can often reflect a deeper understanding of inner voices, or inner truths, an exploration of self and existence, or an internal dialogue that seeks to uncover feelings experience, needs, and desires. Strength can also be silent. Strength can be viewed as necessitating vociferousness, violence, action, or physical attributes. Silence can be a way of integrating strength with examination, or a dialogue between heart and mind. Women of color, lesbians, third world women, and others silenced by universalizing tendencies of earlier stages in feminist thought needed to be included in the range of women's experiences being researched theorized and taught. False universalism of feminist theory revealed the limitations of taking a stance where a theory speaks for all women. Explorations of their own histories on their own terms, members of marginalized groups identify new theories. Feminist dialogue can include working class women as well as any woman, working or non-working. Narrative is a way of dealing

with differences of power, authority, and voice. Metaphor is a way of understanding gender, race, culture, and sexuality.

3.4.2 *El Que Por La Boca Muere*²¹

Arnold: Do you EVER think before you speak?

Alan: No. Why? Do you?

Arnold: Frequently. It helps to pass the time while you're speaking.

Torch Song Trilogy (Bogart)

Feminist discourse does not have a singular agreed upon definition according to bell hooks, a prominent writer on feminism and feminist theory. hooks, in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2000), identifies the postmodern fallacy that anything goes as long as it gets you what you want, which, in her view, has reduced feminism to be defined by some as anything they make feminism to be; a label that is used to sell many ideas as feminist thought whether or not that label is accurate. Because of this trend, according to hooks, there is an increasing belief that because there are so many different types of feminism, solidarity among women is no longer possible. This discrepancy is most notable in the difference between what is viewed as white feminists and non-white feminists, an idea that is important in my research as this presents a framework from which the relation between the women in my family and dominant culture can be better understood. According to hooks, non-white women look at their existence and treatment in relation to the overall treatment and oppression of people in the society in which they live. As a result, they understand that their identity is formed, defined, and constrained not only by men in their social group, but their

²¹ Literally “the one who dies by his mouth” but translates to taking care to think before speaking.

correlation to the rest of society as well. In this sense, according to hooks, non-white women recognize the limitation of feminism. Narratives allow for a more complete, but not total understanding of domination and the recognition of individuals' connections to social systems of oppression (hooks, 2000; Lather, 1991; Miller, 2005). Focusing solely on sexism, to compose and institute reform, excludes the role that class, ethnicity, and sexuality play within a given groups' association with oppression, which results in a necessity to move away from the assumption that eliminating sexism alone will eradicate these systems (hooks, 2000) . In understanding the relation of oppression, domination, gender, and social status, a researcher can begin to discern or re-examine feminist voices. As a researcher, intent on preserving these voices, in the process of research, I have taken into consideration my role in presenting these narratives. It is possible that I may inadvertently presented narratives as oppressive voices that include the domination and systemic eradication of identity where none exists, filtered through my own understanding. Conversely, I might inadvertently have created a liberatory narrative where none exist. During the course of the research, I considered the re-interpretation of these voices and to what extent I inserted myself and the degree of control and influence I had on the final iteration.

The personal voice is a political voice and women's everyday reality is informed and shaped by the language, constructed meanings, and cultural and social experiences. Women's personal voice becomes a way of relating incidents of discrimination, exploitation, and oppression that correspond to their understanding of the ideological paradigm that shapes the understanding of self and the construction of identity. It is important to understand personal narrative as a step towards self-discovery

and its synonymy with progress towards developing political, social, and cultural understanding as a whole.

Feminist narrative is one way in which researchers can move away from the disembodied voices left over from data, reports, and books that are often overemphasized as the epitome of validity in research. In suppressing the more disturbing aspects in the representation of individuality of human cognition within the domain of educational praxis, personalized voice and perspective can be neglected. Feminist narrative allows a researcher to move from viewing personalized voice as a non-academic consequence of the research process towards being viewed as an important part of developing more informed research. A researcher, by being attentive to individualized voices, enables the creation of a broader view in which the social realities of the research participants can be examined, and can foster a deeper understanding of their endeavors. According to Michael Schratz (1993), utilizing feminist narrative has allowed researchers to depart from established and conventional approaches of objectivity, reliability, and validity in order to uncover and gain a deeper insight of everyday activities. Schratz states research that neglects feminist narrative has a tendency to take situations at face value, and to ignore the underlying tensions, realities, situations, and dynamic relationships that are as much a part of the research process, as are quantified data. The uniqueness of individuals is overlooked in favor of broader, more generalizable results. Voice, in this study, as intended, filled the gap between the faceless and nameless that research can create concerning its participants, and made them more three-dimensional.

According to Shulamit Reinharz (1992), feminist narrative moves away from treating participants as a singular anonymous voice, seemingly representative of an entire group or groups of individuals, towards more inclusive multiple voices that retain their individuality and personal perspective. Part of the research process involves representing participants' voices as completely and thoroughly as possible. The researcher, within the context of feminist research, is allowed to intersect his/her own voice whenever necessary to further the ideas being explored. It is important to understand that a researcher can never truly speak for another individual. By adhering as closely as possible to the participants' original voice, feminist narrative allows for "understanding women in their social contexts and using women's language and behavior to understand the relation between self and context" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 71). It is the intent of feminist narrative to show or study the life experiences of women from their own vantage point.

Spanish utilizes both masculine and feminine forms of words, specifically nouns, pronouns and adjectives. When speaking of more than one person, if that group is comprised of females, then feminine nouns, pronouns, and adjectives are utilized; however, if just one male is then part of the group, then all words defer to masculine forms. It is in this context that language becomes very crucial to meaning making, and communication, especially in cases where language reflects or prefers the male experience incongruent with feminine language. Meaning is in this sense is constrained by language placing great importance on the "putting into words that language women employ as part of the research experience so as to most accurately portray their interpretation and translation of meaning in their everyday lives" (Devault, 2002, p. 89).

These narratives may then provide, through an examination of behavior and language, an entry point into the perceptions the women in the study, based on the nature of the textual information they produce for examining the ways in which their sexual, ethnic, and cultural identity has developed within and without their lived experience and social location. The importance of personal narrative, personal voice, in this research is to depart from the notion of a universal portrayal of woman, womanhood, and feminine identity, as well as any indication that these participants all shared the same experiences and oppressions. Feminist writing should be approached, according to Gerda Lerner (1997) by focusing on the interweaving of sex, race, class, and cultural systems and the intersection of these with more inclusive relationships of power. The significance of language and how it informs meaning is evident in Fox-Genovese's (1991) statement that women do not "speak a different language from the men of their community," but rather, communicate or deal with language in a different manner, one in which they "confront a language that frequently denies their subjectivity and authority" (p. 284). This is true of women in households where Spanish is the primary and secondary language. Women, in a Spanish-English, bilingual household, deal with language differently conceptually more so than literally. In Spanish, there is a clear difference between words where literally there is a feminine and a masculine form. Women who communicate in the Spanish language, like those in this study, must confront the very clearly defined sense of feminine words and masculine words, always acquiesce to masculine dominance. It is in this sense that personal voice is extremely important in that the researcher, through these narratives, will be able to convey or at least attempt to capture the ways in which women can experience and appropriate

language differently and provide a better understanding of the meanings they have created for themselves concerning the visual world around them, and, in turn, how that meaning has informed their construction of identity. However, it is important to note, that as a male researcher representing females within the context of a bi-cultural, bilingual household, an unavoidable outcome is that their voice will be filtered and constrained. That is not to say that every effort was not made to convey their narratives with as much accuracy as possible. However, my relationship to these women, and my gender prohibited the possibility of candid responses.

CHAPTER 4

LIKE A FEATHER FALLING ON WATER

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, “and what is the use of a book,” thought Alice, “without pictures or conversations?”

Lewis Carroll

Long emerald waves of stalks and leaves flitted in the breeze. It was early fall, and the sky was golden and warm, and bounced dreamily off of the waxy leaves in the cornfield. I wandered through the maze of maize, lost in languorous leady thoughts of wonderland and make-believe. I was an adventurer, looking for long lost lands, through a jungle of corn, danger at every turn. In the distance, I heard a native call my name. The voice lingered on the breeze, like a note held long, an oboe in the distance. My pace quickened. I decided to run, to find the source of the voice. A friend in peril, or a foe lying in wait, ready to pounce and disembowel me. I ran, through the blades and stalks, breaking both along my path. The edge of the maze was nearing, and so I slowed and began to crouch, peering out through the blades of corn. The voice, it turned out, belonged to my oldest sister, Leticia. It was noon, and the sun was high in the sky, like a pinhole of light set against pale blue curtains. Time to come in out of the heat and have lunch. During the summer, I was never really hungry at noon, but I decided to go in anyway. The clock struck one o'clock, time for the largest meal of the day. Either I ate now, or waited until after dark when second of the largest meals was prepared. Our lives centered around routine; clocks, radio, work times, weather, water—nothing could ever just happen, it all had to be planned. Routine was inescapable, or so

it seemed. My sister had found a way out of the rut of summer time doldrums. She read, and I would read along with her.

She lay on the bed, in her usual pose. Her hair, like waves of undulating ebony curves, fell carelessly around her waist and spilled onto the bed beside her. She was proud of her hair. On the nightstand near the bed, there is a picture of me and my sister. We are standing near a sugar cane grove; it is mid-afternoon and the day is cloudy. There are rain clouds in the distance. In the picture, she is dressed in a flowing floral dress, her hair unbraided—my sister’s glory. Her hair has remained uncut all of her life, save the ends now and then. Her hair is part of her identity. I wouldn’t know my sister if she were to have short hair. Every morning before school or work either she or my mother would braid her hair. Ebony drapes of silky fine hair fell from her crown to her knees as she sat, brushing and untangling it. I would often ask her why she didn’t just cut it as women in the family had. She would always answer that it was her duty, as the oldest, to uphold the tradition of keeping long hair as a sign of a woman’s virtue.

“Women,” she would say, “are defined by their hair. It is our glory, and a sign to God that we are both humble, and vain.”

My sister has always been very wise. Most of my life I have done everything possible to emulate her wisdom. She was my role model. I wanted to be smart like her, I wanted to be creative like her, but most of all, I wanted to have her grace with language, both in Spanish and English, her ability to see multiple sides of any situation, and her ability to think well before she acted. She has always negotiated her identity within the constraints set before her by institutions such as school, work, and the government and people in positions of power such as her teachers, her boss, and the bureaucracy while

still maintaining her sense of self. When I see her, as I understand her, she has always been Leticia. She has always been the older sister; a student; a caretaker; and heterosexual, independent, traditional, loving, convicted, forthright, strong, and in control of herself. I have never seen my sister cry. When my grandmother died, even though she felt a part of her soul went with her, she did not shed a tear—at least not where anyone could see. She comforted my mother—who has never had trouble sharing any emotion whether positive, negative, screaming at the top of her lungs, or sobbing uncontrollably. She has always been the voice of reason. Tradition was very important to her. Keeping the old ways as much as possible had been instilled in her through her grandmother with whom she had spent so much time. Her grandmother raised her, and she idolized her, and although she did not agree with many of the traditional ways, she maintained them because that was how it was meant to be. Responsibility had been placed on her shoulders at a young age, and she, whether through reluctant acceptance or quiet obedience, was the good girl. My sister took care of us as we grew up, and took on the role of guide, guardian, and at times, mother. Her responsibilities to her family weighed upon her, and I began to see her hair, not as a crowning glory, but as a testament to faith, and, not unlike Rapunzel, the tether to which she held on to her hopes and dreams.

4.1 Gringolandia

When my sister was younger, it was her responsibility to act as the intermediary between the English speaking world and our family. Leticia was always the level-headed one in the family-- calm, and organized. My parents were overly reliant on her,

and she felt the pressure. At an early age, she was the one that acted as family clerk, filling out forms, reading important letters, and negotiating terms between authorities and my family. When she became a nurse, she healed us, in a literal sense. She became the shaman, the spiritual and the physical healer, tending to the wounds we inflicted upon ourselves through careless behavior. She was the one relatives came to with bumps and bruises, cuts and abrasions, and aches and pains. Members of my family would come to her first, seeking advice on whether or not their symptoms were severe enough to warrant a visit to the doctor, or if they could use a salve, a bandage, or some kind of easily obtainable medicine. They asked about what benefits prescribed medication had in order to make a decision as to whether they could live without taking it. Since many doctors at the time did not speak Spanish, and none in my family spoke English, they came to my sister to interpret what the doctor said, and to make sure what he or she was prescribing was legitimate. She was the first in the family to finish high school, and the first to ever set foot in a college building. Everything she accomplished she did on her own; she was the pioneer. She had to learn who to contact, where to go, who to pay, what forms to fill out, who was in authority, and who needed to be bypassed in all endeavors, not just her own. When Leticia was growing up, my parents, having limited English proficiency, frequently enlisted her as their translator. She remembers,

Mom took me everywhere. She would take me out of school, or I would miss school altogether, so that I could be her interpreter. I hated it. But I did it anyway. Sometimes, the people I would talk to would be mean, but most of the time, they were nice...I don't know why, probably because I was a little girl and they felt sorry for me. I think that's why I hated it, because they made me feel like I was someone who needed pity. I used to get so angry at mom for making me do it. I always thought, 'if I can learn English then why can't she?' I always felt like she was just being lazy, but anyway, it was too much for a little kid to be responsible for. But I did it anyway, because it was my responsibility. If I didn't do it, who else would?

Her relationship with my mother was a conflicted one. The responsibilities heaped on my sister created a power struggle between the two. Though my sister was responsible for being the liaison between the family and the world, she was still my mother's daughter, and within the hierarchical structures of Latino households, my sister had to remain submissive—though her role was important, she had to know her place.

4.2 Yes, Alice

My sister, Leticia, however, found ways to empower herself. She would escape the world through literature. There was scarcely a time that I saw her without a book. Her room was filled with books; they were everywhere. On nightstands, under her pillow, under the bed, in the bathroom, in the car, and in her purse. She would read many things, from classic literature, to trashy harlequin romance novels. One of the things I both envied and admired was her ability to not only read multiple books at a time, but the pace at which she read them. Leticia would finish several books in a week, and replace them, in a seemingly never-ending cycle. Her appetite for books was matched by her need for solitude. Thrust out into the world at an early age, her desire to be isolated, or at least create a barrier between the demands of responsibility and herself increased as my sister matured.

Reclining on the bed, not unlike an odalisque woman, Leticia lay in the quiet of the room, my head on her lap or the small of her back, reading with her. There we would talk, or rather, I would talk, and she would listen, or I suspect sometimes, pretend to listen. On quiet sunny afternoons, this was the time we would share with one another, after the bustle of morning chores were over, and the hectic rush of dinner was hours

away. We would steal ourselves a moment of solitude—well, as alone as a family of 10 in a two bedroom farmhouse can get. Leticia read a lot of books-- always in the midst of some steamy romance, horror novel, classic, or science fiction story. My memories of her are of her in quiet repose, accompanied by a glass of water in one hand and a book in the other. She preferred stories where the heroine, though strong, didn't always get her man; the heroine got something better. One of her favorite stories was *Jane Eyre*, a novel by Charlotte Brontë, that reminded my sister of her own life experiences. Over and over she read this book; I loved reading it with her, though much of it I didn't understand. Not that I couldn't read the words. The words were no problem. I couldn't understand many of the concepts, or how poverty existed outside of our world.

Understanding that white people were poor and dejected, subject to discrimination and recrimination was an idea completely foreign to me at the time. I remember asking her if there was such a thing as a poor white person. Her laughter was not at my expense, at my naiveté, and although not mocking, made me understand that I was being silly yet again. With the patience of a nun, she would cater to all of my questions.

“You mean there are really poor white people?” I asked.

“Yes, of course there are, but it also depends on what you mean by poor,” she answered in a way that both signaled her understanding and matter-of-factness at once.

“And they were mean to her? But she was just a little girl. Why didn't they take care of her?” I stated indignantly.

“They were taking care of her. They weren't mean. It's just how it was. Back then, she wasn't just a girl; people were treated like adults at a much younger age. Do you think Abuelita had it any differently? She was abandoned to live with her aunts when

she was 6 years old, and by the time she was ten, she was doing the same work the other women in the family did.”

“Didn’t they have someone to help them, you know, like Papí or Abuelito? I’m just now ten, you mean I would have to be living alone too?”

“No, you’re a boy. You’d have to be married by now,” she laughed-- a laugh which I knew was half teasing, and half true.

“Yuck no! I don’t ever want to be married, and I don’t want to be poor either. I know I won’t ever be dumb like Jane Eyre. She should have been mean back, or at least done stuff to the other people like hide their shoes or not wash their clothes right or make them eat something gross.”

She laughed again, “You are poor right now. If she had done any of those things, life would have been worse for her.”

“Yeah but she would have gotten back at them for being mean,” I said in a rational voice.

“Yeah but she would have gotten sent somewhere worse for doing that.”

“Not if she didn’t get caught,” a look of eureka upon my face.

“You always get caught,” she said, as though that were the only answer.

“No” she sighed, eyes never wavering from her book, “she did the right thing. She followed the rules. Did what she was supposed to, and in the end, she was a stronger person, and she was the one that had to be relied on. In the end, she was the one who became the hero because she helped the man that fell in love with her, she took care of everything, and she wound up being happy. Throughout the story she was

happy. She knew she had it hard, accepted it, and went from there. You might learn something from that.”

“*Mmmm*, I don’t know. She just seemed like she gave up. I don’t want to give up. But, I’ll read it again and see if I can see what you see.”

“You will one day. One day you’ll understand it’s not so easy. Sometimes you have to do things that are hard and no one gives you a choice. You just have to do. But in the end, if you learn from it, you might be able to keep from having to do an even worse thing later.”

“Hmmm, you may be right. But I still don’t know. I think it’s better not to let people push you around. She didn’t even talk back to them. I would have at least said something.”

She laughed again, “Yes, that’s why you always get in trouble. Just listen.”

“But then they get to say what they want,” I replied.

“And if you say what you want usually it makes things worse,” she responded.

“One day I’ll be able to say what I want,” I declared.

She laughed again, this time it was a little more pointed laughter, “No one ever gets to say what they want to say—no one.”

And with that, I settled into my mind. Thinking of the various ways in which I might express my ten-year old emotional indignation at the thought of someone actually telling me what I could and could not say. My sister smiled, and went back to her reading. As much as I did not want to admit it, deep inside, I knew she was right, which made me angrier. I wished that I could be more like her. She seemed to have it all figured out. Life didn’t seem to bother her as much. She knew what she knew and

seemed so resolute that it was right. I trusted her forthright attitude and confidence in the world. I made up my mind that I would be as smart as she was, and maybe someday, I would understand why I couldn't say what I wanted to say, even though I believed in my heart that it was the right thing to say. Justice needed to be enacted. The Jane Eyre's of the world needed to be avenged, or at least protected.

4.3 The New World

Leticia was creative and she loved making art. During her years in public school, she was consistently winning awards and prizes for her artwork. This was something that I idolized, both her talent and her ability to put her talent to use in order to gain. For her, just being able and encouraged to be creative, to draw, paint, work with clay was enough. Paints, colored pencils, clay, and paper were luxuries for our family. These were items that we didn't see regularly, much less use. Though, after her first prize, the family saw there was potential to be had in creativity, if not just for the prestige of having an artist in the fold, then at least for the tangible prestige to be had as a result. The first television that our family owned was a prize that my sister won for her artwork in the second grade. This accomplishment was so profound that my mother borrowed a camera to document the occasion. In fact, her accomplishment was celebrated with food and music, and of course, watching television. My mother worked very hard to preserve this luxury, only allowing it to be turned on in the evenings for fear that the light would burn out and stop working. Only one person was allowed to turn the channel and work the volume; when no one was watching, she kept it covered with long embroidered

doilies in order to keep the dust from accumulating. My other sister, Maricela, posed with Leticia in order to commemorate the achievement.

Afterwards, the novelty of having a television became a necessity. It was the window to the outside world, of people and places that we knew little about. Soon after my sister had won the family their first television, my mother's resignation to only turn the television on during the evenings became non-existent. The television was on morning, noon, and night. My mother, my aunts, and then my siblings, devoured television programming. For my sister Leticia, the Public Broadcasting Station was her favorite. She loved watching programs that enlightened her. She learned about history, of people's lives beyond the U.S., she learned about cuisine, in and outside of the U.S., and she even learned about fixing cars. She loved that channel. On one occasion she managed to put her new found knowledge to use, as she helped my mother drive a standard automobile. My father was away, working in a place that was too far for him to come home every day. He had been away almost two weeks, and time came for my mother to go into town for necessary sundries. The only car available was a standard five-gear vehicle that belonged to my father's employer. Desperate, my mother decided she must do what she needed to do and planned to walk the ten miles into town. My sister, in her usual matter of fact, and calm demeanor, convinced my mother to take the car instead. My mother recounts, "She was so small, but she knew so much about the car, I just trusted her. She told me what to press, and when. She was very good at listening to the car, she would say "Mamá when the car sounds like this,' and she would make a noise, 'that means that you press that other peddle, and push this to here.' She was such a smart girl. It took a long time to get to town, because I was afraid to go to

fast, and I didn't have a license. But we got there. I was so amazed at how smart my little girl was. After that I didn't mind her watching so much television. I just didn't like her to sit so close." My sister learned a lot from the programs she watched.

We used to watch television together, and more often than not, the television was tuned to a old black and white movie. Leticia loved classic movies, sometimes I felt, more than she loved books. She enjoyed period pieces, where women were clad in Elizabethan collars, or wide bustles and powdered wigs. She loved musicals. I am convinced she could sing the entire Gilbert and Sullivan songbook. The movies Leticia preferred, like the books she loved, were full of intrigue, of complex heroines, and of course, music. Though Leticia loved the complexity of a movie, she did not discriminate in her taste. She could enjoy Kubrick's *2001* just as easily as she could *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Star Trek*. Not only can she sing the entire score of *Pirates of Penzance*, but she can do it, dressed as a Star Fleet captain. Her memory is full of obscure movie references, many of which she utilizes when making a point. When we celebrated her 30th birthday, she remarked, "Oh no! My crystal is going to turn red! Carousel! Carousel!"²² To which I laughed and answered, "No Tish, not red, you're so old, it's turning black." She was not amused.

One of our favorite programs was Bob Ross on public television. Like clockwork, every Saturday we would sit in front of the television and watch as Mr. Ross created painting after painting with almost effortless ease. When my mother would pass by and see what he was painting, she would say to Leticia, "Someday you will paint me a

²² In the 1976 movie *Logan's Run*, an individual's life is limited to 30 years of age after which, life is terminated voluntarily in a ceremony that is called Carousel. An individual's age is indicated via a crystal that is embedded in the palm of the hand. The crystal changes colors from yellow, to blue, to finally red which signifies the individual has reached the end of his or her lifespan.

beautiful painting like that.” Leticia thought his paintings were beautiful, and tried to emulate them. She and I would practice with old paint and paint brushes on the back of cardboard boxes. When we watched Bob Ross on television, I was always envious of the ease in which my sister emulated his work. She was the smartest and most creative person I knew, next to Bob Ross of course, and I strived to be as intelligent and creative as she.

4.4 Bob Ross

One of the fondest memories I have of her is of a day after school. I was in the first grade, and had begun to have a fascination with my sister’s artwork, especially during the afternoons when she would paint with Bob. Scholastically Leticia was well ahead of me, in high school when I was in elementary, and seeing what she created in art class, and at home over the years made me anxious to grow up. On the day I remember, she came home with a piece of art paper, the biggest piece of paper I had ever seen. Accompanying the paper was a set of brand new paints; there were so many colors, bright and exotic, along with a set of brushes. I was transfixed. She set them down at the kitchen table, and then disappeared to continue her usual after-school routine, including turning on the radio, organizing her books, getting ready for homework, and making sure my brother and sister prepared to do their homework. I opened the box, and was entranced by the set of paints. There were so many of them. There were almost as many as the ones Mr. Ross had on television. I ran my fingers over them, feeling the coolness of the tubes on my fingertips. Although I knew I shouldn’t, I couldn’t resist picking them up and examining them further. I opened one

tube, a beautiful blue, the shade of sky reflected on water during a clear sunny day.

Leticia had also brought home an art book, filled with beautiful images. Within its pages, I found a painting. The painting was of a woman, dark with long hair. She reminded me of my aunt, though the woman in the painting was much thinner. I wanted to copy this work, to play with the paints, but mainly, because there was a large piece of paper, it was too much of a temptation for me to resist not trying. Knowing that I might have to deal with the consequences, I drew the woman as best I could upon the piece of paper, and once satisfied, I began to paint. Eager to experiment with the paints, I began by opening the blue paint I had held before first, unable to wait any longer to see color on the paper. Using a plate that I obtained from the cupboard as a palette, I squeezed some of the paint into it, trying my best to be conservative so that I might be able to conceal my mischief. Opening a few more colors, I placed what I imagined to be adequate amounts on the plate as well, and once satisfied, I began to paint.

The feel of the paint on the paper was marvelous. Never had I experienced painting with brushes; up until this point, at the age of six, most of my painting was confined to using my fingers. Most of my doodles were on school paper, or the backs of opened cereal boxes or cigarette cartons--never on a piece of paper this nice or this size. Halfway through my creative endeavor, my sister returned from her routine and walked in on me painting in the kitchen. I was startled, and quickly put down the brush that I was using, the look upon my face not unlike a deer caught in headlights. Awaiting her scold, I began to quietly put the paints back in their case, tears welling in my eyes. Caught in the act, there was no way to deny what I had done. Instead of yelling at me, my sister did something else, she praised my work.

“Mom, look at this, look at what Andy made; it’s really pretty,” she said, with a smile on her face.

“Are you mad at me?” I sniffled.

“Well, you should’ve asked, but now that you started, you have to finish. Just be sure to use them right, and don’t waste them,” she said, still smiling.

“You really think it’s pretty?” I asked.

“Yes,” she laughed, “of course I do. I wouldn’t have said it if I didn’t mean it. You have to learn to trust. Not everyone is out to get you. Besides, who cares, if you like it, that’s really all that matters.”

4.5 Traditions

Her artwork was often delicate with an emphasis on clean, crisp purposeful lines. It was often a goal of hers to see how thin and curvy she could get a line without erasing. She drew much of her inspiration from the art of Native Americans that she would find in encyclopedias. Leticia was an avid thrift store connoisseur and among the novels and comic books she would buy, there were also old art magazines and books on artists with a lot of pictures. She had always had a preference for the art of Native Americans. My grandmother did live in New Mexico, and this type of artwork was prevalent not only in people’s homes, but in school and stores. It was everywhere. Even though our family was poor, the need to encourage my sister’s creativity outweighed our monetary limitations. One of my uncles was so proud of her that he found a way to earn extra money in order to ensure that there was enough money for the art supplies she

needed for school. He also made sure that she had enough money for her art books, and a subscription to her favorite magazine *SouthWest Art*.

Leticia's artwork and intellect won her many accolades in public school. She proved herself to be a model student, studious and even more, gifted, a distinction that created an opportunity for her. During her eighth grade year of school in New Mexico, she was one of the top students in her school, and recognized for her academics. A recruiter from the state university of New Mexico contacted my aunt, our legal guardian at the time. The call created a panic. My aunt's first reaction was to believe that my sister had somehow, though implausibly, gotten into trouble at school. In her experience, the only reason schools had to call home was to report delinquency, inappropriate behavior, or expulsion. My sister had gone to school during the age of tracking, where often students were cajoled out of school through constant phone calls home. Parents, especially poor immigrant Latino parents, often found it easier to keep their children home than to deal with auspicious non-corporeal school entities. My aunt's second reaction was to consider that somehow the school believed that she, in her capacity as guardian, was suspect; that she had somehow put my sister in peril and now there was someone coming to take her niece away. This second possibility worried my aunt so much that she called my mother, who was working in Colorado at the time and told her that some important person from the school was coming to take Leticia away.

When the recruiter came, she made it very clear that neither my sister nor my aunt had cause for concern, they did not do anything wrong, but rather the contrary. The recruiter had come to inform my family that my sister's academic accomplishments had

been noticed, and that as a result, she had earned a place at the Eastern New Mexico University once she graduated and that a full scholarship would be available provided she continued with her excellent academic record. My mother did not completely understand what this meant at the time. Only that, from her perspective, universities were places far away from family, and that students went there alone. Essentially, the recruiter was coming to take her child away from the family. The fact that she was a girl made the situation even more implausible. Girls did not live alone, and away from home without someone to keep them safe. My mother believed the only girls that lived alone were white women who didn't care about their families, too engrossed in a career, or acting like a man. The other girls that lived alone, in my mother's mind, were girls that had to live alone because their family had thrown them out, or worse, left to become prostitutes. For my sister to go to the university on her own was out of the question. Women rarely went anywhere alone. They traveled with husbands, male relatives, or other women. Promises meant nothing to my mother either. The issue of money was a compelling one. In her mind, they were only trying to seduce my sister away. They, the ominous no-faced they, were trying to lure her into a situation where, once committed to school, would find a way to stop paying, and force the family to come up with the money. In the end, it would be far more devastating to her daughter to go somewhere idyllic, to have her dreams within reach, only to have it turn into a nightmare, her dreams ripped from her grasp. For my mother, it was better to pay for everything on your own. This way, when the world offered up disappointment, one only had oneself to blame. After the recruiter came, that was the last year my sister spent in school in New Mexico. The next year she began school in Wyoming, as far removed from anything

familiar as she had yet experienced. There, even the terrain was white for most of the year.

Leticia resented the notion of my mother's antiquated thinking. Even though my father tried to convince my mother that this was the best for their child; my mother remained resolute that it was an impossibility. Once my mother made up her mind, there was no point in trying to undo her decision. The matriarch had spoken. My sister didn't understand why she couldn't go to school. Part of her knew that although she was living and existing as an American, she was still who she was. She was not white. She was poor. She lived in a small house, with a large family. She was responsible for her siblings. She was responsible for taking care of her parents. She was smart, but not smart enough.

My sister was always my greatest champion; her patience with me continued on into my adulthood. The previous story illustrates the important role that my sister played in my family's education. She was the one mostly in charge of our education. Indirectly however, she acted as the liaison between the family and the unknown trappings of the dominant American culture. To us, she was the bridge between the comfort of family and the white world. She was the first in many respects-- the first to speak English, the first to graduate high school, the first to go to college. Although she had a few older cousins, she was the first to go to public school, and the trials and tribulations she experienced there were difficult for her, but she muddled through them. She recounts one of her most difficult experiences. The year after her last in a New Mexico, school proved to be very difficult. She remembers her time in Wyoming,

I was sitting in class one day during the first semester of school. We were already half way through the semester. The day had just barely begun. I was just

minding my own business, doing my work, and all of a sudden a teacher comes up to me. "You haven't been tested yet have you?" she asked me. I had no idea what she was talking about, so I told her no. "What?" she said like it was my fault, "Well, we need to see if you're reading level and English proficiency are up to the right level. I can't believe they let you into this class without testing you first." It was a regular English class and I had been there since the first day of school. I told her that I was doing just fine, but she seemed really agitated. "Well, if you've never been tested then how do we know you're in the right level? We need to be sure that you understand English well enough to be in the class." I answered, "Well if I wasn't able to understand you then I wouldn't be able to respond to you. Obviously my English is just fine." Apparently she didn't like that answer because she insisted that I get tested. So I went with her to this little room, and there were a bunch of other brown kids in there too. They looked so sad, and worried. I was so angry because I didn't understand what the problem was. I had been doing just fine in class, the work was kind of easy, and my grades were really good. But I guess that wasn't good enough for this woman. So I followed her into the room, and they tested me. "It seems your reading level is really high, higher than the class you're in. I don't understand," she said and sounded a little disappointed. I didn't understand either, but apparently it was good enough. After that I was a little teary, not because I was sad, but because I was so mad and no one could do anything about it. I think it was a little violating. It made me feel small, and stupid. But I didn't let that stop me from doing well. I think it made me try harder.

I understood her dilemma. When I was in the fourth grade, a similar thing happened to me. Luckily, my sister was there to guide me. When I told her that I was going to be tested for English, she came with me on the day of the exam. She acted as my advocate, but more importantly, she helped calm my nerves, as I felt that I was being punished for doing something of which I was unaware. When the test began, she made her presence felt. And in the end, no one felt violated.

When she taught us, it was always with a gentle hand. Her patience was extraordinary, even when she was justified in being frustrated. Her composure was her strength, and she prized herself for having control over her emotions. The lessons she delivered were as gently as a feather falling on water. But the ripples they made, became a tsunami.

4.6 Synopsis

If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked,
while your own conscience approved you, and
absolved you from guilt, you would not be without
friends.

Charlotte Brontë

Leticia believed, and continues to believe, that knowledge was the greatest gift that anyone could possess. If a person was smart, it didn't matter if money was scarce, or if the situation that person was living in was not the best. If a person was smart, he or she could find a way to get more money, and change the situation in which he or she was living. This belief is something that she passed down to her siblings. Her influence on me, my mother, my sister Maricela, and Leticia's two nieces was great. Leticia understood her power. Never did a day go by that she did not encourage a pursuit of knowledge.

She was always fond of sticking to the rules. In her mind, you had to learn the rules first before you could do anything else in life. One of her pet peeves was the way in which I would always make my own rules, or change the rules as we went along. She called this cheating. I called it, being innovative. Her greatest annoyance was the way in which I read books.

"You're cheating. You shouldn't read the end first. If you jump to the end how are you going to know what it means? You need the rest to understand it."

"I don't like surprises. I feel better knowing how it ends. If I don't know how it ends, I'll spend most of my time reading and worrying about what's going to happen. This way, I know what's going to happen beforehand and I won't worry—do you want to know how it ends?"

“Yes but I can wait. That’s why books have a beginning and an end. They’re meant to be read from front to back.”

“But if I know what’s going to happen I can choose what I want to pay attention to. I know what isn’t important to the story.”

“It’s all important to the story. You can’t do that in life. That’s the point of a book; it’s supposed to be like you’re living it. If you skip ahead it kind of breaks the fantasy doesn’t it?”

“Wouldn’t it be awesome if you could!”

“No! You’re always looking for a shortcut. There aren’t any shortcuts in life.”

“Well if the writer didn’t want me to look they should have made it harder.”

“That’s why the pages are numbered, and the chapters, and you read it from front to back. The rules are there, you just didn’t follow them.”

That was our usual argument. She always saw the world of possibilities within the scope of logical rules, and order. She understood the world in a way that I could not. Her life and experiences were completely different. She had grown up in a world of rules, and had also created the possibility for me to see things in a different light.

Most of the knowledge that she passed on to me and her siblings was through what she read in books and saw on television. The stories that she read and the television programs she loved fueled her knowledge of the world. The importance in understanding the influence of visual culture on her perception is based on the potential for media to communicate an individual’s realities (Moreman, 2008). These media transported her to places beyond the confines of poverty, and in turn, she taught the women in her family to see beyond the realms of their existence and imagine

possibilities. She did not believe that we would always be poor, but that knowledge was the key. Knowing more than those that have authority over you can help you understand when you are being unfairly treated. Although you may not be able to do anything about mistreatment and injustice at the moment it occurs, through knowing about the world, a solution can be found. The world she saw in books and on television offered a vision of potential answers, the only thing needed was to put the pieces together. In her mind, however, possibilities still functioned within rules; whether directly stated or unseen, there were rules. Whether you chose to follow them or not was up to you. Leticia's construction of identity developed in conjunction to her gender, her sexuality, her intellect, language, and traditions. The complex nature of her sense of self is made through the ways in which Leticia navigates the contradictions that are present in the multiple identities Latinas in the U.S. encounter. Latinas like my sister Leticia learn to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view simultaneously juggling culture, gender, and sexuality, where the intent is to preserve as much as possible from a pluralistic existence (Anzaldúa, 1999).

In Leticia's stories, she has defined herself as a person that mediates between the outside world and the family. The stories I have presented show her relationship to me and the ways in which she has formed my identity. However, though her narrative is largely dictated by my relationship to her, I can only suggest what she taught me and what I observed. Leticia still operated under the sense of tradition that weighed heavily on her identity. Her influence on the family, including the other women in the study, was influenced by her perceptions and dealings with what she considered the white world.

Much of her perceptions of the world were formed from watching television. She learned about prejudice and difference, and inadvertently passed her suspicion of the white world to her siblings, namely, the other women in the family. Much of her perceptions were formed from dealing with outside authorities from an early age, and were reinforced by her mother's fears. She recounts,

I was really too young to be talking about finances, and making arrangements for funerals, or helping Mom at the doctor's office. There were some things I wish I didn't have to know. Most of the time, I was always so frustrated with Mom, because I had to learn English. I thought that if I could learn English then so could she. But, even that wasn't as bad as when I had to be the interpreter for the rest of the family. No one asked me, they just expected it. But I couldn't say no, because that wasn't right.

My sister was caught, often quite literally, between the old traditional world of her Mexican heritage, and the white world in which she was living. Although she understands that the world is complicated, and that there is more to conflict than skin color, she does have a difficult time separating her experiences from her perception.

When I was younger, I remember going to the *treilita*²³ and in the back corner, there was a sign posted that said "no wetbacks allowed." I thought it was funny because if you were from Mexico, how would you know what this said? But it was a reminder. When me and my friends used to go shopping together, they would always think I was paranoid because I would make sure that I didn't touch anything that I didn't plan to buy. One of my friends said, "Oh you're just paranoid." One time, we were in a store and one of the clerks followed me all over the store; meanwhile, my friends were left alone. I was so angry that I just decided to leave. They saw me leave in a huff, and asked what the matter was. I asked them, "Didn't you see that guy following me around? He was making sure that I didn't take anything." They said, "No, how do you know? Maybe he was just flirting with you." I told them, "You don't understand; you're white. It's different when you walk into the store. When I walk into a store, the first thought that comes to my mind is, 'make sure you don't look like you're stealing.' I make sure that the clerks see me, and that they know I'm just looking. It's an awful feeling."

²³ A regional word that was used in Roswell, New Mexico to refer to second hand shops. This was in reference to most second hand shops being housed in old tin roofed buildings on the outskirts of town. *Treilita* is a Spanglish word that means "little trailer home."

Her fears of dealing with authority were often contradictory. In one sense, she pontificated the establishment of rules and their necessity for being able to function in the world. But, in her teachings to her siblings, there were always undercurrents that taught a need for disestablishment. The rules were there, but there was a right way to break them and a wrong way. Leticia, like many Latinas whose identity is formed within the marginal hybrid space, deals with the need to assess the rules governing each setting and understand her ethnic, class, and gender position (Romero, 1997).

My sister is constantly negotiating her identity within hegemonic norms, both within her culture and outside of it. Her complex relationship with her mother shows how at once she was adamant to hold on to traditions and resistant to them. Her sense of self was highly influenced by the books that she read, namely *Jane Eyre*. She wanted to emulate the solid strength of character that Jane exhibited in the book. She remembers:

I loved her because she did what she needed to do, and didn't really complain. I think I'm like that. I do what I need to do in order to make things work for everyone around me. I wish that I could be selfish like Maricela or Mom or the cousins, but I'm not. I know people try to take advantage of me, but I don't let them. Even though I've done a lot for mom and she's made a lot of decisions for me, I know she is doing it because she doesn't understand, or because she's afraid for me. She's had to deal with a lot in her life, which has probably made her over protective of me. I do wonder now what life would have been like if I had gone to college in New Mexico, and what life would have been like if I had become a nun. But, that's not how things turned out. Besides, in the end, I love watching television too much and reading lots of smutty romance novels to be happy as a nun.

Her stories evoke the complicated nature of identity, especially from the position of liminality. Leticia's identity situated in a marginal space where her sense of self functions as a mediator between the traditions and norms from her Mexican heritage and hegemonic norms she and her family encounter in the U.S. Her identity has been difficult for me to understand, because in one sense she functions within structured

norms, holding on to what she feels are antiquated ways of thinking. But she also believes that paths should be individually formed, within the construct of the establishment. The construction of identity is problematic when individuals attempt to define themselves, but is then interpreted or viewed as something else (Schutte, 2000). She also views the world in which she lives with skepticism, and is just as fearful as her mother of authority. However, her identity is just as much limited or controlled by the women around her as she is by the outside world. Part of what makes defining identity difficult is the challenges that occur in the tensions that arise out of negotiating identity. Leticia's mother is often the greatest influence and source of subjugation. Leticia's stories illuminate the way in which marginalization and subjugation occurs both from within a culture and outside of it as well.

CHAPTER 5

BABEL

The world, that understandable and lawful world, was slipping away.

Lord of the Flies

5.1 Let Them Eat Cake

The air was filled with music. Heat from the sun baked adobe walls of my grandmother's home in New Mexico was like a furnace. The adobe walls dissipated the sound that floated on the rose scented breeze. My cousins and I were gathered on the shady porch, lounging lazily in the heat of the day. We sat on the cement floor, cooled by a generous spray of water. As the music played, we talked and gossiped, laughed and argued, and we were together, assured by our youthful optimism that it would stay this way forever. Music was everywhere, especially when my cousin Maya was around. She was frivolity, and fun—the flavor in the otherwise blandness of poverty. Both Maya and my sister Leticia were born months apart, and they were opposites in many ways. She, as all her sisters, was outgoing, boisterous, and jovial, especially in the company of men, music, and alcohol. She, like her sisters, traversed the plane between good and evil, good in this case defined by obedience, chastity, and restraint—and evil being everything my grandma said it was, usually most things that were fun. These girls, outside the ever present disapproving elders' eyes, were bad girls. They smoked, drank, caroused with boys, talked about sex and about each other. They were anything but traditionally obedient girls. But I loved them; I idealized them, especially my cousin Maya. She was funny, bold, and everyone loved her; she was everyone's big sister,

friend, and could do no wrong. Her unassuming nature made her easy to confide in. Never judgmental, she gave advice with acerbic wit and often, it was advice that could be counted on. My aunt loved her, the whole family loved her, and she brought life, frivolity, and joy with her gregarious nature. She exuded a great energy, a light second only to my aunt's radiance, living, giving, sharing perpetual youth with everyone around her. Maya and her sisters together became muses, nymphs, and sirens that tempted the soul to leave rationality behind, to relish in total abandon. Maya and her sisters loved celebrating, and birthdays were the best kind of celebration.

We were in the kitchen, my aunts, my sisters, my cousins, and I, sitting around the table that served double duty as a kitchen counter. Large gelatinous yellow orbs fell into a big cream colored ceramic bowl as my aunt cracked eggs into it. I recognized the bowl. It was the cake bowl. The one she used every time she was going to bake a cake, which was a rare occasion. Naturally, as children, we were drawn to the promise of sweets, a treat that happened once a month, twice if we were lucky. It was Maya's birthday, and as usual, my aunt was helping us celebrate by making the birthday cake. Each of us had our own cake. My oldest sister Leticia had German chocolate, just like my father; my sister Maricela loved lemon cake; my brother's was a yellow cake with chocolate frosting; and for me, it was always white coconut cake. My aunt always took special care to celebrate each family member's birthday, never neglecting one. And in a family for whom sugary treats were a rarity, a cake was special enough. The sharing in the laughter and good spirits that came with eating cake was its own gift. Especially for the women in the family, celebrations often meant getting together.

The music played on as we prepared the celebratory pastry. Maya shared her anecdotes about life, in her comical and acerbic way. Witty and clever, Maya, my aunt always said, should be a songwriter, or a comedian. Her retorts though softened with humor, stayed sharp and true nonetheless. The cousins danced with one another, laughing and playing, in a way that only girls were allowed to in my family. They spoke to one another, in ways that they didn't when men were around. When the women in my family were alone together, they all became like Maya and her sisters, bawdy, loud, gregarious, and risqué. The language that they used was steeped in metaphor, though not vulgar, no less suggestive. While the music played, and the women gathered around while Maya, ever precocious, holding a pair of brown eggs to another aunt and asked one with a sly smile "*a mi me gustan los huevitos morenos, y a ti Ramona cuales te gustan?*"²⁴ My aunt, without skipping a beat, "*a mi lo que sean, lo que importa es el tamaño.*"²⁵ The women laughed, and the ennuendos continued, until each had their turn.

The language that women used was coded in a way that allowed them to disseminate information that was often much more meaningful and complex in Spanish than in English. They were able to say things that they would otherwise not say in mixed company. In the sanctuary of the kitchen, they didn't use the word *nosotros*²⁶, everything was framed in *nosotras*²⁷. Language was crucial in the way that women connected to one another, and metaphorical speaking was the way in which the women

²⁴ Translated to "I like brown eggs, how about you Ramona?" which is a sexually provocative statement, huevitos being a slang word for testicles.

²⁵ Translated to "it doesn't matter what color they are what matters is their size."

²⁶ Nosotros is masculine form of "we" or "us" in Spanish, which is used to denote a group of men or a group of men and women.

²⁷ Nosotras is the feminine form of "we" or "us" in Spanish and is only used when there are no men present.

in my family preserved their sense of decorum but still allowed themselves to be provocative. I once asked my aunt why the women in the family didn't just say what they meant, why they had to speak in puzzles. My aunt replied, "Because we are not men. Only men are *groceros*²⁸ or *descraciados*²⁹; the only women who speak like men are *cantineras*³⁰ or *mujeres indecentes*³¹. We are still women and we still need to be polite." As the day progressed into night, and the women continued their cooking and carousing in the kitchen, their conversations turned more candid. Even though I had been allowed to participate to a limited degree in the playful banter of cake making, and birthday celebrating, the time had come for the women to talk about more serious matters. My cousin Maya, in her gentle way, looked at me and said, "You know what? *Tío*³² is going to the *treilita*³³ right now, and he needs you to go with him. Besides, we're just going to talk about girl stuff now...you know, like kissing boys and wearing dresses and make-up. You'll be really bored, so why don't you go with him. I'll give you a quarter if you go." Little did she know I loved talking about boys, but a quarter was a quarter after all.

5.1.1 Structuralism and Language

The ideals and philosophies that emerged during the enlightenment became the foundations for modernist theory. Questions that emerged throughout the Enlightenment concerning the problems of the world became possible to solve through rational thought

²⁸ "Uncouth"

²⁹ Literally this means "without grace," but is used to infer a lack of honor.

³⁰ Cantineras are women who frequent Cantinas or the places usually relegated as spaces for men. The popular belief is that women who spend time in these places are usually only there for one reason—to procure sexual favors.

³¹ This was a term the women in my family used to denote a prostitute, since the term *puta* (whore, prostitute) is one that is too vulgar to use in polite company.

³² Uncle

³³ Second hand shop

and scientific ideas. Objects in the world inhabited a universal and moral position that was concrete and absolute. Within these constructs the possibility of ambiguity, complexity, and fragmentation had no place. If these possibilities existed, their nature was the result of poor scientific method; knowledge about them was incomplete and only a matter of time before explanations surfaced (Saussure, 1966; Sturrock, 2003). Existence in the world was seen as transparent and unified; individuals were capable of knowing themselves and their place in the world.

Structuralism is centered around the idea that reality is containable and completely knowable based on the external linguistic structures that determine meaning. Primarily, the meaning of structuralism centers around the perception and interpretation of structures. Structuralism is a way of thinking about the world in which there are definite objects whose nature is understood without the need to go beyond its self regulating existence (Hawkes, 1977). The relationship between the object and the observer is the only thing that can be observed, and is determined by the relationship to all other objects involved in the relationship (Sturrock, 2003). The full significance of an object cannot be seen or understood until it is integrated into the structures that constitute its meaning. An object's final nature is determined by the permanent structures in which it fits. Structuralism is connected to the study of language, and is the basis on which many of its concepts are founded, a central tenet of which is semiotics. Everything that exists within and around human affairs can be explained categorized and made knowable through signs and sign systems.

The language theory of Ferdinand de Saussure is the basis through which structuralism is formed. According to Saussure, a person's understanding of the world is

mediated through the linguistic signs and words whose meanings are contained within a language system (Gabardi, 2001; Hawkes, 1977; Saussure, 1966). Signs are defined in relation to underlying rules of symbolic meaning, or a system through which they can be understood. The world is divided into signifier and signified, and meaning is found in the relation between the two, not necessarily in the representational factor of the signifier (Gabardi, 2001). Saussure believed that phonetic sounds could adequately represent meaning. He privileged the spoken word over the graphic signification or signifier. His belief was in the binary opposition of signifier and signified. He believed this is what gave meaning to language. Signs and symbols were believed to be static, stable, and universal and can be found in Saussure's definition of semiology: "A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it *semiology* (from Greek semeion 'sign')" (Saussure, 1966, p. 15). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them.

Language, though only one semiotic system, one form of signifier, was seen as the most complex and universal by Saussure. Linguistics became the defining pattern for semiology. Language is a formative part of our understanding of reality and history not just a supplemental or ancillary part of it.

As Saussure states:

Language at any given time involves an established system and an evolution. At any given time, it is an institution in the present and a product of the past. At first sight, it looks very easy to distinguish between the system and its history, between what it is and what it was. In reality, the connexion between the two is so close that it is hard to separate them. (Saussure, 1966, p. 9)

Linguistics is seen as function of the time in which it occurs binding together coexisting terms and forming a system of meaning in the collective mind of speakers. Language follows rules; linguistics must follow laws that operate universally in language. Language is a social product (Barthes, 1977). Distinctions should be made between what is social and what is individual, what is essential and what is accidental. Language is independent of the individual and cannot be created by an individual and presupposes collectivity (Saussure, 1966). Understanding is inherent as social cues are passed from one to another. Systems of signs such as language are established to evoke ideas. Language is conveyed through visual signs, sounds, and movement. Writing is a system of signs (Saussure, 2002). As language is a product of societies, but not all societies are the same, and so in that sense, not all languages are the same. Diversity exists within language and depends greatly on where the society exists that creates the language. Understanding is found within the signs and systems that appear essential and universal.

Although language is integral to understanding a culture, the reciprocity of language, meaning, and culture to identity is a crucial part that is missing from structuralism. In connection to the introductory story where the women in my family shared with one another, the language that they used was coded. I spoke Spanish as did they, but that was not enough for me to understand completely the nuances of what they were saying to one another. Language was not limited to verbal expressions. The women in my family would often use a gesture, a hand turned upside down as though it were cupping a heavy load, to identify a man as *huevo*³⁴. The gesture was something

³⁴ Lazy, slow-witted, unmotivated—referring to a man who is so sluggish and lazy that his testicles drag on the ground.

that they all knew and recognized but was not a universal sign system or language. The gesture originated as a way for the women in my family to talk about the men in their lives in a subtle way.

5.2 You Can't Have Your Cake and Eat It Too

They called her *higado*. In Spanish that word means liver, and they called her that because she was dark. Out of all of her siblings, my aunt Lupe was the darkest, but she didn't mind; she loved her color. "Why do you always have to dress in black people's clothes, your make-up makes you look like a *mayate*,"³⁵ my uncle would say. She, would always retort, "You're just jealous because black is beautiful, and I buy what you wear so you must dress in black people's clothes too." This was the usual banter at my grandmother's house between my aunt Lupe and my uncle Chano. Together we lived with her-- my two uncles, my other aunt, my grandparents, and several cousins. It was a small house, several rooms shared double duty, save the kitchen. It was the only room that had a single purpose. I loved the kitchen; it was where it was warmest on cold winter days, and it was where everything happened—the best conversation, the best laughter, the best stories, and the best meals. My aunt, with her gentle girth, served as the sun around which we all gravitated. Her personality was as immense as her appetite, her nurturing nature brought into focus by her curves. She was like the wind, soft and gentle, warm and comforting but like the weather, when the wind would change, it could be tempestuous, dark, and frightening. This was one of those occasions, the sight of her made me feel as though on the precipice of a tumultuous storm. She called to me, in a voice that sounded like a low and heavy rumble. I went

³⁵ Slang for a person of African decent

into the kitchen, her usual domain, the throne room from which she exerted her power. There was trouble, and it had my name written all over it. As I walked in, my aunt Lupe was sitting on her favorite chair, a repurposed lawn chair sturdy enough for the weight of her responsibility, the cast iron legs like a horse beneath this dark Gloriana. Her face, like a granite sky, shown the lightning of her anger. Another roll of thunder echoed as Lupe asked where I had been. I told her that as usual, I had gone to school, and that we had been on a field trip to the local zoo, and then picnicked at a park nearby. A lightning bolt shot towards me, and grazed my arm, though only slightly, the sting radiated outward like heat pouring over my body. She asked me again, where I had been and this time, the thunder rolled even more ominously. The look on her face told me that this was not the time to repeat my previous statement. I took a deep breath, and I told her,

I went to school. Ms. Samaniego was mean to me. We went on a field trip, to the zoo, and then we went to the park near the school for a picnic, but I didn't like the food that they brought us. It was white-people food; it looked and smelled awful. Even the cake they gave us for dessert was green. I didn't even know there was such a thing as green cake. I thought it was bad, so I went to tell Ms. Samaniego that it wasn't good anymore and that she should throw the rest away. She got so mad at me and told me that I had to eat it, that I was lucky to be able to have this food, and to come to the park. She told me poor people like me never appreciated anything, and that it was her job to make sure that I understood how lucky I was.

Thinking of Ms. Samaniego standing over me, with her sickly sweet perfume, and her even more saccharine smile as she mouthed the words "poor people like you," brought back the feeling of crying, of anger, of wanting to curl up in a ball while simultaneously wanting to hit her. She was my teacher, and I did not understand. She was dark like me, she was Latino like me, but she never spoke Spanish, and would get angry if I did. I continued my story,

She made me sit there looking at the food and wouldn't let me move until I had eaten some of the food. She made me so angry that I waited until she wasn't looking, then I smashed the food under the table. She thought I had eaten it, but when she came to tell me it was ok for me to get up, the food came unstuck and fell on the floor. She was so angry. She grabbed my arm and I was so scared. I didn't know what I was going to do. So I pulled and pulled. She tried to hold me but I stepped on her foot and I ran. I ran to the field behind the house and waited until it was time to come home before I came into the house.

More thunder rolled. My aunt Lupe was angry, and I was to blame. But, the storm passed, it blew past me and out of the kitchen, and out of the house. It rolled down the street, moving in the school's direction. The darkness eventually moved until I could no longer see it. The storm had passed, and once again, behind the clouds, the sun shone once more, her pearly smile like the rays of warmth against my soul. After the tempest, Ms. Samaniego never made me eat green cake again.

5.2.1 Baudrillard

Simulacra suggests that representation goes through four stages 1) a sign reflects basic reality 2) sign masks or distorts reality 3) a sign masks the absence of reality 4) sign becomes simulacrum (a pure simulation bearing no relation whatsoever to reality) (Baudrillard, 1994). Hyper-reality causes the sign to become more real than reality itself. Baudrillard's assertion that we live in a world of mass-media manipulation and hyper-real politics does not prohibit alternatives for being. Baudrillard's theories reflected postmodernism's struggle over and within representation.

The signified of cat, dog, or ox is not equated with the animal itself but with the mental representation. There is an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified. For example, the word "cat" does not resemble the animal whatsoever; there

is no intrinsic relationship between the signifier and the signified. Each language has a distinctive and arbitrary way of organizing the world.

Fundamental to structuralism is the semiotic definition of a sign in terms of its relationship to the signifier and what is signified. A sign is defined as the union of form, which signifies the signifier. The signifier is the sensible, material, acoustic or visual signal that triggers a mental concept. The signified is not a thing but rather a mental representation. The sign is central to language. Barthes contradicts this theory of sign and in his explanation of language:

is no longer a simple nomenclature; it derives this complex character from the fact that its sign cannot be reduced to a relation between a signifier and a signified, but is also, and perhaps more importantly, a 'value': the linguistic sign is completely defined, beyond its signification, only when we are able to compare it to signs which are similar: /mutton/ and /sheep/, to use Saussure's example, have the same signification, but not the same value. (Barthes, 1983, p. 3)

Redefining the sign to move away from a completely systematic interpretation led structuralism to the development of social theory where the human agent was eliminated as a key factor that explained the understandings of culture and society in favor of displaced, complex, and unstable interconnected interpretations of society.

5.2.2 Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is a mode of inquiry in which many of structuralism's systems and rules of language, communication, and understanding are challenged. The concepts of structuralism are challenged by theorists as being exclusive and repressive. It is a shift away from the signifier-signified dynamic and a move away from the spatial to the temporal. Poststructuralists distrust anything that is viewed as an all encompassing theory in which one explanation, one language, or system can explain

the totality of discourse. According to poststructuralist thought, signs themselves are subject to slippage and indeterminacy. Signs and meaning in this context contain within them rhizomatic movement; meaning moves outward branching unpredictably which in turn prohibits any notion of stability. Poststructuralism is a critique of the concepts of the stable sign, unified subject of identity, and truth. Poststructuralism provides theories that reject the idea of innate structures of mind or culture that can be identified, or that can be applied universally. Language is seen as an open-ended field, infinite in interpretation, and independent of signifier-signified binary fields of operation. Instead, language is seen as discourse that is de-centered from signifier and signified relationships, and is instead, dependent on negotiation between language and its users.

Poststructuralism and postmodernism challenge the concepts of structured, rational universes. Both theories position language as discourse, and discourse, although organized systems of language, is an open-ended field of infinite sign substitutions. What this means is that there are no direct one to one correlations between language and what is understood. Instead there are infinitesimal social forces at work that determine meaning. Language becomes social discourse, and can serve as a way to undermine the structures that they come to represent. Postmodernist and poststructuralist understanding is preoccupied with interpreting, re-interpreting, and breaking down the social forces at work within a society and the conflicting interactions that are generated by those forces.

Poststructuralism informs feminist narrative inquiry by emphasizing problems with social texts. In the study, the participants have provided a more detailed understanding of the perceived underlying causes that have affected the construction of

their identity. My sister Leticia, in her stories, struggles with her identity as a Latina from a traditional Mexican household, and her desire to rebel. In her journey to become a good daughter, she has sacrificed many of her personal desires in lieu of opportunities that would benefit the family at large. Understanding identity through a poststructuralist lens gives insight into the complexity of her identity as her choices, feelings, opinions, ideas, hopes, dreams and aspirations are either met or crushed. Her experience, though personal, is not unique, and is connected to the stories of the other women in the study. What poststructuralist theories bring to bear on the study is the way in which the women in the study are understood. As opposed to a structuralist model where the identities of the women in the study can be lumped together, from a poststructuralist perspective, connections can be made between the women and how they have created meaning for themselves. The women in the study are viewed in relation to one another not just from their relationship to men. A structuralist viewpoint would predicate that the women only came to understand one another in opposition to their male counterparts. But, within a poststructuralist perspective, the women in the study have a closer relationship to one another, and influence one another's identity as much as the men and the outside world do.

Discourses offer a way to understand social dynamics through subjective interpretations of those who participate. Again, like the signifier-signified relationships, the subject-object relationships are broken down and viewed as socially constructed relationships rather than inherent ones. Gender is one relational dynamic that is challenged among others, where the male-female relationship is no longer binary. The state of being male is not inherently related to having a penis, but instead, degrees of

maleness, masculinity, and patriarchy are critiqued and re-evaluated. Likewise, femaleness, femininity, and matriarchy are no longer associated with only having ovaries, or a vagina. Male and female are no longer restrained by their subject-object, signifier-signified duality. Instead, these two states of being are in a constant state of flux, and open to interpretation, dependent on context and relationship.

5.2.3 Bakhtin

Identity is complicated when viewed as representation. An individual cannot be completely represented or contained within a specific set of criteria. Human consciousness and artistic practice do not come into contact with existence directly but through the medium of the surrounding ideological world. Art is a refraction of refraction, a mediated version of an already textualized socio-ideological world. Like art, identity acts as a refraction of refraction. All texts are seen as an infinite play of signification. Representations of identity, or art, are at the same time thoroughly and irrevocably inseparable from the social.

“Chronotope” is a word that Bakhtin uses to define the connection of space and time within a text and how these functions are mediated in the relationship between; 1) how and where the viewer and the viewed interact, 2) historically constructed meaning and culturally constructed meaning, 3) the creator of meaning and who is shaped by meaning (Holquist, 1994). However realistic and truthful the intent of the visual, representation is always mediated and cannot be identical with the real world it represents.

5.2.4 Structures In Relation to Power—Foucault

Understanding of the world and its multiple realities can be achieved through the different perspectives and discourses of those inhabiting it. Representation and the conflux of meaning and knowledge converge upon the focal point of power and power relations that aim to limit or liberate. Foucault (2001) states that “representation, in its various forms, is in the process of losing power. No longer are we to remain slaves to the power of authority to define the state of being that is common to things and knowledge, especially when the state of being might fall outside the realm of conventional representation” (p. 260).

Power relations are concerned with the relationship created between object and subject loses its antagonist-protagonist, oppressor-oppressed state of being in light of poststructuralist philosophies that enable multiple inroads into the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Marxism, which is in line with structuralist theory, is often credited with the obsession and proliferation of concepts that embrace the dichotomous relationship between those who have power versus those who have no power; between the *haves* and the *have-nots*. Often equated with monetary gain, power is not something that can be so easily attained, though it is easily defined—those that have money have power. However, according to Foucault, power is not centralized within the domain of individuals, groups, or cultures. Neither is it possible to represent or seem to represent the totality of authority based on claims of knowing, truth, and possessions (Olssen, 1999 ; Sawicki, 1991). Foucault claims that power does not come from these assumptions but is the result of strategies that cannot be attributed to appropriation. Foucault's central critique of traditional approaches to power is that 1) power is

possessed; 2) power flows from a central source and is contained within a hierarchic structure; and 3) power is capable of subjugation and oppression. In contrast, Foucault's alternative conception maintains that individuals have the capacity to 1) exercise power rather than be possessed by it; 2) be productive while subsisting in a repressive state of power; and 3) circumvent the hierarchical structure of power and understand that power:

comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations exercise it from the bottom up. We have in the first place the assertion that power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action. Again, we have at our disposal another assertion to the effect that power is not primarily the maintenance and reproduction of economic relations, but is above all a relation of force. The questions to be posed would then be these: if power is exercised, what sort of exercise does it involve? In what does it consist? What is its mechanism? (Foucault, 1990)

Embracing this theory leads to the realization that power is no longer in the domain of the dominant culture; it does not rest in the hands of the privileged few, but instead is the domain of those who choose to claim it, and rests in the hands of those choose to wield it (Deleuze & Hand, 1999). When the nexus of power is reevaluated to include the theory that subjugated can act as the dominator and vice versa, the sources of conflict surrounding dominator-subjugated struggles move to many divergent points. Realizing this, one authoritative body that is responsible for the domination of knowledge, truth, and power becomes multiple points where the struggle for power and control converge where all members involved become complicit in the domination and oppression of others and themselves. The oppressed-oppressor relationship exists instead as a constant inversion of power relations where it no longer enjoys a localized existence, but becomes divergent, passing through multiple hands. Knowledge can no

longer be contained, and meaning is no longer homogenous and universal, but can be defined and redefined constantly.

It is the fact that knowledge systems are inextricably related to issues of power, and there are always sociological implications to the production of knowledge.

According to Foucault, knowledge systems themselves constitute technologies of power, a concept used to theorize the interconnections between power and knowledge (Olssen, 1999). Knowledge is sometimes viewed as a remedy to poverty. Societies are often encouraged to seek knowledge as a means to escape, or as a solution to their economic woes. If members of society go to school, go to college, and get good grades, they will become better functioning, productive, and liberated members of the larger society in which they dwell. Individuals have the power to lift themselves up from poverty through knowledge, through the gains they make through embracing labor as a solution to lack of empowerment.

Paradoxically, this liberation derives from a proliferation of meaning, from a self-multiplication of significance, weaving relationships so numerous, so intertwined, so rich, that they can no longer be deciphered except in the esoterism of knowledge. Things themselves become so burdened with attributes, signs, allusions that they finally lose their own form. Meaning is no longer read in an immediate perception, the figure no longer speaks for itself. (Foucault, 2001, p. 16)

In the study, my sister Leticia's story entitled "Like a Feather Falling on Water," she views knowledge as a way of escaping poverty. Knowledge, in her view, is the only way to escape the mundane world in which she is living. Her perception is that through knowledge, she can become emancipated, and in some way find the truth. From a humanistic, structuralist stance, Leticia believes that there is truth to be found and that enlightenment is the way in which to overcome adversity. However, my mother's

reaction when Leticia is awarded a scholarship is one of skepticism and fear. In Leticia's story, my mother, by allowing her fears of a "white" world and its trappings, becomes complicit in Leticia's subjugation.

The problem created by power relationships is, like those implicated by my mother's story, the perception that in order to have power, one must first surrender to the domain of others. Othering occurs on many levels. In Leticia's story, the recruiter and the world she represented was othered by my mother. In the story about the women in my family and their candid moments alone, they othered their male relations. And, in the story between myself and my teacher, I was othered by a member that I perceived to be my own ethnicity. Othering does not occur in a unilateral direction, but is instead reciprocal and multidirectional. In *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault describes power as "exercised from innumerable points" and within the "interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile power" (p. 94). Power comes into being in terms of power relations. Power relationships could work to shape, normalize, and objectify subjects for the purposes of social utility and control, but can also be resisted. Foucault's notion of the dividing practices found within institutions of power reveal the tendency for subjects to feel divided within themselves and others, resulting in being regulated and dominated. In addition, other institutional sectors, such as psychiatric institutions, schools, and prisons, are increasingly essential to the operations of social power and in the constitutions of subjectivities.

5.2.5 Truth

Systems that serve to devalue the insights and reflections of those who dwell on

the fringes of established norms, further create chasms between practice and theory. Neglecting the authentic experiences provided by narratives and multiple perspectives of others create in researchers the perception that they are all knowing, great and powerful disseminators of truth. For those who believe the only true art education lives and reigns under the watchful gaze of sanctified institutions, any knowledge gained outside of their purview cannot be beneficial or is relegated to secondary status. These beliefs solidify the rules that govern formalized art education and its practices, creating prestigious and sanctified positions for an anointed few. In this sense, the ever present bureaucracy, codified structure, and immovable philosophies contained within these positions of power serve as a weapon to be wielded in the face of teachers and practitioners of art education in the living world, the world outside of academic theory, where living knowledge is contained and discarded in favor of the tried and true measures provided by the institution.

Knowledge is often confused with truth in modernist philosophies. For example, in education, knowing the right answer is often given more credit than knowing *an* answer. Knowing the right answer is associated with knowing the truth. In research, the implication is that knowledge and truth are often proposed as one and the same. Knowledge in this context is presented as being understood without perspective. In this way, knowledge presents the ability to understand without the interference of thought, or reflexivity. Everything can be truly known. The link between power and disciplines is built on the relation of power and truth. In Foucault's words, "there can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association, [we] are subjected to the production of

truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). Moreover, for Foucault, truth is political in nature; society is hinged on the interplay between power and knowledge (Olssen, 1999). One form of knowledge is valued over another, which is then used to create a hierarchy within the system where philosophical truths are held at the highest level and the narrative perspectives held by localized individuals are at a much lower standard. But even the lowest of the hierarchy stem from ways of knowing that are part of cultural or social experience. My sister Leticia experienced the ways in which educational systems and internal cultural systems presented knowledge and ways of being that were seemingly inescapable. Educators sometimes have the potential to create instances where they are viewed as all knowing great and powerful disseminators of truth. However, seemingly inescapable truths exist in informal and formal education, where any knowledge gained outside of either purview is seen as unbeneficial or secondary in importance. The women in the study have a tenuous relationship with knowledge gained from within the family and the outside world. In the study, both Leticia and my mother believe that knowledge exists as a way to gain power, however they are both skeptical of and distrust what they consider to be "white" which includes formal education.

5.3 The Cake is a Lie

We are living in the age in which the pursuit of all values other than money, success, fame, glamour have either been discredited or destroyed for we are living in the age of the thing.

[from the movie *Party Monster*, 2003]

Rain pelted the window pane like icy fingers tapping to get in. It was winter, the sad in-between that was after Christmas but before the heat of Valentine's Day. January was a desolate desert of nothing, whose only hallmark was the moment when all the bills from Christmas were due. The pillows of my bed lay around me like lifeless corpses, soft like flesh but cold as death. The only heat in the room came from a row of fat candles sitting on a nightstand near the bed, the fear of catching fire only slightly below the desire to be warm. It was dark outside, though it wasn't late. I stared at the clock, watching the second hand wind around, marching forward like an obsessive compulsive soldier, ordered to march and never being able to stop. Ticking, tocking, taking away a bit of my life with every second; each moment passed never able to be reclaimed. I wondered how many minutes, how many seconds, hours, days were left in the passing of my life. As my head sank deeper, in the shallow comfort of my mind, my memory faded to the days my grandfather and I spent together, laying on his great wooden bed, watching television late into the night. I watched the clock then too, measuring with my fingers the amount of time left until he would come home from work. He made me laugh, and though his hands were rough, and his skin like tanned hide, his demeanor never was. He never forgot my birthday.

I stared at the clock, some more, its tempo syncing with the rain drops on the window sill, like a lullaby beckoning my slumber. A sigh swept over me. I was alone, in the dark, only the clock and the rain celebrated my solitude. I was cold, the candle flickering against the weather, bickering, spitting, fuming, but losing the battle slowly. I put the flame out of its misery, deciding that perhaps the specter of bursting into flame was not one with which I would like to contend on my birthday. There had been no

laughter, no warmth, only candles too sickly to even stay the night. There had been no birthday cards, no well wishers, and no surprises. I missed those bygone days of grandfathers, aunts, and birthday cakes.

5.3.6 Postmodernism

Postmodernism is not a style succeeding the dissolution of modernism, but rather a cultural condition resulting from the erosion of modern period ideals; it marks a historical moment, one of fairly slow germination, characterized by a shift in assumptions inherited from the enlightenment (O'Grady, 2003).

There is no one simple answer to define what postmodernism is. It may be easier to define what postmodernism is not or how it differs from modernism. Postmodernism does not refer to systems in such a way as to indicate that they are conventional, organized, and unified concepts. Nor does postmodernism equate human existence with hierarchic rationality that governs societies in totality. Postmodernism rejects the modernist idea that humans are free agents, and that society is unified in its goal towards perfection. Postmodernity is complex, multiform, and resists simplistic explanation. Postmodernism rejects a description of itself as embodying a set of timeless ideals; it must insist on being recognized as a set of viewpoints of a time, justifiable only within its own time (Nicholson, 1990; Usher & Edwards, 1994). When discussing the postmodern, postmodernity, or postmodern theories, it is important to understand that the term does not refer to some fixed, systematic thing. Postmodernism encompasses a broad spectrum of disciplines and is best described as a way of examining the cultural discourses that are included in these disciplines.

Knowledge, in postmodern theories, cannot be systematically encapsulated in one all knowing, universal framework. Instead, knowledge is contextual, subject to change, dependent on many factors. These factors are also contextual and subject to change. Because of this, knowledge is fluctuating, mediated by circumstance, understanding, and discourse. In postmodern theory, knowledge is less about seeking truth or the right answer, and more about acknowledging multiple truths and multiple answers.

Leticia, in her stories, revealed her desire for knowledge and equated the acquisition of knowledge to liberation. In her story, the flowing contextual and uncertainty of knowledge is illuminated in the way she relates her knowledge to other members of the family. The context changes between her Latina identity and her assimilated identity. Postmodernism and poststructuralism reject the unity, homogeneity, totality, and an essentialist concept of human nature. The pursuit of the real and the true knowledge of modernist theories gives way to the ambiguous openness of postmodernism. Situated within poststructuralism and postmodernism, identity becomes unraveled, and complex. Identity becomes the site of struggle (Usher & Edwards, 1994). In relation to visual culture theories, subjects are only able to understand themselves through the world of things and their immersion and participation in a visual world that occurs physically and within the mind. The women in the study experience the world through the filters of culture, language, ethnicity, and gender. Their identity is formed from a participation and negotiation of what they see, read, hear, make, and discuss with one another.

5.3.7 Deconstruction

Deconstruction theories critique the implicitness of systems and signs found in structuralist thought. In structuralist theories, consciousness is thought to have an unmediated correspondence with reality. The meaning extrapolated from structuralist and humanistic discourses is that individuals are able to rationalize, act, and understand on a universal level. Structuralism has assumptions that humans have a cause-effect existence in the world and are able to enact change through rational optimism.

Deconstructivist theories position reality within an infinitely reconstituting universe. There is no foundation, or point of origin. Understanding and meaning framed within deconstructivist thought is not seen to begin from point A and extend to point B then to C and so on. The relationship between subject and object is no longer binary; the relationship instead is between the innumerable representations that subject A takes in relation to object B, and object C and subject D and so on. There are instead, infinite points, that lead to infinite points that lead to still more infinite points, allowing for a multiplicity of understanding and complexity of existence. According to Deleuze and Guattari (2004):

There is not even the unity to abort in the object or 'return' in the subject. A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature. (p. 9)

Viewing the world in this fashion, deconstructivist theories situates identity in a destabilized context in relation to language. Language does not create meaning, instead, meaning is derived through texts, and no one text has intrinsic meaning because one text's meaning is correlationally attached to other texts.

Learning and social interactions, mediated by artifacts of earlier generations, are able to be deconstructed. Individuals are imbued with the knowledge and behaviors that are learned from and passed down by earlier generations. Individuals are not a blank slate, and come with preconceived notions and well-established social parameters. Beliefs that individuals possess a bank of knowledge that is socially conditioned are challenged by deconstructivists, who instead are advocating knowledge working within and throughout society and in spite of society. Parameters are established where a socially constructed understanding of the world serves to constrain an individual along certain permitted social paths. By deconstructing these social constructs, the social forces that create these states of being are exposed, resulting in ambiguities, paradoxes, and multiple, sometimes conflicting, meanings.

Again in deconstructivist theories, binary oppositions are understood to operate within meanings that are inclusive and exclusive to a culture, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Maleness in a structuralist view excludes femaleness; however, from a deconstructivist theoretical standpoint, maleness is only able to be understood through femaleness. Maleness and femaleness inform one another, and move beyond. That maleness cannot exist without femaleness results in the inclusion of one to the other in discourse. The question is no longer about whether an individual is defined as male or female, but to what extent does the individual believe himself or herself to be male, female, bisexual, polysexual and beyond. There are aspects of these found within each other. The dualistic constructs found in structuralist theory are disrupted. This becomes even more poignant when the lines between maleness and femaleness are blurred.

Identity moves beyond a continuum with opposing norms at either end and into a dynamic and ever branching rhizome.

5.3.8 Derrida

The idea of binary oppositions held by Saussure came under scrutiny in Derrida's investigation and subsequent theories on deconstruction. The relationship between the signifier and signified to the sign is destabilized as signs are redefined from the perspective that they differ from each other and in reality bear no connection to signifier. The connection between image, text, language, and meaning is defined by the concept of intertextuality. Intertextuality is used to refer to the dependence of text on codes, other texts, and are said to contain both new and pre-existing meaning (Allen, 2000; Kristeva, 1986). Language and meaning are interlaced within a network of perpetually changing pathways that go beyond conventional understanding. This postulate led to Derrida's construct of difference, a word that he used to reflect:

the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing [espacement] by which elements relate to one another. This spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive (the a of *différance* indicates this indecision as regards activity and passivity, that which cannot yet be governed and organized by that opposition), of intervals without which the "full" terms could not signify, could not function. (Derrida 1981, p. 27)

According to Derrida, the spoken word is invariably privileged where voice and speech is accepted as more authentic. Meaning, however, is an illusion when connected to language and word; the structure loses its foundation and is revealed to be unstable. The signifier should not be understood as only existing to provide access to the meaning of the signified. The sign is important, but it should be freed from the binary oppositional positioning in which structuralism places it. "Deconstruction bends

all its efforts to stretch beyond these boundaries, to transgress these confines, to interrupt and disjoin all such gathering” (Derrida, 1997, p. 32).

Deconstruction is meant to open, expose, expand, and create complexity within meaning and understanding:

The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things--texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need--do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come. Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away. (Derrida, 1997, p. 31)

Then "experience" means running up against the limits of what can never be present, passing to the limits of the unrepresentable and unrepresentable, which is what we most desire, namely, the impossible (Derrida, 1997).

The relationship of language, literature, writing, speech and the ways in which meaning is deconstructed to create other meaning in Derrida's theories relate to the convergent and divergent nature of art, culture, meaning and understanding. In the study, the women who participated relate meaning to one another through the language that they use. For the women in the study, language is dealt with directly in the utilization of both Spanish and English in order to convey the complex ideas of the realities they perceive. Theorists like Derrida move beyond the assumption that language and meaning contain universal truths. In art education, and within this study, theories of deconstruction encourage educators to reconsider the presumed dominance of language. What is included in the visual may not always be reducible to language.

5.4 Betty Crocker Can Bake Someone Happy

Someone left the cake out in the rain
I don't think that I can take it
'Cause it took so long to bake it
And I'll never have that recipe again.

McArthur Park

My mother loved watching cooking shows. When she was younger, and living at home, it was always her job to cook for the family, as my aunts were too young to reach the stove, and my grandmother too tired from all of her other familial responsibilities. She imagined what it was that cooks like Julia Child did with their lives besides cook. She didn't speak English at the time, so the only thing she understood was the imagery that she saw. Most of the ingredients she recognized, but some were, without the aid of language, indiscernible. One of the things she loved the most was when they made desserts, having a bit of a sweet tooth, and she would commit those episodes to memory. After she married and had a family of her own, without a house full of critical uncles and unadventurous family members, she decided that she would try to broaden her culinary skills and her children's experiences with food. I remember, as a child, sitting at the kitchen table with whatever object my mother had given me to keep me quiet, watching her cook as Julia instructed. It was on a small color television that she would look, intently, committing to memory every ingredient and every utensil, movement, and measurement. She would jot down notes in Spanish that served as mnemonic aids later when she would actually commit to cooking. Occasionally, she would point to some ingredient and tell me to remember, or ask me to translate what Julia said to the best of my ability—I was only five. At the store, she would call out ingredients or tell me to go and fetch one for her, not by name, but by the look of the

label that the product bore; a can of condensed milk would be the small red can with the flower, chocolate would be the box with the little old lady on it and so on. Together we would piece the ingredients until she was satisfied. Then, once at home, using her notes and her fantastic memory, she would practice. She would make several variations until she felt like the recipe was successful, each time, altering her notes. In this fashion, she managed to learn how to make things that would have been out of her realm of possibility when she was younger. It was her recipe, after Julia of course, that became the German chocolate cake that my father loved so much, and later became synonymous with his birthday.

Imagery, in the modern world is almost inescapable. In my initial discussion, I emphasized the power of television to demonstrate to some degree the ways in which the women in the study re-address their perceptions and the transitory nature of making meaning. As an example, the way in which my mother views the women in Mexican *novelas* both shapes her understanding of women, and challenges her perceptions through conversations with her daughters, nieces and other relatives. Though the appearance may be that the control of information is maintained solely by the corporations and networks that provide the programs on television, the knowledge and meanings that these programs convey are negotiated by the viewer. What a program may intend to portray, may not be what a viewer eventually sees or interprets. In this sense, production of programming, the production of knowledge is not one sided, as with the previous discussion on language. When the viewer is engrossed in watching these programs, or any other imagery for that matter, they create their own meanings, knowledge, emotional responses, and understandings that may or may not be entwined

with the originator's intent. Viewers are enabled to go beyond passive consumerism, and enter a state of interchange with other viewers where they are able to go beyond the intended meanings presented. For example, images that depict something as deviant or somehow against the prescribed normative state of cultural acceptance, could reinforce the idea that those that act in a contrary way, or do not accept this as part of their cultural experience will be deemed as abnormal, or not. Of course, I do not deny that there are forces at play that utilize visual imagery, television included, in order to maintain control by creating a sense of others that threaten the mainstay of society. There is a tendency for cultural groups to utilize visual imagery to reinforce the concept of other against which they play the antagonist. However, this does not, in itself, neglect the possibility for individuals or groups to create meaning through these images and in effect disrupt the conventional notions of cultural awareness and reshape their own environment. Just as moving pictures on the television screen are in constant flux so too is the relationship between the creation of meaning, the dissemination of power, and cultural identity; power does not rest in one person, authority is transitory, and knowledge is expansive. I believe these relationships exist, but the extent to which they exist and the potency they contain is unknowable.

5.4.1 Visual Culture

Among those scholars whose work impacts visual culture studies is Roland Barthes, who was a social theorist and semiotician. He contributes to my understanding of visual culture, as does Derrida and Foucault. In his exploration of the visual, signs,

and meaning, basically semiotic theory, he asked if meaning is constructed or whether it is inherent to images (Barthes, 1964).

Within discourses that pertain to visual culture are theories of semiotics of which the linguistic work of Saussure is key. Semiotics contains within its philosophy the principles of sign, signifier, and signified where in the arbitrary nature of the sign is emphasized. Signifier and signified relationships become an important part of analysis when applied to the visual world. A semiotic approach to visual culture provokes questions of fundamental assumptions and beliefs when discussing visual texts (Howells, 2003). Discourses that pertain to visual culture explore how communication of meaning is made possible in the visual world and beyond. With the introduction of Derrida's theories on deconstruction, visual culture studies position the creation of meaning in relation to spaces that do not necessarily operate within the physical realm. Sounds, thoughts, language, ideas, and writing are included. Meaning is not only contained within the field of vision or the visible (Rogoff, 2002). Semiotics is a way of putting into words something that we already know, to some degree, intuitively. As long as there are many different signifiers for the same signified, and if any signifier can be used then the sign, or the union of the signifier and signified is arbitrary. The sign is arbitrary and one of the key concepts of visual culture theories is that meaning is not found in the sign itself which leads to "the most important problem facing the semiology of images: can analogical representation (the 'copy') produce true systems of signs and not merely simple agglutinations of symbols" (Barthes, 1999, p. 33).

Meaning is not a natural occurrence; things only mean what they do because individuals agree about what they mean. So if one group ascribes meaning to one sign,

and another group assigns another meaning to the same sign, the sign becomes both. Visual culture theories seek to investigate cultural life from the perspective of the visual world (Dikovitskaya, 2005). The relationship between the signifier and signified can change over time. Semiotic communication could extend beyond both the verbal and the visual, and extend into the social and cultural. The intent is to take every day innocuous things and dismantle them in such a way as to investigate the cultural meanings they convey. Barthes (1964) postulated that everything could act as a visual text and is not limited to oral speech or written discourse but included photography, cinema, television, music, art, and products. Any material has the capacity to arbitrarily be endowed with meaning. Objects can communicate something if they are imbued with meaning that is agreed upon by others. Things do not mean anything unless they are invested with meaning by cultures and societies. A tenet of visual culture theory is that objects, visual texts, and things move from a closed silent existence to an open existence that allows deeper meaning and transient cultural discourse. One of the issues that concerns visual culture theorists is that the investigation of images and the cultural values that are invested in these images (Moxey, 1994). Donna Haraway (1991) investigates visual culture from the perspective of vision in connection to new technologies, where cultural assumptions may occur.

Material culture is the field of inquiry that investigates the meanings ascribed to tangible objects such as toys, clothes, furnishings, houses, instruments, and other objects from the material world. Visual culture intersects material culture in the study of the visual significance of these objects. Both studies inform one another. Discourses that include visual culture typically involve the fluctuation between visual culture and

material culture and are enriched by the discourses found in the intersection of both. Investigating these intersections creates the possibility for new knowledge.

In a visual world, non-verbal communication exists in many forms. Society is inundated by visual signs every day; visual communication can be found in the television programs that we watch, the magazines that we see, the clothes that we wear or buy. Visual culture concerns the act of interpretation, where meanings are distinguished between those that are concealed and exposed, between instituted meaning and disestablished meanings. Interlaced within these discourses is the construction of identity in connection to power structures that are troubled in the course of visual culture studies. The binary oppositions set up in structuralist theories becomes displaced and “rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another...multiple separations, individualizing distributions, [and] and organization in depth of surveillance and control,” are instituted in their stead (Foucault, 1999, p. 62). Foucault in his investigations into power structures, identity, and the representation of these in language and discourse illuminates a move beyond fixed states of being. Under his theoretical guidance, the exploration of the visual liberated from the constraints of perceived omniscient and omnipresent power structures allows an individual to determine for himself or herself those things that characterize, represent, and belong to them.

This study examines the dynamics of power in connection to culture, identity, sexuality and gender that is in line with post-Marxism. Unlike modernist Marxism, post-Marxist theories understand that power is still a force for subjugation and oppression, however, these theories also include the possibility that power is unstable, and that the

binary oppressor/oppressed relationship inherent in Marxism is not easily defined or codified. The oppressor can be oppressed and the oppressed can act as an oppressor. Since my research embraces post-Marxist ideals it is necessary to begin to look to authors who might help in formulating a foundation of visual culture studies that deal more closely with women and socio-economic marginalization. Griselda Pollock (1998) in her work challenges the assumptions within art and art history that have contributed to the marginalization of women and their artistic contributions. She also deals with the imaging and socialization of body in regards to illusions of class, based on post-Marxist ideas of representation. In much of her writing she explores femininity in connection to cultural meanings derived from social and economic forces.

Like Pollock, Constance Penley (1988) also deals with feminist ideology though she situates her study within the context of film. Penley centers her studies within efforts to convey a connection of feminism to the psychology of media. Through this idea, she examines the portrayal of women in film, their representation, and the psycho-sexual connections to the meanings men and women construct when watching film.

Again, in the vein of psychoanalytic explorations of identity combined with Lacanian explorations of ego and self, Kaja Silverman (1996) infuses the study of the visual culture through the aspects of self awareness and social constructions. Silverman explores the interconnectivity of theorists, namely Lacan, and the visual. She explores visual representation in connection to social norms, and how individuals navigate meaning when confronted with a recognition of an individual's distinct autonomy.

Among art educators, one of the more influential authors for me and my understanding of visual culture is Christine Ballengee-Morris (2003) who focuses on the

cultural aspects of socialization. Ballengee-Morris explores cultural groups and relationships, economic consumption of culture, ethnographic study, and political cultural issues. Her writing investigates the conflict between people and cultural groups' power positions. Of interest to me, among the ideas explored in her writing, are her interpretations of how objects are viewed by consumers as representing people and places with little to no context. Ballengee-Morris also explores multicultural reform in the context of global culture and cultural diversity give meaning and structure to life through which visual culture explorations enable individuals within multiple social groups to function effectively in their social cultural environments that are constantly changing. Cultural identity, oppression, colonialism, assimilation, and resistance are her interests. The women in the study experience positions of power within their own social group and are complicit in the subjugation of one another in ways that, at times, they are not aware. For example, my mother, tied to fear and tradition, kept my sister Leticia from advancing scholastically. She was not aware of the limits she was imposing on my sister until later on in life. She recalled, "I should have let her go. When I think back, and look at what her life is like now, I really think that she would have been better off studying. I knew she was smart, but I was afraid of what might happen to her. Sometimes, people can be mean." I believe my mother let her perceptions of the white world interfere with her decision to keep my sister from going off to school. Though fitting into my mother's perception of American life would have meant letting my sister Leticia go to school, my mother was tied to her traditional upbringing and could not accommodate this experience for my sister. Her decision was tied to her fear that by

being away from family, my sister would change, and become more white, forgetting her heritage, her home, and her family.

5.4.2 Visuality

Vision is not centered around the eyes, but is part of a sensory experience. When eyes are closed, mental images occur. Visuality concerns the vision that occurs through memory (recalling familiar places, people, scents, scenery, emotions, words, songs, noises) as well as the mental processes that allow us to imagine. Vision occurs in unconscious or subconscious means through dreams and hallucinations, the mental images conjured during these states can be just as vivid as if they had been seen in the physical world. In terms of the technological and virtual world, vision is not constrained by reality, but exists in a world that is composed of data, bits and pixels though no less real (Walker & Chaplin, 1997). Mitchell (1994) theorizes that the visual is postlingual and comprises the interplay between visuality, institutions, discourses, subjectivity, the gaze, surveillance, and other places where vision no longer is relegated to the eyes. For Mirzoeff (2000) visuality and intertextuality relate to the visual image and the interlocking texts that are dependent on vision in a term he calls "intervisuality" (p. 7). Visual culture is extended when individuals visualize the world around them including objects that are not in themselves visual (Mirzoeff, 1999). For example, previously I mentioned the concept of fourth-dimensional shapes like the tesseract that does not and cannot exist in three-dimensional space, however, individuals are able to visualize what the concept of a tesseract can be.

5.5 Synopsis

Modernist approaches to knowledge and understanding, present humanity and authority as an all knowing great and powerful disseminator of truth. For those who believe the only true way to understand lives and reigns under the watchful gaze of sanctified institutions, truth solidifies the rules that govern formalized ways of knowing. Modernity is characterized by a pursuit of rational truths, or rather, there is a belief that truth can be found. Answers exist. This has the unintentional result of creating prestigious and sanctified positions for the truth seekers to occupy. Due to this hierarchy, it is often the case that those in positions of power hope to maintain and control the dissemination of what they perceive to be truth further localizing their stranglehold. In this sense, bureaucracy, codified structures, and immovable philosophies contained within these positions of power serve as a way in which to control the construction and dissemination of knowledge. The modernist approach certifies that unifying truth can render the world, experiences, and events coherent and meaningful. Purveyors of truth forget, neglect, or purposefully subvert the notion that in essence they may be presenting belief, opinion, or propaganda as truth, misrepresenting themselves and the knowledge they possess in an attempt to maintain power.

In contrast, postmodernists view the world as pluralistic and continuously changing. There exist a multitude of autonomous voices, and multiple sites of authority. Postmodernists challenge the hierarchic nature of disseminating knowledge and meaning, and instead approach this dissemination as neither horizontal nor vertical in order. Deleuze and Guattari believe knowledge to be rhizomatic in nature (2004). The

search for the authentic self gives way to understanding the meanings that are created from everyday life. Identity is formed by a constantly unfolding desire that is then expressed through the choices an individual makes daily. In postmodernist, and poststructuralist paradigms, knowledge, understanding, and meaning making are founded in textuality. Texts foreground the importance of language. Postmodernists and poststructuralists do not seek all encompassing truths, but instead prefer to challenge representationality. Truth is not a byproduct of what texts represent, or that truth can be found in the intentions of texts' authors. Postmodernist philosophies challenge the modernist assumption that truth is a matter of correspondence with an outside reality, or that knowledge is given from an authority to a subordinate. Author, commentator, reader, or translator is approached from the perspective that they are not capable of capturing truth or presenting texts as proven fact, creating avenues through which a critique of logo-centrism, or the possibility of knowing the world in a direct and unmediated way can take place.

Postmodern social theory has been influential in offering criticisms of material and economic causality. Some of the more notable theorists that have influenced my understanding are Lather (1991), Derrida (1997), Barthes (1999), Lacan (1998) and Foucault (1990) are the fundamental theoreticians on whose work I have premised my theoretical framework for this study. All have rejected the Enlightenment belief in the unity of reason and progress and the idea that there is a rational purpose in existence, or that individuals are free and rational agents. Their work also rejects science and technology as institutions that can rationally control and develop the natural and social worlds, or rather, they reject that science and technology, in and of themselves, are

capable of solving the woes that plague humanity. Possibly, the most influential theory that has informed my understanding is that liberty, equality, and democracy do not always rest on universal humanistic ideals, nor that these things exist in an optimist's vacuum. In the study, the women who participated experience the world in ways where they are not always in control of themselves or are able to act as free agents. Within the study, the women experience subjugation not only at the hands of the outside world, but within and between themselves. Leticia, for example, believes that knowledge can set her free, but the weight of tradition and the realities of rules and regulations confine her to reside in what she feels as safe and secure. She wants to break free from the limits placed on her by her family, but also relishes in preserving the traditions that she believes are part of her heritage.

CHAPTER 6

BETWEEN SEA AND SKY

Lost inside adorable illusion and I cannot hide.
I'm the one you're using, please don't push me aside.
We coulda made it cruising, yeah.
Once I had love and it was a gas, soon turned out to
be a pain in the ass.
Seemed like the real thing only to find mucho
mistrust.
Love's gone behind.

“Heart of Glass,” Blondie

Her name means “bitter heaven”—a paradox. Maricela is a paradox. Her sign is the centaur. She is a Sagittarius, half man, half beast; half of her life is ruled by logic, philosophical, and rational thinking, the other by her emotions, impulsive and reckless at times. She reads a lot, just like my older sister Leticia; however, their tastes differ immensely. Where my oldest sister enjoys the realm of fantasy, adventure, romance and science fiction, Marí loves to read crime novels, enjoys looking at forensics books, loves to watch crime dramas, and anything that involves law, justice, and police. Though she enjoys these, she is also fond of the occult, metaphysics, astrology, and divination. Her tastes range from Nostradamus and ancient astronaut theories, to Bigfoot, and palm reading. She looks for answers. Life is meant to be solved; there is a reason for existing, a reason why people do what they do-- to themselves and to others. Her search is constant, always a new venture-- palm reading, tarot cards, forensic science, and psychology. Her life has been the search for answers, to discover who she is, and where she fits in this place and time. Her nickname throughout our childhood was *Columbo*, because she always knew everything about everyone in the family. She knew who was where, what they were up to, and whether or not they were telling the

truth. My aunt relied on her to get to the bottom of things. She was never snoop in the sense that she would go through people's things, or spy. But she had the uncanny ability to ask the right questions, to make family members trust her, and find a way for them to confide in her. She would find the answer, and when she did, she would report to the adults—but she would never divulge her information to just any adult—just mainly my aunt.

“What are they up to?” I would ask.

“Nothing-- none of your business! It's not for you to know,” she would answer.

“Well then why do you know? Come on...I won't tell anyone, I promise,” I whined.

“Yes you will, you have the biggest mouth of all of us. You can't keep a secret.

You can't even hide that you have a secret. It will be written all over your face. You can't help yourself, you just can't hold it in, especially when it's juicy—or when it's going to get someone in trouble.”

“Yuh huh! I promise I can keep a secret.”

“No you can't, now stop asking. This is important stuff, and you're just a kid.

Besides, no one will listen to you either. You're worse than Rona Barrett, if you know, everyone will know.”

She was right. I couldn't resist knowing something. I had to know the ending of a book or movie before I read or watched the entire thing. It was maddening. Knowing about other people was just as compulsive for me. I had to know. I had to know what made people do what they did, and why as well. My sister on the other hand, felt it was her duty to know, to ensure that everyone was kept apprised of anything that might be harmful to themselves or the family or to make sure people were being honest.

6.1 Duality

My sister's dual nature was evident in everything she did. In her youth, she loved make-up and playing sports as well. She wanted the boys to like her, but she could put them in their place if they got out of hand. One of her favorite past times was learning to box with my dad. She even had her own set of boxing gloves. Although they were pink, she knew how to use them, and they didn't hurt any less. Though she appeared to be rough, she liked to wear fashionable clothes. Mari was always in style. She always had to have the latest fad in fashion, in decorating, in posters, in school supplies, and in make-up. She was up to the minute, her room always full of the latest fashion magazines, and her closet packed with clothes. She had outfits that she put together the best she could in order to emulate the images from the magazines. What she could not afford at regular price, she obtained through garage sales or thrift stores, and when that failed, she would have my mother make it.

Her taste in clothes was not the only thing up to the minute. She also loved listening to music that was hip, now, and in style. When she was a teenager, she watched American Bandstand religiously, no matter how hard the rest of us protested. Dick Clark was in our living room every Saturday morning, a fixture for us from the time she was in middle school well into her years in high school. After American Bandstand, her thirst for popular culture did not end. Sundays were more often for Kasey Kasem than the Eucharist or Homily. She listened to Billboard's top 40 in order to know what music was in and what was on its way out. Although this might have been typical of teenagers in dominant American society, it was not the norm for those in Latino

households. Many of my cousins did not understand her infatuation with *gringo*³⁶ music, instead preferring to listen to *rancheras*³⁷, *cumbias*³⁸, and *corridos*³⁹. Marí didn't like that music. She associated it with *gorrudos*⁴⁰. Roughly translated it's a man that wears a cowboy hat all the time, similar to hick or redneck. In her perception, those types of music was as far removed from her as she was from Mexico. She did not understand at the time. At present, she still dislikes the music of what she considers "old-fashioned" or "trashy Mexicans," preferring music from dominant American culture.

She also associated traditional Mexican music with *quinceaneras*, weddings, and *bailes*, all of which were places where, in her experience, men were allowed to be lewd, aggressive, and sexually promiscuous. Girls were usually inducted into the social circle at these events, and many used them as a means to find a partner. Marí did not enjoy being around lascivious stares, and free roaming hands; unlike my cousins, she did not want to be objectified. Our cousins of her approximate age were concerned with boys, dating, kissing, and finding their way to their future husband. They had begun to think about building a household of their own and wondered why my sister did not have those aspirations. She wanted to be a police officer, or an investigator, something that had to do with the law. Our cousins' thoughts turned towards marriage and family while my sister's were fixed on college, living in a big city, on her own and making her own decisions. Marí was the strong one, the bold one, as none of the other girls in our family had even dared to think to live alone, far away from family. Her mind was set on having

³⁶ A gringo is Mexican slang for an Anglo-American. Gringo is also sometimes used to refer to Latinos who were born in the U.S.

³⁷ Music that is the equivalent to country music. Rancheras are usually accompanied by mariachi bands.

³⁸ Cumbias are dance songs that are reminiscent of salsa and merengue.

³⁹ Mexican ballads that usually pay homage to outlaws and more recently, drug dealers and narcotraficantes.

⁴⁰ This refers to Latinos who wear cowboy hats. Usually derogatory in nature, the name refers to a man who is vain, empty and usually a womanizer.

a career. She wanted to be like the people she saw on her favorite television shows, *Three's Company*, *That Girl*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Happy Days*, and *Laverne and Shirley*, living in a world that was fun and full of laughter. She wanted to travel in style like the people on *The Love Boat*. She wanted a cool single life like the characters on *Rhoda*. In her career, she wanted to live a life like the men on *Hawaii Five-O* or *Magnum P.I.*, or women in *Charlie's Angels*. To live in a nice apartment and travel to exotic locations doing what she loved to do was the life about which she dreamed. She did not want to live under the thumb of some uneducated ruffian, acting as wife, mother, and slave to him. From her perspective, she had seen too much of that in her life. One of her fears was living as my grandmother did. She did not believe that my grandmother had any power, that she lived her life in servitude to ungrateful, spoiled men, catering to their every need, getting nothing in return. Her perception of my grandmother was of a woman, caught up in the old ways of doing things-- living a life she did not choose, imprisoned in poverty and ignorance. That life was never going to happen to her.

"I never wanted to have a life like she did, waiting on the men hand and foot like they were babies," she said to me now in her forties.

"Why do you think grandma was powerless?"

"Because, I don't think she knew any better. That's just the way things had always been. If I had been her I wouldn't have put up with so much." My sister always believed that my grandmother suffered some form of self imposed indignity at the hands of her male relatives.

6.2 Resistance

In our family, Marí was known as being the most courageous, the strongest, and willing to confront difficulties. She was always fearless in her endeavors, never faltering from confronting injustice even though in her efforts to right a wrong she would have to deal with repercussions. She never wavered from defending anyone she felt was being mistreated, even if it meant confronting a family member. If she thought something was wrong, if someone was being unfairly treated, if someone needed defending, she was always there to act as a sword and shield. Standing against the men in my family was difficult, but she wore the mantle of trouble maker and pest with pride, utilizing her youthful charm as a weapon. She was always telling my uncles to do things for themselves, to clean up after themselves, to wash their own laundry and maybe, just once, cook their own meal or make their own cup of coffee. She stood against the men in the family when they acted imperious and demanding. Her fierce protection of our aunts, grandmother, and cousins often incited anger and annoyance from my uncles so much that they had a nick name for my sister. They called her *pulga*, which in Spanish means flea, because of her constant irritating behavior; she was there when they didn't want her, and no matter how hard they tried they couldn't get rid of her.

Her demeanor at school was no different. In school, she was usually the one to stand up to bullies, whether they were students, or teachers. During the sixth grade, she was in a school that was predominately white; the only students of another ethnicity in her class were her and our three cousins. Being outsiders, it was not easy for them to find friends. They looked different, and though my sister tried to fit in, it was difficult to undo genetics. She and our cousins kept to themselves, preferring the comfort of family

in the face of uncertainty. When they were in class together, and it was time came to work, they would, as they were accustomed, work socially, talking to one another in light-hearted and jesting play. Often, they would break into Spanish, talking to one another. On one occasion she remembers working with a cousin on a poster.

“Dame el papél y yo le dibujo lo que queremos, y después tu me ayúdas a colorearlo” (Give me the paper, I’ll draw on it and then you help me color it) she said to her.

“Bueno, cuál color quieres?” (Ok, what color paper do you want) my cousin asked. Before my sister could respond, her teacher came over with a stern and objectionable expression on his face.

“What are you two saying?” he demanded.

My sister responded, my cousin too shy and scared to say anything, “Nothing, we were talking about our project.”

“I don’t believe you. You were saying something about me weren’t you? I’ve told you before to speak English in this class. I don’t like it when you use your own language. This is America, you’re here to learn in English. If you can’t say it in English then you can’t say it in Spanish either,” he scolded.

“But sir, we weren’t saying anything. We were just talking to each other like we do at home,” she said adamantly.

“Yes, well, you’re not at home now, and this is my classroom. You’ll do what I said,” he stated, much more assertively.

“I don’t see what’s wrong. We didn’t do anything wrong.”

“So you’re not going to stop then? Well, until you admit you were wrong, and agree to stop speaking in Spanish I’m going to put you in the corner,” he said.

My sister eyeing the redness on his face and the frustration in his eyes continued. His visible perturbation did nothing to deflect her rising indignation.

“No, because we didn’t do anything wrong. There’s nothing wrong with speaking Spanish, and I didn’t say anything bad,” my sister responded, as my father would say, her horns coming to bear.

My cousin, grabbed my sister’s arm, pleading with her, “No Marí, no digas nada. Nos van a castigar. Dile que nomás sí y ya nos deja solos.” (No Marí, don’t say anything. We’re going to get in trouble. Just tell him you’ll do what he says and he’ll leave us alone.)

“Aha! See! Now what did she say? She said something about me didn’t she? I knew you two were trouble. Tell me. What did she say?” he said, the look on his face, as my sister put it, was like the Grinch looking down on Whoville.

Our cousin now looked even more frightened. Both she and my sister were placed in the corner.

“There, now you two will stay there until you’ve learned your lesson. Until you apologize and agree not to speak Spanish anymore,” he continued scolding, his tone, filled with the essence of self satisfaction, smugness, and, as my sister put it, *salado* (a term in Spanish that means salty, but when used in reference to a person, it means someone snooty, uptight, and bitter.). After a few moments passed, both my sister and our cousin began to cry, but for very different reasons.

The teacher went to my cousin, “Are you ready to apologize?”

“Yes, Mister, I won’t speak Spanish no more. I do what you tell me, just don’t tell my mom,” she sniffled.

“Good, then you can go back to work,” he responded, a slight smirk on his face as he approached my sister.

“And what about you? Are you ready to apologize?” he asked, like a serpent asking someone to eat from a tree.

My sister responded with silence, her tears running down her face, fists clenched. She was so angry, so helpless. She felt all she could do was not give in. After all, she hadn’t done anything wrong.

“Fine then, you’ll stay there until you learn,” he stated. She remembered being so angry, all she could do was cry silently to herself. The day passed, and she stayed in that corner until the teacher, reluctantly let her leave after school had let out. She remembers that day well, it is etched in her mind and one that fueled her decisions about her own children’s lives at school. By becoming involved in their scholastic endeavors such as participating in PTA, volunteering in school and taking childhood development courses in college, Maricela hoped to be better armed in order to defend her children against the bullies disguised as teachers that she encountered.

In high school, my sister continued her foray into the fashionable, hip, and trendy. That is where she decided to pursue the fashionable world of hair styling and enrolled in cosmetology classes. Creating hairstyles, learning about color, clothes, and style opened a new world for her. It was as though she were on her way to a fashion runway somewhere. Her dreams of living in a fast-paced world of the limelight and fashion were within grasp. This was one of the spaces in which she found a way to be creative. She

never really enjoyed making art in the traditional sense; her only foray into the art world stymied by an over-zealous teacher who suggested her work was more suitable for a yard sale than a museum. She transferred to the cosmetology department midyear as a result. Her work in hair was phenomenal; she had found a way to express herself, and in competition after competition, she won top honors. One prize she earned was a trip to San Antonio with a companion. However, after the glitz and glamour of possibilities wore off, she abandoned the notion of making it her career. Although she loved working with hair, and make-up, she felt, in the end, it was just a place to be creative, not something she wanted to turn into her work. If she turned cutting hair into a job, she felt that would be it. It would be a job and eventually kill any fun that might have held. Enjoyment came from being creative, from being allowed to explore possibilities, and to experiment with new ways of creating hairstyles. She was, essentially, a sculptor of hair. Her vocational training and proficiency with hair styling made her the natural choice as the family barber. When family members came for a new permanent, hair coloring, styling, or hair cut, she was expected to do her best, at no cost. Pressure from my mother to be the obedient family member, to lend her services to the solidarity of the familial entity began to wear on her. Though she loved working with hair, she began to feel as though she had become a servant, to my mother's need to keep family whole, and to the whims and fancies of the family members that came to get their hair done. Expectations soon became demands; creativity gave way to criticism and routine. She hated it. Like clockwork, her usual temperament resumed, and she stood adamant--she should, if not compensated, at least be allowed to have some control over on whose hair she would choose to work. Control was a hard thing for my sister to give up. She

always had to be in control of herself, or at least, feel like she was in control. Her goal in life was to remain free of subservience, to live as she wished without feeling obligated to another.

6.3 Courage

A feeling of sadness washed over me. We were sitting in my sister's kitchen. She had just come back from the store and was now standing at the cramped kitchen counter. Bags heaped with junk food, fruit, crackers, soda, and the ingredients for our weekly ritual cluttered the area. Brown paper rustled as I fished out the good stuff, and left the green things in the bag.

"Hey! If you're going to take stuff out, at least empty the whole bag," she scolded.

I did as she asked, careful to leave the chocolate, graham crackers, and marshmallow within easy reach for her. As I cleared the counter, she continued to work, breaking crackers in half, placing a piece of Hershey's chocolate and a marshmallow between two the two halves of graham. I watched her, as the golden sunset peeked through the window, bathing the small cramped kitchen in a light the belied the timbre of the room. I loved the sunset-- its glow was like the sunrise, only harkening the end of toil instead of the beginning. My sister was next to the window while she worked, the only window on the eastern side of the house. Shadows danced across the room, and her face, a dark silhouette against the brightness. Features on her face were barely visible, though I knew what was written on her face.

In a voice tinged with hidden sadness, "So how do you want to do these, in the microwave, on the stove, or in the oven?" she asked.

“Mmmm, I think I like them best when we cook them in the oven. They melt really good, and they toast, not like in the microwave where they get too soggy,” I answered, trying to sound chipper.

“Alrighty,” she smiled, still in shadow. “We’ll do them that way, just be sure to watch them so they don’t burn.”

Our weekly ritual, making s’mores, had become something that I looked forward to, and dreaded at the same time. Cooking had become my sister’s new creative outlet. Never afraid of exotic ingredients, she did her best to search for recipes that included things she had never tried before. Unwittingly, I had become her favorite guinea pig, often going over for dinner, and being confronted with the unexpected proffering my sister thrust before me. There were ingredients from stores I hadn’t ever been to, tentacles, and an eye or two. Cooking magazines were all over her home, thrift store cookbooks were crammed into bookshelves in every room in the house, and the Betty Crocker bible had its place on the kitchen counter. A recipe for s’mores wasn’t needed because we had made them so many times. Hers were the first ones I had ever tasted. We had begun to make s’mores one day after school when I had told her someone had mentioned them, and when I asked them what they were, they belittled me, “oh yeah, you can’t make s’mores with beans and tortillas,” they had said. She took it upon herself to find the recipe, and so began our weekly tradition.

The sun had settled onto the horizon, the gold giving way to purple and orange. The late summer air blew into the small one bedroom home as the front door opened. My sister jumped as she heard the door slam in the living room. Her face fixed on the horizon, her hands working mechanically, unconnected to the rest of her body, washing

the dishes in the sink. She breathed in, her mind willing itself to go somewhere else. An animatronic figure, devoid of emotion save for one of fear, sadness, dread, had replaced my sister. The warmth of the summer heat was sucked out of the room, her shadowed form, cold, and lifeless against the waning sunlight. He entered the room.

“Te estoy hablando, que no me oyes?” (I’m talking to you, can’t you hear me?) he said, in a dark and ominous voice.

“No te oyí, estaba platicando con Endí, que necesitabas?” (I didn’t hear you, I was talking to Endí, what did you need?) said her answering machine voice, antiseptic and clinical in response. His face darkened, there was a smile, but it was not happy. He came closer, his hand on her shoulder. In the other room, my niece, ten months old, had begun to stir. She had been sleeping while we were cooking, and now I could hear her muffled breathing, the sounds of reluctant waking. He came closer, and her back stiffened, her hands still washing the same dish she had been when he entered.

With a sickening smile on his face, he spoke, “Que diablos estás haciendo, que no ves que tengo hambre, que me vas hacer de comer? [What the hell are you doing? Don’t you see that I’m hungry? What are you going to make me to eat?] There you are, wasting time like a fat lazy woman, cooking crap. How am I supposed to eat this shit? Where’s the real food? Your man is hungry, and you’re standing there, washing dishes like you don’t even care. I work hard all day and to come home to this! You’re fucking lazy. I’m hungry goddamn it, don’t you hear me?”

His fingers dug into the softness of her shoulder, her face did not give way, did not indicate that she even noticed, though I knew it was painful as the tips of his fingers turned white with the pressure. I sat at the counter, unable to move. In the background, I

heard my niece stir even more, her muffled breathing now mingled with the baby groans of eye rubbing and full diaper discomfort.

“I’ll cook for you in a minute, just let me finish the dishes and then take care of the baby. After that I’ll...” she didn’t finish.

“What?! I said I’m hungry—now, not later! Are you going to defy me or are you going to do what I asked you to do you lazy bitch!”

She turned and walked towards the bedroom, my niece now fully awake and beginning to whimper. Their bedroom, the only room in the house, contained only a bed and a small shelf upon which a television sat and more cookbooks. My niece, Amanda, was in the middle of the bed, sitting upright, rubbing her eyes, sleep still in them. Maricela walked over to her, and bent down to pick her up. As she placed her hands upon my niece’s waist, her husband called out to her.

“How fucking dare you turn your back on me while I’m talking to you! I’m not finished with you. Are you going to come back here and get me some goddamn dinner or what?” he yelled, the smile now a grimace, and his brow now furrowed.

She called back in a voice as frozen as the features on her face, “No, let me take care of the baby first and finish the dishes, then I’ll get to you.”

As he grabbed a stack full of dishes, piling more on top of these from the cupboards, he yelled “You want the dishes done?” He slammed dishes on the floor. The crack and shatter of plates, cups, glasses, and bowls sent shards in all direction, the clamorous noise, echoing in my ears mixed with the cries my niece began to bellow. “There, I’ve done the dishes for you. Do you want me to take care of the baby next?” he said, now in a voice that belied the simmering storm within him, calm and grave.

The sound of plates crashing on the floor, the cries of her baby and the imminent threat of her enraged husband seemed to snap her out of her somnambulant composure. Her face contorted, the anger pent up for too long swelled within her. She set the baby down as her husband came towards her, his fists balled in the all too familiar way. This time, she would not stand helplessly as her love for another betrayed her from allowing brutality to continue. This time, she would not let love blind her to the pain of the beatings she succumbed to for untimely washed clothes, poor quality food, or unwanted sexual advances. She would not let him bruise her anymore. He had broken her bones, but he would not break her spirit. As he swung towards her, she swung back. He grabbed her neck and began to squeeze. The baby cried as they fell upon the bed, gnashing, biting, clawing, and fighting. The baby, my niece, rolled off the bed and fell to the floor, hitting her head. Some unknown bit of humanity and compassion must have been triggered deep within the recesses of my brother-in-law's heart and he let my sister loose as he turned toward the fallen baby. I picked her up, comforting her the best way a twelve-year-old could. In his moment of distraction, Maricela grabbed hold of a steel-toed boot, one of his work boots, and swung it hard, hitting the side of his head as hard as she could. He fell to the side, clearly in pain, and she took this moment to move out from under him and towards me.

“Come on! Take the baby outside and wait by the car. I’ll be right there,” she commanded.

“But what’s happening? Why was he hitting you? What’s going on? You were just cooking s’mores. Does he hit you all the time? What are we going to do?” my voice in a panic, filled with adrenaline, confusion, and fear.

“Just get outside and wait by the car! Just do it and quit asking stupid questions,” she said as she grabbed her small sofa and planted it in front of door that led from their room into the living room. I ran to the car, Amanda whimpering and sobbing, clearly startled and afraid. In the background, I could hear my sister yelling at her husband once again. She slammed the front door and ran to the car. We both clamored in, and at the moment, I felt as though this were some horror movie, like the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and we were running away from the villain before he could do unspeakable cruelty to us both. Freddy Krueger was in the house, and we were desperate to get away. Her husband’s face appeared in the doorway, his hand cradling his jaw where the bulk of my sister’s swing hit-- Sagittarius to the very end, her aim hard and true. In the car, I had managed to calm my niece down, and she lay cradled in my arms, sleep once again overtaking her. The day had given way to night, the street lamps had awoken, their light reflecting on the windshield as we drove down the road. She had overcome her bondage, for the moment, and as we traveled to my mother’s house. She sighed, peered out onto the asphalt, transfixed on thoughts that were only her own. As I looked at her the granite earth on which we drove was softer than her face and easier to read. As we drove down the starry road, I turned towards the sky, looking at the moon, which had begun to rise on the horizon, and remembered the marshmallows, the chocolate, and the graham crackers.

“What about the s’mores? We forgot them. I really wanted to have some today. I was thinking about them all day today,” I asked.

“Don’t worry,” she said calmly, “we can always start over tomorrow.” It had never occurred to me that we could start over tomorrow, and I didn’t realize that she was talking about more than just the s’mores.

6.4 Synopsis

Maricela had married a man from Mexico after having met him at one of my cousin’s *quinceañeras* (a party similar to a sweet sixteen party celebrated throughout Latino populations). Because of her proficiency at understanding English, popular Mexican slang, and proper Spanish, my sister often served as the liaison between generations, helping them understand one another. Helping soothe hurt feelings and misunderstandings was one of her strengths. Marrying a Mexican man proved a challenge, however, and soon after their honeymoon was over, she was thrust into a conflict between being an independent American woman and the expectations that came with being a traditional Mexican wife.

“I never thought of myself as Mexican, or Hispanic, or Latina. I have always thought of myself as just plain American. I thought I was going to be a wife like mom, and have a marriage like that. I didn’t think I was going to be stuck with a guy like our uncles,” she said when I asked her about how she identified herself.

One of her biggest fears was to be like the older aunts in our family. “They all seemed so dumb. I didn’t understand why they waited on their husbands hand and foot. I couldn’t stand to be listening to them gripe all day,” she stated as she discussed the role of women in the family. Women in the family lived their lives from the home, and from her perspective they were subservient to their husbands and children. Believing

that they were too afraid, or too naïve to venture beyond their home, she was sure they live their lives through their husbands and children. Having a career remained one of her goals and continues to be one. Her needs to have a job, friends, and a life outside of home often clashed with the expectations placed on her to be a dutiful, homebound, and domestic wife and mother. She did not believe that her husband was her sole reason for existing. This mindset was often a source of friction between her and her husband, as well as the women in his family who did not understand her behavior. Conflicts in cultural understanding led to widening gaps between my sister and those with whom she identified.

“It’s like they wanted me to be Mexican, and were mad at me because I didn’t understand. They always told me ‘you should understand you’re Mexican, or do you think you’re a *gringa*⁴¹?’ I would tell them I knew I was part Mexican but that I wasn’t a Mexican. They would call me *agringiada*⁴², or coconut. I hated that because I knew I wasn’t white, but they didn’t understand that. They think all people who are brown with Spanish last names should speak and act like they do,” she continued. “It’s not that I’m embarrassed. I am proud of my heritage, but that’s not who I am. I don’t believe in just being one thing. I mean, I’m both. I live in the United States; I don’t know what it’s like to be Mexican, I’ve never lived down there. I’ve only ever lived here [in the U.S.]. What do I know about being Mexican?”

During her marriage, her life became a struggle between trying to remain confined within her ideas of being American set against others’ perceptions of how she was meant to act, speak, and believe. Life had always been a constant tug of war for

⁴¹ A term that means “white person” in Spanish.

⁴² A term that means a person is becoming like a white person.

her, living between emotions and rationality. At some point, I believe, she tried to create a rational explanation for living within such an abusive relationship. Back then, before we started our Friday afternoon ritual, she did not understand her own behavior. Until this moment, I had never known she was living in this place, between the tumult that was her life, her emotions rocked back and forth in a darkened sea, and the firmament upon which she had set her hopes and dreams. To me, she had always seemed to know who she was. I never knew she lived in a state of liminal identities, almost like a werewolf, not quite beast, not quite human. Her identity growing up seemed so set, she was who she was, and there was never any question, at least not for me nor for herself, about who she was.

“I always thought of myself as an American who could speak Spanish,” she mentioned when I asked about her youth. Adulthood became another matter. Her marriage had become the proving ground, where she struggled in maintaining her own sense of self while being confronted by the pressures of living in a traditional environment and acting as a traditional woman. Her perception of traditional woman was constructed by what she saw around her, the women in her family, and what she saw on television, the Mexican novellas that came on the Spanish channel. She remembers:

I hated those women, they were always crying all the time, and they always had to be so sexy, with their breasts practically falling out of their clothes. And they were always fighting over ugly men. But what got on my nerves the most was the crying...crying over men, crying because they were lonely and wanted a man, or crying because their man left them. They were like our *tías* (aunts) putting up with everything. That's what I thought a Mexican woman was.

This idea of being Mexican was juxtaposed with the things she saw on American television, and often in direct contradiction. There were never any women living alone

by choice in Mexican novellas, unlike those on American television such as Rhoda, Mary Tyler Moore, or Allie McBeal. Her perception was that women in Mexican society were servants whose only duty was to satisfy their husbands. Living with her husband became a source of disagreement between her perception of self and others' perception of her in that she wanted to remain independent, have a job, and socialize with her own friends and without her husband. She did not feel that a woman's life ended the day she took her marriage vows. Her life with her husband was an awakening. Though she understood the language spoken in Mexico, she realized that it took more than knowing a language to understand people. When I realized that she had been suffering internal and external conflicts, she seemed dimmer, like a shadow of her former self. At the time, I think I viewed her willingness to be subjected to such violence as weakness. Although later, I understood, her strength had turned inward, and she had used her anger to fuel her independence. My father's influence had begun to surface, and she put her fighting lessons to use. My father had wanted to name my sister Marisol, which in Spanish means sea and sun, because he loved the ocean. My mother hated the sea, and the sun even more and wanted to name her Celestina, which means heavenly, because she loved looking at the stars at night. So they compromised, and named her Maricela, which to them means sea and sky. From the day she finally stood up to her husband, until the day she sent him to prison, she finally began the long trek to reforming her sense of self. She stated,

I still like Mexican men; I think there are some good ones. Just look at Papí. I think Mom was lucky to have met him. If he wasn't so progressive in his thinking, I bet Mom would have been in the same boat as I was. No, I take that back, I think one of them would have been dead and the other in jail. Visiting mom in prison would be horrible.

CHAPTER 7

FOR WE ARE MANY

And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

Mark 5:19

You are ugly. Men are supposed to be ugly. Men don't cry. Men are tough-- they swallow their pain. If you cry then you are not strong. You are a man, so you are ugly. Your goal in life is to work hard, get married, have children, and die. Men are supposed to be smart. You will learn, read, go to school, and educate yourself. Always remember your hands are your livelihood. Take care of them and they will take care of you. As I looked in the mirror, these were the things that echoed in my head. In front of the world, I would be strong, I would be hard working, and I would not show emotion. It was only in secret, in the dark, in solitude alone with my thoughts that I would cry.

The concrete was cold against my bare feet. I could feel the gritty sandy pebbles that had come loose with age scratching my soles. We were alone, me, my sisters, and several girl cousins, in the room where they slept along with my aunts. There was a bureau filled to capacity with mostly girl's clothing, along with several suitcases and at the time, we were rifling through them, pretending—in our minds—enacting a fashion show. Several jewelry boxes lay on a dresser so ancient that the corners were rounded and smooth from years of bumps, scrapes and hands. These jewelry boxes were filled with shiny, multicolored beads, both glass and plastic, like marbles strung together, as well as broaches, hat pins, rings, and hair picks. I loved this box, the look and feel of all that jewelry, the colors so vibrant, their heft in my hands, and the sound they made as

the beads clicked together; it was all so alluring. My favorite thing to do was to dive in with both hands and just let the beads run through my fingers. As we rummaged through clothes and jewelry, the air was filled with chatter and laughter. Slowly, they chose outfits. In their minds, there was a Farrah⁴³, a Diana⁴⁴, a Bo⁴⁵, a Daisy⁴⁶ and there was even a Maude⁴⁷, for most disliked a Flo⁴⁸, and a Phyllis⁴⁹. Make-up was the most important part of the illusion. The girls huddled around each other, taking turns making one another up, tweezing, shaping, smearing and powdering faces. I was young, so was chosen to be the mascot; I wanted to be Lynda Carter, but had to settle for Jan. My dress was tight, but beautiful. It had been my sisters, green with sequins and satin-- her Sunday dress that had long been outgrown. Together the girls matched it with a pair of green shoes and striped leggings. Being included was fun, even though it was a little difficult to breathe. Belonging was most important, and these girls, my family, made me feel included, loved, and accepted. As we were laughing, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. It was funny; if not for the bowl haircut, I really could have been a little sister. As I looked, my face fell. I still looked like me through the lipstick, the eye shadow, and the base. I was still me—ugly, funny looking, awkward, but the girls insisted I was pretty. This made me smile, hesitantly, but smile nonetheless. Time came for us to leave. Our families had been together the whole summer, and now we had to return to our homes. The girls began to undress. There was, however, a problem. My dress had been too tight, and during our fashion show, I had somehow

⁴³ Farrah Fawcett

⁴⁴ The alter ego of *Wonder Woman*

⁴⁵ Bo Derek

⁴⁶ Daisy Duke, a female character on the television show *The Dukes of Hazzard*

⁴⁷ The main character of the television show *Maude*

⁴⁸ A character from the television show *Alice*

⁴⁹ A character from the television show, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*

broken the zipper that ran down the back. I could not get it off. My sisters and my cousins, while trying desperately to coerce the zipper to come free, panicked, frustrated with one another's ineptitude. Tears began to run down my face, streaking the make-up that still remained. In the commotion, the frenzy of clothes being shoved into drawers and on hangers, the shower of cotton balls covered in make-up, and the tangle of jewelry, the girls began to yell at one another. In that confusion, my young mind began to conjure images of horror--what would happen to me, where would I live, where would I go as I would most definitely be trapped in this dress forever, unable to ever return to school. I would live my life as an outcast—the ugly boy trapped in the tight green dress. The commotion and squeals obscured the sound of steps approaching the door. There were more tears flowing down my face resulting from a combination of the images in my head, and the sting of make-up in my eyes.

Steps approached the door. The noise had quieted suddenly, although I did not notice for my mind fixated on my imprisonment. Through the tears I could see my sisters faces, the smiles and laughter replaced with contorted frowns and teary eyes. I wondered what was going on, and before my lips could form a question, I felt a tight grip on my arm. Then, through the din of quiet, yelling, like fists of iron, broke through-- contorted faces in anger and fear, screams and cries from my father, my mother, at one another, at my sisters, at me. More tears, out of fear and misunderstanding fell through the mask of smudged lipstick and mascara. I did not understand what I had done wrong. Why was my father yelling? And then it came.

“You are not a faggot. You don't dress in these clothes ever. This clothing is for girls, and you are not a girl; you are a boy! I don't fucking care what they told you. This

is not alright. This is not how boys play!”

“But we were playing. I was a T.V. star. The girls made me pretty.”

“You are a disappointment; don’t be crazy. Only *maricones*⁵⁰ dress this way. You want to be hated all your life, do you want to be a failure; do you want to live like trash the rest of your life? You will not be a *maricón*. I’ll beat the shit out of you before I let that happen. I’ll kill you myself before I see you become one of those, those *maricones*!”

Tears streamed down my face. Now, not only was I going to be trapped in a dress, but my dad was afraid of me, angry with me, for being something I didn’t understand. Whatever this thing, this *maricón* was, I did not want to be it if it meant my dad was going to be angry with me. I looked to my sisters, eyes burning with pain and regret, and beckoned them, pleaded with teary eyes to come to my defense, to tell him we were just playing a game, but they stood aside, afraid themselves, hugging one another in tears, red palm prints only now starting to appear on their faces. Their sobs muffled in fear that they would provoke more gruesome retribution. As I watched them, I began to cry more, afraid that whatever I had done to make my father angry had somehow been the catalyst for his anger towards my sisters. I had to be strong, but it was difficult.

“Shut up! What have I told you? Stop crying. Men don’t cry and you are a man. Stop fucking crying!”

He tugged on the zipper, his calloused hand, like a sandpapered vice on my arm, shot pain through my body.

“Stop moving. This is what you deserve for being so stupid. How could you let them do this to you? Don’t you know this is bad? I said stop moving! I should leave you

⁵⁰ Spanish derogatory term for a homosexual male

in this dress forever so people can see what a bad boy you are. Maybe when the kids at school beat the shit out of you, you'll learn.”

The coldness in his voice matched the steel that now ran down the length of my back as he cut the dress away with a knife, slicing its way through the fabric and scratching my back slightly but enough that the burning welt afterwards reminded me of my shame. My heart sank, and my eyes widened, as for a moment I felt the knife was my end, his anger too large to control. Relief, only slightly, came over me as the only souvenir I would have that day was a scratch that would eventually heal.

We rode home in silence. In the car I looked out of the window, watching the trees streak by in the last bit of sunset, the orange glow warm on my cheek. My sister hugged me, and gave me a bead. It was amber colored. I looked through it, and the world became a multifaceted sunset, warmth glowing even in the darkness. Images were repeated in different angles, in different shades of amber. The world became new; I could see different sides of the same object, multiple levels of multiple realities. I turned my new sight onto the road in front of me; it was magnificent. Now I could see the road ahead and some of the trees as they passed on the side. I looked at my father, and I saw multiples of him as well—big dad heads, little dad heads, contorted dad heads, dad and mom heads, dad and tree heads—I began to laugh. My dad began to tut; his disapproving angered eye bored a hole through mine as I looked through the bead. Quietly I sat back, as my sister scolded my father, telling him to leave me alone. He acquiesced, his attention back on driving. At that moment, my sister Maricela had power, and it was only the beginning. She was my father's favorite, she was Kojak, Berretta, Quincy, Starsky and Hutch all rolled into one, and she was my greatest

defender. She was the strong one, fearless, a warrior; she was the archer, the Sagittarian firing true rarely missing her mark. I returned to my faceted bead, looked at my sister, and she too became many.

7.1 The Fourth-Dimension

The universe, if infinite and unbounded, can sustain the indefinite multiplicity of being. Social order is only tenuously contained within the greater complexity of the relationship between individuals and the totality. The connections between individuals are also infinite, transcending space and time. We are able to connect to ideas in the past, so that they fuel the ideas of the future. Past trajectories can also be affected by future thoughts. How often has the past been rewritten? Individuals see the past, present, and future from their own perspective, coming to consensus on some items and disputing over others. There is always someone to agree, and disagree, about moments in time and how they occurred or will occur. Consciousness develops and understanding is made, not in a vacuum, but within the connections that are made between individuals. These connections lead to collectives who base membership on agreements. How they interpret what they see, hear, and say is connected to their collective understanding, but more importantly, it is in how they differ in their understanding that makes the meaning they make even more rich. We understand what we see, and we see what we can understand. Vision is constructed through the common understanding that is attained through the collective. Visuality, which is a way of seeing the world, is influenced by the way individuals see themselves, and the way in which individuals see other people (Mitchell, 1998). Vision within the scope of field of

visual culture is “a cultural construction; it is like a language that you have to learn how to speak” (Dikovitskaya, 2005, p. 46). Connections of visual understanding by collective individuals can alter principles and values that are a visible and tangible part of existing within the group. The way an individual sees the world, and how they see themselves in the world to extrapolate meaning is situated in culture, gender, language and society (Barnard, 2001). Language is also affected by and an effectual part of creating understanding. Collective individuals in the form of cultural groups understand the visual world constrained by the verbal limitations contained within their language.

Intertextuality can be defined as the connection between the collective, the discourse that occurs in-between, throughout and within the fluctuating, interconnected and interdependent states of being within modern cultural life (Allen, 2000). The concepts of visuality and intertextuality fit within the scope of art education in helping educators understand the way meaning is made. Knowing the elements and principles of art and design may be important, but without understanding how different students understand or make meaning of these, learning will most likely be limited. By finding ways in which to help students connect their worlds with what is being taught, art educators learn not only about their students but learn about their own practices as well. The interconnected creation of meaning and understanding is not univocal. Understanding the intertextuality involved in teaching can help educators understand that meaning is created for their students, by their students and in turn creates meaning for the educator as well. Knowing that understanding is influenced by culture, language, ethnicity, gender, society, and other factors, educators can better understand the students they are teaching.

In the book *Flatland* (1963) by Edwin Abbott, the world of the aptly named Flatland is inhabited by a race of two-dimensional beings called Flatlanders. The citizens of Flatland are depicted as flat two-dimensional shapes of which there are squares, triangles, circles, rectangles, and hexagons. Their existence is limited to the two-dimensional within a world where there is width and length but no height. Flatlanders' understanding of themselves, defined by what they are able to see, is informed by looking left right, forward and back. Their vision is limited to these directions as they are incapable of viewing up or down. They see each other as a set of lines, each shape only distinguishable from one another by the number of sides that are counted. Their society is divided into cultural collectives that are defined by the number of sides that each member has. Hierarchies develop based on shape membership, circles are highest, triangles next, and so on and so on, the more sides an inhabitant has the lower on the social order they appear. The three-dimensional world is incomprehensible to Flatlanders and would only understand three-dimensions through what they can see. The textual signifiers of spheres in "Flatland" are understood by its inhabitants based on the redistribution and reconstruction of these texts. Three-dimensional objects, such as a sphere would appear as a dot first, a circle, then a larger circle, then becomes smaller until it became a point again and vanished. The text being considered, in this case a sphere, is understood in varying levels of more or less recognizable forms. According to Barthes (1981),

text redistributes language...one of the paths of this deconstruction-reconstruction is to permute texts, scraps of texts that have existed or exist around and finally within the text being considered: any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it...the texts of the previous and surrounding culture...is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it. (p. 39)

Based on an intertextual connection, we can understand the third dimension easily because that is the dimension in which we exist. We have a language to describe it, and is delineated by height, width, and length; it is a series of planes connected to themselves, such as a cube. We can also understand the second and first dimensions because parts of their texts are present within our field of comprehension.

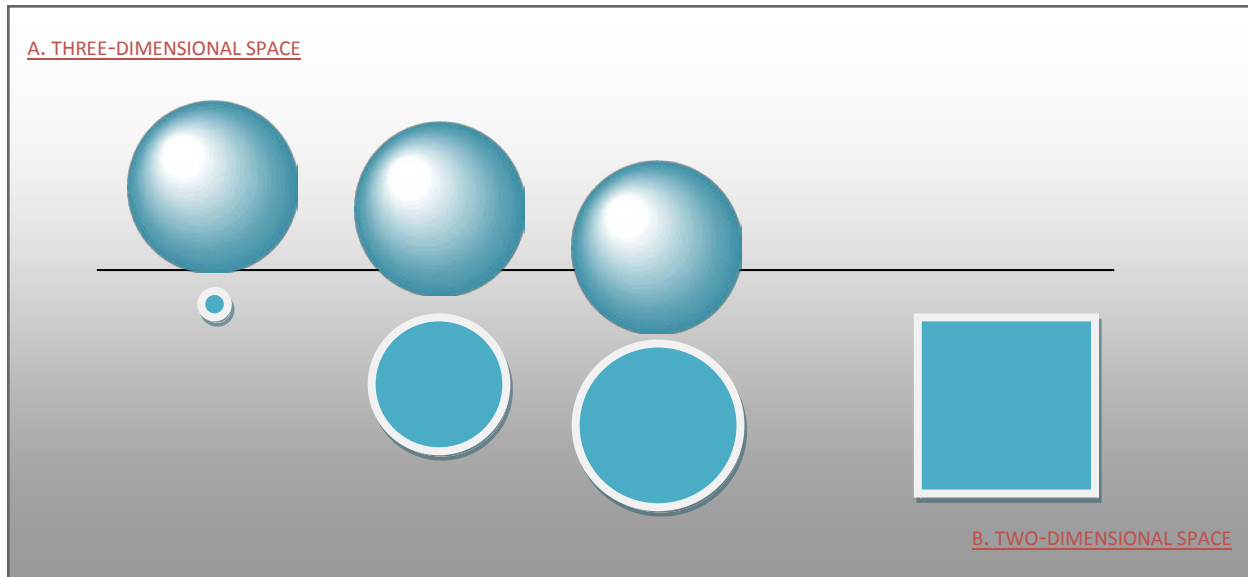


Figure 1. A sphere moving through two-dimensional space as seen by two-dimensional square.

As the story of Flatland continues, into this self-contained and self-absorbed society comes a revelation of a totally new order of existence, with the intrusion of a being from a higher dimension; the visitor is a sphere. In the story, a three dimensional creature greets an inhabitant of Flatland who is part of the middle management class within the social strata, a square, and who is unable to immediately see the three-dimensional creature. As the sphere descends into Flatland, only a point is able to be seen. Then, a circle can be seen which grows through a succession of circular slices until it reaches its full diameter, shrinking back down to a point and disappearing as the sphere descends through the two-dimensional plane. As the sphere converses with the

square, he begins to try and explain the concept of third-dimensional space and after a futile exercise of explanation, the sphere decides to take the square out of Flatland and show him. At first, the experience is too great, the square is unable to comprehend what he is seeing. His mind reels at the sheer unreality that he is observing, and at times, it is difficult for him to see, as he is constrained by, not only his language and culture, but physically as well; he is still a flat square in a three-dimensional world, this has not changed. In the process he begins to re-evaluate all the preconceptions he has had about the nature of reality. Eventually, the Flatlander outstrips his teacher and aspires to worlds of even higher dimension, but in the end, the experience is too much for the poor square, who must return to his world and try to convert the resistant inhabitants with his new-found knowledge.

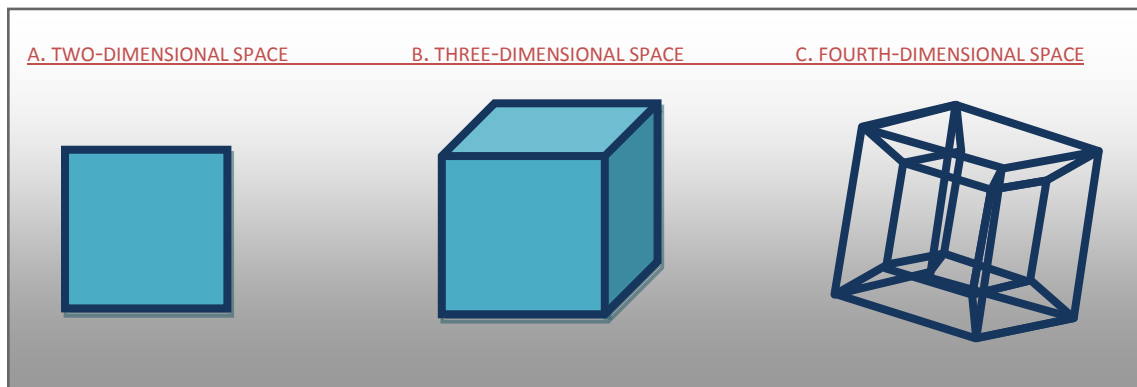


Figure 2. Examples of dimensional space, square, cube, tesseract.

Like the square in the tale of Flatland, we, as inhabitants of the third dimension have our own shortcomings and limited understandings of fourth-dimensional space. Understanding can only be gained through the use of the language and constructs that we have at our disposal. Imagine a cube. We understand cubes because we exist in third-dimensional space. A point is an imaginary idea that indicates a position in a system. Points are a construction, a language that exists to describe a specified area in

the universe. There is no real thing that can be pointed to and stated, that is a point, because points exist everywhere, in multiple areas, in multiple ways, and are of indeterminate sizes. To indicate the first-dimension, two points are connected by a line. The first-dimension exists in length only, there is no width or depth. One-dimensional space exists as the length in between two points of indeterminate size. The second-dimension exists as lines connected to one another. In second-dimensional space, there is length and width, but no depth or height. We can understand what a point, a line, a plane and a three-dimensional object are because we live in the upper most level of those dimensions. We can see the others because we exist in the third, the second, and first, dimensions are below our own. We cannot see the fourth-dimension because we do not exist there. It is beyond our capability of understanding. But it exists. A line is a point extended into first-dimensional space. A plane is a line extended into second-dimensional space. A cube is a plane extended into third-dimensional space, and a cube extended into fourth-dimensional space at right angles is called a tesseract. A tesseract can only be represented using three-dimensional ideas and terms. Fourth-dimensional realities can never truly be understood from a three-dimensional perspective because language is limited to three-dimensional understanding. The language that is available to three-dimensional being such as ourselves is confined to the texts we understand.

The existence of dimensions, one stacked upon another, enables the existence within one dimension without being aware of the dimension above. Understanding within the context of Flatlanders was relational to the world that was comprehensible by its inhabitants. The Flatlanders could not perceive anything beyond what was socially,

visually, linguistically, and culturally constructed for them. Saussure (1915) in his theory on linguistics codified this understanding in terms of signifier and signified. The signifier, the sound-image portion of a language, and the signified, the concept that the signifier aims to represent, were imagined as a two-sided coin. Like the Flatlanders, an individual was constrained by one side of the coin, never really able to look beyond to the other side, though it was one and the same. In his theory, signs were described as being arbitrary, possessing meaning not because of a referential function, but because within the cultural, lingual collective, there was no other concept. The representation was confined to the function of language, the systemic structure of communication, that existed at any one moment in time. What this representation references is the structure of language in place, it is relational to the system of language being used within the cultural collective, as in the two-dimensional world of Flatland, and not directly to the world.

Fourth-dimensionality can be described as duration; however, that is the only one way to describe it as we do not have the full capability in language or vision to fully describe the fourth-dimension completely. Like Flatlanders, third-dimensional beings can only understand the world through three-dimensionality; to try and comprehend the fourth dimension, third dimensional language must be used. If fourth-dimensionality is duration, then it can be described as the line between one point of existence in third-dimensionality and another. A better descriptor might be time. Existing in the fourth-dimension, a person would be able to see himself at all stages along his lifetime. In the fourth-dimension, a person would look like a series of himself, from birth to death, existing all at once. A third-dimensional being can only see single cross-sections of

himself in the fourth-dimension, much like the Flatlander looking at a three-dimensional object. In relation to language, as re-defined within poststructuralism, like fourth-dimensional space, language, the signifier and signified, are on a continuum, very much like fourth-dimensional space. Each exists through their relationship with one another (Stivale, 1998). We understand what an object is in many different ways. When we see a chicken, we are capable of seeing, and understanding its multiple states of being relative to our perspective and context. The signifier/signified relationship of chicken to animal surpasses the binary logic of structuralism; we are able to understand *chicken* on multiple levels. *Chicken* can be thought of as an animal, food, an egg, a feather, a chick, a coward, morning, breakfast, home, farm, and so on. We only see the cross-section of the totality of meaning which is based on the limits of our own perception. Like fourth-dimensional space, the interconnectivity of multiple meanings are evident in one state of being. Though we are unable to understand all meanings, they exist all at once.

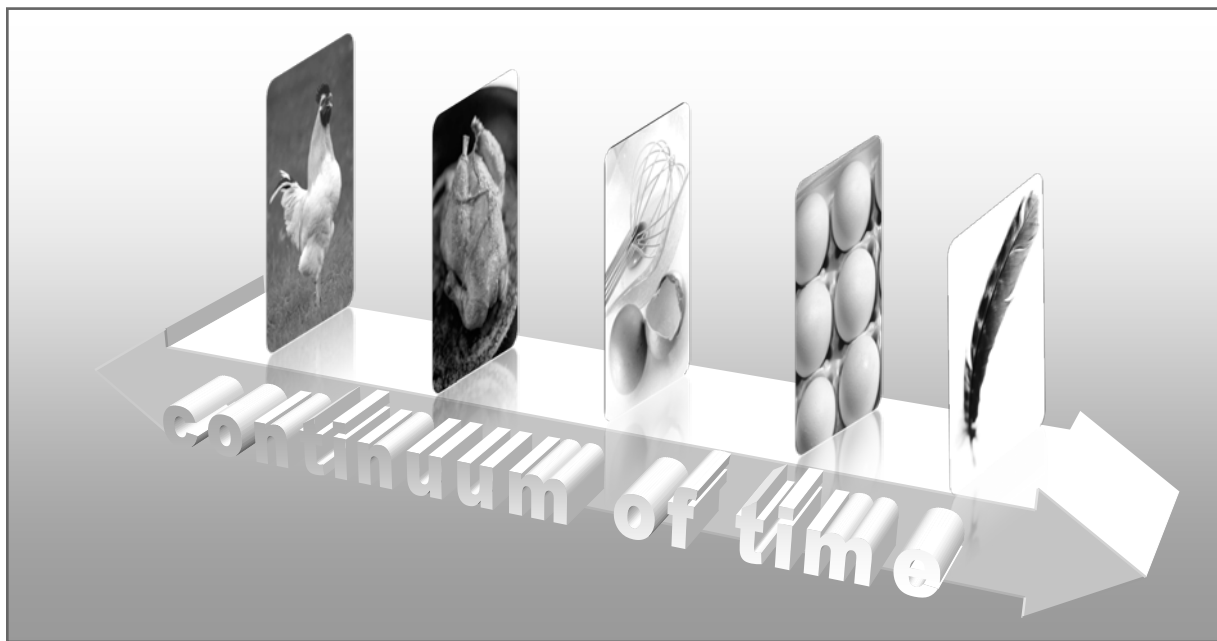


Figure 3. Signifier/signified relationships as related to fourth dimensional space.

Barthes (1977), in relation to the social contexts of language, considers the social part of language unable to be modified or created by individuals. In his view, it is essentially a collective constraint which one must accept in its entirety if there is to be communication amongst its members. Barthes states that:

A language is therefore, so to speak, language minus speech: it is at the same time a social institution and a system of values. As a social institution, it is by no means an act, and it is not subject to any premeditation...this social product is autonomous, like a game with its own rules for it can be handled only after a period of learning. As a system of values, a language is made of a certain number of elements, each one of which is at the same time the equivalent of a given quantity of things and a term of a larger function...the sign is like a coin which has the value of a certain amount of goods which it allows one to buy, but also has value in relation to other coins, in a greater or lesser degree. (p. 14)

The construction of language is sometimes autonomous where meaning is created and understood in relation to the perspective of its user. My sister Leticia used to call me *tilingo lingo*. It used to make me happy. One day, when we were at school she called me over to her table during lunch, and out of habit, used the nickname that she always used. I walked over, and one of her friends laughed asking why my sister called me by that name. Leticia did her best to explain, but found it very difficult to articulate exactly what it meant. In her limited vocabulary she conveyed that it was a name of a traditional folk dance in Mexico. Her friend, befuddled, continued to laugh, as she stated she had never heard anything so strange in her life. Leticia tried to explain a little further, but exhausted, just let her friend continue in her misunderstanding. I didn't find it quite so easy to let go. I understood completely what the moniker signified. *El tilingo lingo* was a dance that was distinct in its use of the harp and the quick stomping of feet, in a quick and frenetic, though graceful, fashion. Leticia called me this because of my frequent erratic and often hyperactive behavior; I was never still. And like the

dance, I often appeared to her that I was constantly jumping around and stomping my feet. The dance is meant to be indicative of the utmost expression of joy and happiness, a joy so profound that an individual is compelled to jump up and down with excitement; something I did quite frequently in my youth. And so, I attempted to explain, and the more I explained, the more excited I became. I began to exhibit the sheer excitement of being the center of attention, having an adult hang on to my every word, and being able to share some of my intellect with another. As I explained, I became *el tilingo lingo*, though I was unaware of the transformation. Leticia, in her wisdom, pointed to me and said, “there, that’s why I call him *tilingo lingo*.” They both laughed. After that experience, I quickly became aware of my behavior whenever I was excitable. Although I understood my sister’s nickname for me was a term of endearment, I didn’t relish the idea of being the brunt of laughter, whether it was intentional or not. Not long after, I stopped being *el tilingo lingo*.

Language and meaning come with socially and culturally constructed values, and at times, it is difficult to comprehend language and meaning through cultural boundaries. Containing language and meaning is difficult within the interconnected qualities of the social world. Although one cultural member may not completely understand a particular text in the same way as another, it does not diminish the fact that meaning has been made, interpreted, and reconstructed so that it does contain value. Texts have the ability to redistribute language along different paths. One of the paths that language and texts take is in the deconstruction and reconstruction of meaning. Texts exist around and within other texts, and contain bits of past, present, and future meaning. Language and texts are understood in and throughout temporal

shifts. Meaning is made from the deconstruction of texts and is redistributed through time, through place, and through the memories of the cultural members where the text originated. The concept of intertextuality is conveyed through the transposing of one meaning onto another. Again, within the concept of intertextuality, texts are deconstructed, reconstructed, and rearranged. Intertextuality conveys the notion that texts are not singular, but are plural and contain multifaceted meaning. Any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms-- the texts of the previous and surrounding culture (Barthes, 1977; Kristeva, 1980).

Language is inseparable from individuals' conception of time. Experiences occur in relation to time; people understand and interpret their world through relations of time and language, i.e. I ate yesterday, I'm going to the movies tomorrow, etc. Abstract concepts of temporal shifts are made accessible through narratives, where the often fractured realities and discordant memories are constructed and made whole. Individuals are able to make sense of their world and the fluctuations time has on their experiences. The unique experience of time is made accessible through narrative, individuals are able to relate, to one another, their beliefs, understanding, and knowledge in respect to why they do what they do (Richardson, 1997).

Addressing the limits of understanding that are evident in art education is important. The construction of meaning of visual culture in the everyday lives of individuals is present in the personal and communal narratives that they share. By promoting curricula that examines these narratives and how they depict understanding of visual culture, art education can better serve populations that have become

marginalized by texts and language they cannot understand. By creating curricula that takes into account the communities in which educators function, the evolution of terms and a larger vocabulary can promote diversity rather than colonialist practices. Culture informs language, as well as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and language in turn informs how individuals see the world. If the language of art education excludes individuals then there is a greater potential for colonialist practices to maintain power dynamics that continually marginalize and control another group's education, language, culture, ethnicity, sexuality and identity (Ballengee-Morris, 2000).

7.2 Oranges are not the Only Fruit

I don't give a damn 'bout my bad reputation
You're living in the past it's a new generation
A girl can do what she wants to do and that's
What I'm gonna do
An' I don't give a damn 'bout my bad reputation.
"Bad Reputation," Joan Jett

The light of the lamp post bounced off the greasy black dew covered pavement. The air smelled like a mixture of spring, clean and crisp, cool and moist, mingled with the heady petroleum smell of cars as they passed lazily down the street. On the corner, a dark brownstone building, nondescript and traditional early twentieth century, marked by modern neon and brightly colored flags bustled with people noisily in its dank anonymity. Music thumped, the beat vibrating in the lightly foggy air. It penetrated the darkness like the beat of native drums in an old black-and white movie. The windows pulsed with light that matched the beat within; figures and shadows danced on the glass in hedonistic bliss. A door opened, the blare of music suddenly louder, flashes of

multicolored lights beamed and flickered through the opening. The beat mingled with nondescript voices, laughter, and with the anger of the bouncer at the door. A figure appeared at the door, bracing herself against the jamb. My sister Mari was dressed in a small black leather coat, ripped in several places and patched together with duct tape and safety pins, the effect of vagabond, an intentional masquerade. She pushed past a group of people making their way in through the door, and the bouncer pushes her out. He was a burly, massive hulk of man, and his meaty paw like a small ham pressed up against her shoulder. He spat unbelievable curses as she stumbled to the ground. A thousand blunt razor blades raced across her cheek as her face hit hard against the pavement. The burning that usually accompanies a friction burn began to race across her head, radiating down her neck—she could feel it pulsing behind her eyes. Eyes closed, she saw bright specks and flashes of lights behind her lids. The familiar pain of a full bladder added to her discomfort as the pavement pressed against her head, making more lights flash in the darkness of her mind. She groaned and laughed to herself, let out a sigh, and with no alternative, relaxed her bladder. The warmth between her legs, her hip, and lower abdomen dissipated quickly against the coolness of the road. Twisting and churning, she felt her stomach turn against her, vomit stinging the back of her throat as it found its way out of her body. The sickly sweet bitter taste of stomach acid and alcohol forced her to convulse once more as she emptied the remainder of the stomach's contents. Streetlights blurred in the haze of drunken stupor as she raised her head, her hair dripped with a mixture of dew and bile. Dizzily she clamored and clawed her way to a nearby bench, the dead weight of her body forcing her to scrape most of the flesh uncovered by leather, cloth, or excrement. The

lumbering bulk of her body collapsed unglamorously on the seat of the bench whose wooden slats are only slightly more comfortable than the pavement. As she lay there, with wood imprinting more and more on her swollen flesh, she thought to herself and considered the night. It was beautiful. She was a star. No one could take their eyes off of her. Her moment had come. On the dance floor, she was queen, she was beautiful, she was desired and none, in her mind, surpassed her. She was the world and the world loved her. But now, in the dim light of moon and stars and streetlamp, she was cold, and her only admirers were the increasing number of mosquitoes drawn to her sickly sweet smell. She was alone. The realness of it all fell down upon her like an ice cold pale of water. Only after the wetness began to puddle at her cheek did she realize she had started crying. Her body convulsed under the weight of sadness. She couldn't stop. She was alone in the dark. At that moment, she realized what her mother had told her was true—she was a disgrace, a woman of the night, without a man to love her. She had, as her mother predicted, lost her way and become a monster. Memories began to surface in her mind. She remembered the moments in her mother's garden, helping her till the tomatoes she had grown. In that place, she was warm, both physically and emotionally in the glowing sun of her mother's love. Mari remembered begging her mother to plant oranges because they were so sweet, promising to eat them all, that none would ever go to waste. She would be a good girl. In her memory, her mother laughed, chuckling at her silliness, reminding her that oranges only tasted sweet because they had them so infrequently. If she were to eat an orange everyday it would seem less special. If she had them every day, they wouldn't taste as sweet. Her mind reeled, feeling dizzy as though she had been on a merry-go-round for hours. Her

memories turned to the club, where she had tasted other kinds of fruit every night on the dance floor, cavorting in bacchanalian delights, unrestrained by familial morals, or cultural norms, all the while thinking that her mother and her traditions could go to hell. On the dance floor, she abandoned her traditions for the sake of becoming a modern woman. Little did she know that becoming a modern woman came with a price, one, that at this moment, on this bench, covered in her own piss and vomit, she would never have paid. This was to be the last night that she would laugh and play in garden of earthly delights, and tomorrow, yes tomorrow she would beg her family to take her in, to care for her, to...But her thoughts trailed off as she realized going home was not an option. Nights of unabashed pleasure had wrought their own reward. Mari was—or more accurately had been—pregnant. And now, she thought to herself, "who's going to love me?"

Part of humanistic discourse is the idea of agency. Agency is rife with paradox. And even so, the paradox does not equate impossibility, only that the paradox is a condition of possibility (Butler, 2004). Identity is constituted by norms and dependent on them; however, its construction is involved in social realities that allow identity to maintain critical and transformative relations with societal norms. Agency is not something that is easily attained. In order for individuals to exert power or control over their identity, they must live in a social world that supports and enables individuals to exercise agency. Freire (2000) believed that life experiences, the arts, and knowledge were important to the value of a culture. Individuals live in the world and with the world, the two are mutually inclusive, which makes separating the two existences difficult if not

impossible. According to Freire (2000), agency is not simply a transfer of power from one source to another, but the process in which an individual forms his or her identity.

Agency can be seen as a state of being, an existence, where an individual has the potential or proclivity to assert power, or exert influence. In the case of identity, an individual is able to assert power in the creation of his or her own structures and norms pertaining to identity construction. Humanists seek to bring to society dominant human values, ideas and institutions, in order to instill the most fundamental issues of life. Values that are championed by humanists include those that give dignity, reduce suffering, and enhance human well-being (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Agency from a humanistic standpoint is situated in freedom that makes it possible for individuals to change themselves and their situations. Poststructuralist ideas of agency create a more complicated view of agency. According to Judith Butler (1999), there is a compulsion to view identity as a state of being where sometimes individuals are given a false sense of control over who they are and are capable of becoming. The complexity in agency arises when individuals to some extent, exert some control over their identity, and choose to define themselves in specific ways. This creates pauses in the dominant perceptions that are perpetuated by media, of which stereotypes are a part. Sometimes, individuals embrace stereotypes as a way of defining themselves. Stereotypes are not inherently positive or negative, they exist, but not in a capacity for good or evil in and of themselves. However, it is within this perception that the potential for agency is created. Agency, according to Butler (1993) is the pause in this movement. Pauses or interruption in movement occur where the predetermined pathways that can occur in the construction of identity are excluded or ignored, causing them to become indeterminate,

constantly in flux, and continuous. The mechanism through which identity is understood becomes unstable. Individuals with agency are capable of knowing when and where their identity is shifting, and is able to hinder, or completely stop this movement. What is excluded is used in the reformulation and expansion of identity. Other factors can complicate the role between unforeseen events or unknown factors and identity. When hegemonic norms collide with identity construction the result can create a reformulation of self perceptions that may no longer be recognizable or are incompatible with one another. In some ways, the agency of identity construction is the point at which identity, threatened by un-viability, becomes undone altogether. Butler's view of agency is paradoxical. In her view, agency does not consist of denying the condition of an individual's constitution. If agency is present, then that agency is opened up by a reality that consists of a social world that was not a part of an individual's immediate choice.

Mari had always been the good girl in my father's eyes. When she became pregnant, out of wedlock, in my father's rage fuelled mind, she ceased to exist, becoming the epitome of bad girls in the traditional mindset my father insisted on retaining from his Mexican heritage. Being an unwed mother was a stigma. The idea of good girl versus bad girl is one that is set in modernist thinking. In modernist thought, binary thinking shapes understandings of human difference by placing identity in oppositional positions, and defining identity through oppositional terms. In the binary schema, identity is not formed from its counterpart, nor is it related to its counterpart. There is no connection. According to Foucault, the binary relationship between the sexes is an artificial one, created through the limits of language (Foucault, 2001; Butler, 1999). Instead, identity is formed through inherent opposition to something else; identity

is defined by what it is not, and limited by language and culture (Foucault, 1990 ; Butler, 2004). When identity is thought of in a poststructural sense oppositional or binary relationships fall under scrutiny and become less stable. In a poststructural mindset, identity does not have a complementary counterpart. Thinking of gender in terms of binary oppositions can create the possibility individuals to be separated in terms of difference. Binary oppositional categorization is not limited to defining people. Things, ideas, expressions, culture, gender, and more are distinguished from one another solely in terms of their apparent opposed polarity (Butler, 1993). Terms such as white/black, male/female, intelligent/stupid, subject/object, good/bad are expressed and categorized in ways that prohibit understanding the transcendental, liminal, and subjective qualities that may be present within these aforementioned descriptors (Butler, 2004). When identity is categorized in a binary relationship, it becomes simplistic. Limiting identity within binary relationships presupposes that any relationship that might exist outside of a binary one is null. By doing so, all relationships to identity such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture and language become containable, and bounded, which can result in a barrier that can never be crossed (Hurtado, 1996). Also of importance when identity is understood in terms of binary oppositions, the result becomes an us/them or we/they existence, where the *we* is defined by dominant culture and the *them* is everyone else. When difference is defined in oppositional terms, one element is objectified as the *Other*. The group inhabiting this status is positioned in a place where objectification, manipulation, and control are more easily accessible by those existing in the primal place outside the *Other*. Bhabha (2003) relates the ideas of *otherness* to society and that it is not possible for an individual or group to formulate their own understanding.

Individuals or groups are unable to act upon their own sense of place in society without the intrusion of outside forces.

By allowing or participating in oppositional ideology as it pertains to identity, educators can allow cultural and gendered stereotypes to persist. Conversely, there are discourses that critique the oppositional ideologies that exist, in an attempt to challenge cultural and gendered stereotypes that exist. However, these discourses can be just as dangerous by manipulating perceptions in such a way that dismisses that differences are unimportant, or that stereotypes are socially acceptable.

In humanistic thought, femininity is equated with nature, the wild, and the uninhibited. Nature is seen as something to be dominated, controlled, and cultivated in order for there to be any use. Female identity falls into this equation as being identified with the natural world, and central to this idea is that female objectification takes place (McClintock, 1995). In this sense, both feminist thought and people of color, are categorized, according to post-colonial theory, as less than human, animalistic, or more natural which denies the possibility of a subjective existence and promotes domination characterized by colonialism and neo-colonialism (Said, 1993). Women, people of color, and people who are different, like the wild and nature, are meant to be dominated and conquered, controlled and cultivated for their own benefit. Scholarship in female identity, placed in a binary schema, can be placed within the context of its opposition to maleness. Being female can only be understood within the context of what is male; everything that is male or falls within the masculine purview cannot be feminine, and vice versa. Womanhood is a binary opposite to manhood, bolstered by biological imperatives—males have a penis, females have a vagina. So too identity follows suit

when framed in binary oppositions. An individual's identity is defined by what he or she is not; if they are black they cannot be white, if they are intelligent they cannot be stupid, if they live in a democratic world, they cannot be oppressed, and so on.

7.3 Wondertwin Powers—Activate!

We don't need no education.
We don't need no thought control.
"Another Brick in the Wall," Pink Floyd

My sister's experienced different degrees of hegemonic practices in school. Maricela, whose story includes many altercations between her and her third grade teacher shows the ways in which educators can create institutionalized practices that undermine diversity. In one of the narratives related in the study, Maricela encounters the fear that often comes when encountering difference. She was subjected to punishment for speaking Spanish, but the underlying cause and effect was probably more related to the fear the teacher had towards otherness. That was not the only occasion that my sister experienced punishment for her difference in her third grade year. On another occasion, she was paired with one of the few other Latinos in her classroom as part of a classroom project. She remembers,

I told the teacher that I couldn't be partners with him, and that my dad had a problem with me talking to guys in class. He didn't believe me and it was hard for me to explain at the time. He thought I just wanted to get out of the project. But I couldn't explain. He was always picking on me. I remember one time I was looking at one of the little planters that he had on the window because it was in the shape of a Mexican man sleeping. You know, the one's that have a sarape on them and a big hat. I liked the way it looked and I suppose he thought it would be funny to ask "Does he look like one of your uncles?" I just bit my lip. But when he wasn't looking I went over and knocked it off of the ledge it was sitting on. There were several of us playing near it, and he came over and cleaned it up. He was angry, but didn't know who had done it.

There are other moments in my sister's life where she defied authority and conventions of how she should be represented. She consistently talks about this teacher though, "I hated this teacher, he was such a bully."

The bully, my sister perceived her teacher to be, and students like my sister experience power relationships that are linked to hierarchies and dissent. There are social misunderstandings, and hegemonic norms that center around race, class, gender, sexuality, culture, and language, which persist through social policies that circumvent overt or implicit racist or sexist discrimination through the way organizations and institutions are run (Foucault, 1979). My siblings and I encountered institutionalized segregation when we were sent to language labs and English as a Second Language classes. This was done as a matter of prescription rather than diagnosis. Subjugation is sometimes maintained through institutionalized practices such as those experienced by my sisters and me. Social organizations are set in place through these practices that may inadvertently or purposefully maintain the status quo.

The effects of power, knowledge, culture, and language influence subjectivity. Subjectivity can be viewed as the way in which the world is perceived by individuals, the way meaning is constructed, and the way that knowledge and power interact with one another in the construction of vision. Individuals are taught how to perceive the world through cultural norms, and hegemonic norms, which are in turn in constant flux with one another. As one norm influences another, new perceptions are created. Subjectivity is based on the individuals' unique and personal experiences, which in turn affects the way in which they perceive the world and develop understanding. Language is a part of the way the world is subjectively interpreted. Perceptions are colored by heritage,

upbringing, language, culture, ethnicity, and gender, which shapes an individual's identity. The visual world is part of this influence. Media is pervasive in the lives of the women in the study. My mother, my sisters, and my nieces were inundated by the visual world. Visual culture played an important part in the way they perceived themselves, and also in the way they re-appropriated images, ideas, traditions and language. They felt like they were caught between worlds, torn between the traditional roles set before them, and their desire to break free from convention. The liminality they experienced allowed them to flit between states of being, between a sense of self that incorporated their Mexican heritage, and the heritage they adopted in the United States. They were influenced by what they saw on television, in magazines, at school, which was filtered through the culturally constructed vision that the women in the study shared between them. They taught one another how to see and interpret the world around them.

Education can maintain institutionalized policies that both reproduce intersecting oppressions and mask their effects, such as Hispanic Heritage month and military enlistment posters. These policies exist in gendered courses, like home economics or shop class, and although students are free to participate in either, they are not really free to do so without social repercussions. Subjugated knowledge, within this context, is present but disguised, and according to Foucault, "a whole set of knowledges...have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault, 1979, p. 82). In this way informal education is sometimes invalidated or diminished in importance and devalued as a productive way of learning. Regional knowledge, local knowledge, naïve knowledge, from the perspective of

subjugation, is viewed as something that is incapable of unanimity. According to Antonio Gramsci (1971) every social group creates one or more strata and as a result also creates a homogenous awareness of function within society that act as promoters, and deterrents of social and political acts. In some ways, popular imagery that portrays Latinas as subservient domestic workers, uneducated, poor communicators, welfare recipients or sexualized women promotes the justification of their subjugation and oppression. A major instrument of power lies in the authority to define societal values, by challenging and not necessarily controlling, but undermining or resisting these images. Stereotypical imagery is used to reflect or represent a reality that functions as a disguise or mystification of objectivity, or an objective perspective on the functions and roles Latinas play in society. Through reinterpreting stereotypical imagery, re-appropriating or finding ways in which to challenge stereotypes, the women in the study as Latinas have empowered themselves in a way that allows them to define their own societal image. My sister Maricela, after years of conflict with her perception of my mother as a doting, powerless matron came to understand the hidden realities of her power. She admitted,

I always thought mom was like the women in the *novelas* we used to watch, worried about her man, and always waiting on him hand and foot. But then I realized, mom is a matriarch of the family. She's the boss. And not just of our family but the whole family. I started to realize that the women in the *novelas* weren't powerless. Nothing happened without them. They were in charge of feeding the family, bringing up the kids, and making sure everyone in the family was taken care of. Mom is like that. Everyone comes to her when they need help. If you ask anyone in the family, they know where to go when they need something. I used to hate that about her. I thought she was being a pushover. But really, she's in control. She decides who helps who. She keeps the family together. I like that.

By repurposing or reinterpreting these images, the women in the study are able to control the perspective that these images, which may make racism, sexism, poverty and other forms of social injustice appear normal and inevitable parts of life. By maintaining the perception of Latinas as others, society permits ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression.

Problems around race, class, and gender associated with these categories are not inherent. What I mean by this is that classifications such as race, class, and gender do not contain within them inherent positive or negative connotations. It is only when these are used to politicize membership within specific group categories in order to claim limitations of success, intellect, or other means, that discrimination occurs and individuals are placed on a path where they are unable to see group-based advancement. This can be seen as the root, or cause of social injustice. Class, gender, sexuality, religion, and citizenship status matter greatly in the constitution of democratic processes that promote individual freedom and equality—yet the reality of differential group treatment based on these categories persists in the U.S (Stuhr, Ballengee-Morris & Daniel, 2008).

Due to the hierarchies maintained through institutional subjugation, it is often the case that those in positions of power maintain and control the dissemination of what they perceive to be truth, further localizing their stranglehold on what is to become of texts and discourses. Beliefs, opinions, or propaganda can sometimes be presented in a manner that perpetuates stereotypes in an attempt to explain difference and create acceptance. This can be intentional or unintentional, though the results are the same. Gender, ethnic, and sexual identity, among others, develop as an integral part of other

social identities, and includes culture and language and are a part of the discourses that disseminate and reinterpret texts. Gender, ethnic, sexuality, and culture are tethered to one another and inform one another rather than remaining as distinct identities; they are dependent on one another. As dominant groups attempt to understand culturally different groups, stigmas are attached to certain social identities, of which, women of color, like women in the study, are directed towards invoking an awareness of how they are made to feel less significant because of color and including color's relationship to gender. Hegemonic standards of beauty are persistent within this dominant cultural concept of social identity, in which femininity is a part. Women of color are placed at a disadvantage in relation to these ideals of beauty as they are most often created from the perspective of what is meant to represent normalized civilized society. Latinas, as women of color, are relegated within the spectrum of the natural, undomesticated, and wild world and often sexualized and objectified. Again, the stigmas associated with less than ideal social evaluations associated with the natural unkempt world prompts women of color, like women in the study, to redefine their own standards of beauty to be more in line with those of dominant culture. Women of color, like women in the study, resist conventions of beauty and standards imposed on them instead preferring to evaluate ideals as context dependent. They know that hegemonic standards of beauty place them at a disadvantage, but only within the context of dominant culture, "as objects...reality is defined by others...created by others [and] history [is] named only in ways that define [the] relationship to those who are subject" (hooks, 1989, p. 42). Subordinated groups are capable of developing their own standards, like *Cholas*⁵¹, that often act as sites of resistance and a blatant challenge to the dominant norm. Some of

⁵¹ *Chola* is a term that refers to a Latina that is often associated with gangster culture.

the stigmas that might come into play include, for example that Latinos are poor, Latinas are welfare mothers, *Cholas* are violent sexually promiscuous thugs, and the list continues.

7.4 Culture

Molecules are composed of smaller particles, protons, electrons, neutrons, and other even smaller particles, that make up all living and non-living things, which is known as matter. In order for a molecule to be considered or defined as a molecule, it must contain at least two atoms in a definite arrangement. Sometimes, molecules consist of two atoms but they can also be composed of hundreds of millions of atoms. Each molecule has a unique shape that allows it to interact with other molecules. Molecules may consist of atoms from a single element or more. The interaction of atoms and subatomic particles contained within molecules is explored through molecular physics. Like the definition of culture, the definition of molecules and what comprises them have been redefined over time as knowledge about their known structures and the enigmatic forces behind their construction. Much of the discussion centered on culture and how it is defined, is based on the varying degrees individuals belong or do not belong to a culture. According to Raymond Williams (1983), a pioneer in cultural studies, individuals and societies express their own culture through institutions, the arts, and learning. The foundation of culture is based first on the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings that influence understanding and communication, and secondly in the way individuals test these elements through personal experiences, the making of new observations, comparisons, and meanings.

Poststructural definitions of culture include ideologies where individuals are free to enter and leave cultural diasporas carrying with them the bits and pieces of each culture they have encountered.

As cultures come into being, change, redefine themselves, splinter, and converge they become similar to the way molecules and atoms work. Like atoms, there lies within the concept of cultural belonging, the ability of one individual to possibly exist within more than one culture. Atoms within molecules do so all the time; chemical reactions occur and atoms shift back and forth. When this occurs, they do not stop being atoms, they merely become part of another collective—another molecule. Using this analogy, I equate culture to an atomic structure, where the nucleus remains an elusive indefinable yet persistent entity around which individuals that act like electrons, orbit and sometime leave to become parts of other atomic structures, or, like a molecular structure, existing as parts of two or more atoms at once.

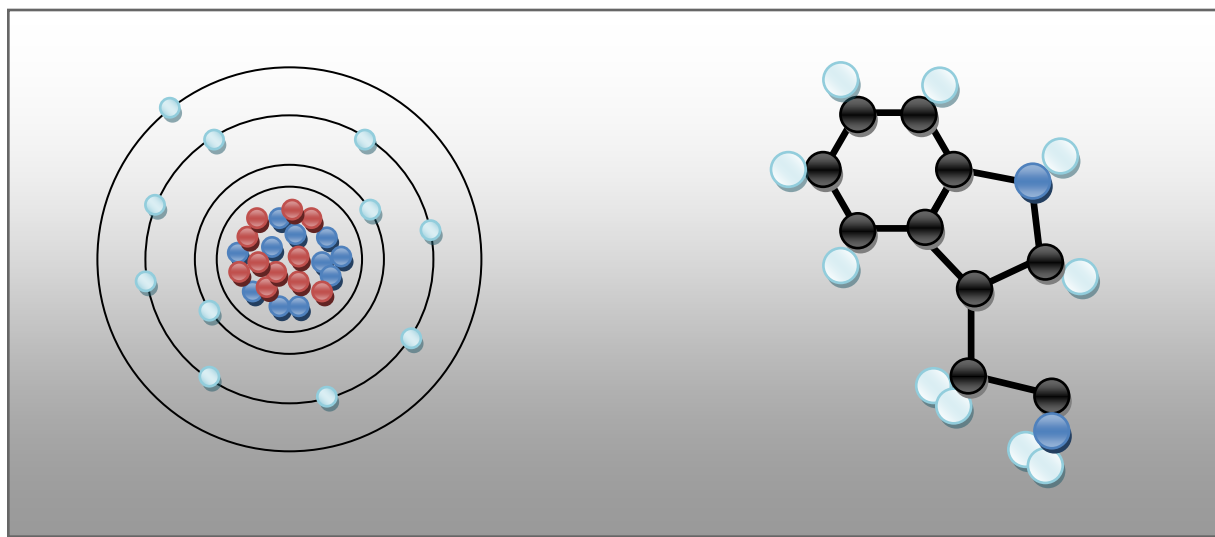


Figure 4. The structure of a sodium atom and a molecule of serotonin.

Although the analogy equating culture to a molecule seems to encapsulate culture within a codified structure, they are not always stable, nor are they finite. Like

molecules, the structures of culture are constantly changing and metamorphosing. Even our bodies, although seemingly concrete structures, are not stable or immune to change. Bodies are constantly changing and developing, from birth to death and beyond. We are able to manipulate our bodies, and in some cases, our physiology. Our body, like the rest of the universe, is not stable. So too, molecules and culture are also unstable. Identity formulated within the concept of culture exhibits conditions, which are also changeable and unstable. At times, an atom becomes disengaged from one molecule to another. Sometimes the change is a result of gravitational pull and at other times, the result of violent chemical reaction. In either case, the shift occurs outside of the atoms control. The change is compelled by outside and unseen forces. Culture and identity work the same way. At times it is beneficial to shift from one culture or identity to another, but what compels an individual to do so remains a product of agency and social conditions. Sometimes an individual exerts agency in order to change. At other times, outside and unforeseen forces act to instill change in an individual's identity. Identity formation and cultural belonging are not always formed as an act of rational thought and decisive action. Although individuals can come to awareness about their identity, there are always outer forces that influence how individuals see themselves.

Women in the study look at the world through their own cultural perceptions and constructions. They are always looking at the world through vision that has been culturally constructed by them and for them at the same time. The beliefs, values, and life experiences of the women influence the way that they learn. They share beliefs, values, and ideas about interpreting their world with one another, influencing how they perceive the world. Although they look at the world through the veil of their own beliefs,

the women in the study are not beyond the influence of hegemonic norms that also have a part to play in the way they construct their identity. The narratives of their experiences with informal education, visual culture, and identity construction represent the different ways that they have experienced the world and constructed meaning for themselves and for each other.

7.5 The World Will Cry 'Save Us,' and I Will Say No

Rust colored mountains stood on the horizon, like cinnamon piled high and topped with a pinch of powdered sugar. The dry air pushed against the car as gusty breezes passed from mountain to plain. Although it was November, it was hot enough to require the use of air conditioning, which was unfortunate as the sage scented air was pleasant—that is, until I neared the city. I was on my way to visit my sister Maricela in El Paso, Texas, an excursion I had postponed, having no desire to visit the desert. As I neared the city, the smell of sewage and industrialization overpowered the sweet scent of sage, and cedar. It was an acrid smell that my air system was incapable of filtering. It leached through the doors and permeated my senses; I had a difficult time concentrating on the road. The smell emanated from the city of Juarez, opposite El Paso along the Mexican Border. Nearer to my destination, the omni-present fence that separated the disjointed streets, Dr. Seuss-like hovels, and proto sky scrapers became more apparent. In some areas of the city, the two sides of the border were like night and day. One side was a post-industrial, technological sprawl of modernity, the other, a time encapsulated pre-industrial conflux of colonialism and cheap petroleum.

Throughout the city, class separation was discernable; the upper class lived higher up the mountains surrounding the city, while the poorer classes lived closer to the border. On the Mexican side of the border, businesses, warehouses, and entrepreneurs lived alongside the economically disadvantaged. Here too, as a mirror to the American city, the wealthy lived further away from the border with a small residence near their investments if they were business owners. It seemed, from my perspective, that the economically disadvantaged were sandwiched between their more wealthy counterparts, alongside the sewage and waste that is dumped daily into the Rio Grande.

My sister works in a warehouse that distributes large volumes of products from Mexico to the United States (U.S.) where they're disseminated amongst the populace and other trading partners. Work requires her to occasionally lift heavy boxes and prepare items for shipping, a task that is shared by men and women. In the loading dock, my sister, in her heels and dress, her baubles and makeup stands out amongst the less demure men and women. The dichotomy this creates is a woman, acting in the presence of men, in a job, at least in that environment, is seen as the domain of men and lesbians. Her work often requires interaction between manufacturers and business partners on both sides of the border and frequent use of Spanish and English, sometimes both in the same conversation, which assures that the cultural navigation that is required to ensure both parties is given the best service, hence the capitalist motto *customer satisfaction guaranteed*.

She is very good at her job. Born in the U.S. has the benefit of citizenship. However, this has also been a pervasive burden for her, as well as me and my other

family members on both sides of the border. Because of our citizenship status, many of our counterparts in Mexico refer to us as *pochos*⁵², which is a derogatory term that equates to blood-traitor. On the U.S. side of the border, we were often ostracized by Mexican immigrants, both legal and illegal, for being too acculturated. We were labeled *agringados*⁵³, *anglisados*⁵⁴, or simply *Chicano*. We, and many like us, fit culturally neither in Mexico nor in the dominant culture of the U.S. The only thing we had was the prospect of embracing capitalism and removing ourselves from one economic social status to another, in theory anyway.

Colonialism is a complex set of relationships that stems from one culture or society or hegemonic norm having power over another cultural collective's education, language, culture, land, economy, sexuality, and gender, in short, their identity. Cultural representation and the way it is addressed becomes problematic when a traditional signifier becomes repeated, relocated, and translated in the guise of something that is purported to be a faithful representation of historical context. The repetition of cultural signifiers like stereotypes, can detract from a sense of a culture's origin and possibly diminish a culture's traditions, sense of history, and social struggles among other things. Allowing cultural signifiers to be placed in an authoritative light based on artificial constructs, creates the potential for homogenization of perceptions of language, cultural symbols, icons, and identity. Diminishing a culture's traditions, history, and identity creates the potential for hegemonic forces to undermine a culture's sense of self, place, and time. Preconceived notions that result from misconceptions of how a given culture defines their customs, traditions, language, and identity can be a misleading factor in

⁵² A derogatory word that is used to refer to Latinos born in the U.S.

⁵³ To have become like a white person

⁵⁴ A Latino who is only able to speak English and is unable to speak Spanish.

poor implementation of multicultural curricula. The interpretation of cultural identity is not a simple act of communication between signifier and signified. Meaning, understanding, and reconstruction of texts requires interpretation from a liminal space through which the general structure of identity cultural knowledge, and cultural meaning is displaced, and placed on a continuously expanding path (Bhabha, 2003).

Self-determination, decolonialism, or reconstructionism, all based on attempts by oppressed cultural groups over dominant institutions of power, are fraught with obstacles. Cultural signifiers that give the false impression as representative texts with little or no context or critical examination serve to undermine these struggles and further increase homogenization or disenfranchisement. As this occurs, conflicts increase between people from subjugated cultural groups and those dominant cultural members who are in positions of power. When this occurs, stereotypic signifiers serve as representations that are continually iterated as outsiders are used to represent insiders and vice versa. Again, colonialism sets up the possibility to view individuals and cultural collectives in terms of binary oppositions; cultures are defined by those traits that are not evident in dominant culture, or are viewed as different or inherently inferior to dominant culture. Stereotyping of cultures and practices of subjugation have created and maintained the potency of dominant culture and devalued the importance of cultural identities that do not relate to, or contain significance to the dominant group (Ballengee-Morris, 2003).

7.6 Tú Me Sobras, y Yo Te Falto A Tí⁵⁵

I don't know why he thought this was good; to imitate what foreigners did, as if everything Western were good.

Amy Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife*

My own and my sibling's experience as outsiders in a country that can't decide what to do with us as immigrant Latinos is not a completely isolated and un-relatable one. I do not presume to think that I, nor my siblings, are the only Latinos from immigrant families in the U.S. to have had the pleasure of being shunned by both sides of the border. Growing up in the U.S. gave me a perspective that I experienced as unique and never truly capable of being universal. Although I believed my life to be similar to the experiences of others that I assumed were like me—Latinos from a migrant family—I did not know many of my counterparts in the U.S. did not go to Mormon services, nor had many of them ever known or heard of *Three's Company*, *Happy Days*, or Green River, Wyoming. Likewise, there were those who had never heard of *Hermelinda Linda*⁵⁶, *Aniceto*⁵⁷, *Cantinflas*⁵⁸, *Gordolfo Gelatino*⁵⁹, or *Chespirito*⁶⁰. These were all heroes of my life, all parts of my complex existence. Unlike ants in a colony, we were not all marching towards the same end, nor were we worshipping the same gods and heroes.

⁵⁵ From a Mexican song titled "Ingrata Perfida" about a man who has had enough of being abused emotionally by his lover. This is the last line of the song that literally states "I have too much of you but you need more of me" but translates to "I've had more than enough of you in my life, and only now that I'm gone do you miss me."

⁵⁶ A popular Mexican comic book about a mischievous witch and her adventures.

⁵⁷ A popular Mexican comic book. Aniceto was Hermelinda Linda's nemesis.

⁵⁸ A popular Mexican film character during the Golden Age of Film in Mexico during the 1940s.

⁵⁹ Based on a character in a song, Gordolfo was a sad sack that was made popular by Los Polivoces, a comedy duo in Mexico.

⁶⁰ A character actor who had a very popular string of shows on Mexican television from the 1970s to the early 1990s.

Authentic images of representation become difficult when confronted by cultural identities that do not fit hegemonic norms. Cultural identities exist in liminal spaces, flowing between many different perceptions. When representation is made a part of multicultural curricula, the intent is to create models that have the potential to serve as a remedy for social injustice (Stuhr, 1994). The result is often a perpetuation of the illusion of sameness; individuals are able to understand one another's differences through their similarities.

My sister Maricela makes tortillas every other day. She loves going to *bailes*, *quinceañeras*, *bodas*, and any other occasion where she can go dancing in her dressiest clothes, her pointiest heels, and her shiniest baubles. She has always loved family and cultural traditions, and has embraced being from Mexican heritage. She has found other women around her that share her zeal for Tejano music and burly mustachioed Don Juan's who promise candy and flowers, the occasional beating, and a quick tempered wife at home. These women share in their own sense of being Latina. However different their experiences, they have found a common ground with which to identify, even if it is at the center of a tequila stained dance floor. This Latina identity is theirs and it belongs to them. These women, my sister included, have defined being Latina for themselves. However, this does not mean that it is all inclusive or that every other women from Mexican heritage shares in this identity. In fact, I know that it is not so, at least not for my other sister, nor for my nieces, nor for my aunts, or even my mother. None of them have shared this experience in its totality, but they have shared enough and similar experiences so as to know or be able to connect to some degree with my sister and those who share her idea of being Latina. The important thing is not

that my sister's identifies in a universal sense of being Latina, if there even is one, but how and why she identifies with being Latina. Whether this identity matches popular stereotypes or others' notions of being Latina is irrelevant. To try and make her story, every woman's story, every Latina's story would only serve to further alienate my sister from participating in the discourse of dominant culture; it would only serve to make her, and those like her, into an *other*, relegating her to non-existence, or existence at the expense of her own identity.

The perception of identity becomes stagnant when multicultural curricula homogenize cultural and ethnic groups as indiscernible collectives. When educational practices place identity where dominant cultural traits, traditions, language, and beliefs are rejected, the assumption becomes that these differences are inconsequential, real meaning lies in similarities. The move to treat individuals belonging to a perceived homogenous cultural and ethnic group as part of the same body of heritage creates a colonialist assumption of authentic shared history where none may exist (Britzman, 1998 ; Christian, 1997). Identifying as Latina/o, Chicana/o, Nuyorican, Hispanic, Mexican-American, or American carries allusions to issues that are problematic, though subtle and privileged to members living within these identities. Each group is distinct and is identified as having a continuum of myths and traits that are easily recognizable and often set against the backdrop of dominant culture. Stereotypes survive because hegemonic norms both in dominant society and within specific groups maintain homogenous identities. Dominant society sees a group like Latinos as a homogenous entity, but this perception is sometimes maintained by Latinos as well. These ideas are perpetuated by visual texts that are intent on defining these groups through easily

categorized markers in order to make them distinct from other cultural and ethnic groups; all Latinos come from Mexico and all speak Spanish as distinct from to people who originate in China and speak Mandarin. Defining Latina/o identity in postmodern terms is difficult since the nature of identity is complex and constantly changing. Visual texts make problematic and visible the ongoing nature of Latina/o identities' definition and re-definition. Many individuals that participate in Latina/o representations challenge and confront dominant culture's models for what constitutes this identity. Negotiation is a major factor in constructing identity, and for many Latinas/os is not limited to negotiation with dominant culture, but includes maneuvering through traditional norms. Latinas and Latinos must constantly struggle with unconventional gender roles from within their own culture and throughout dominant culture. Perceptions of non-Latina/o behavior and cultural expression is treated as civil disobedience on both cultural fronts. However, it is important to understand that Latina/o identity cannot be homogenized, least of all in the U.S.

It is fear that often provokes drastic measures, the creation of barriers, walls, fences that creating a physical barrier that mirrors the cultural barrier that has come to separate the one group of people from another. Otherness is created as a result of this process. When positions of power begin to erode or fluctuate between groups, oppressor/oppressed dichotomies become unstable as one group can be one, the other, or both at the same time. As a result, backlash can result in an identity crisis where groups begin to realize that the we/they mentality that otherness brings has a tenuous hold on the authenticity of individuals' cultural associations. Identity crises are evident in places like those between Israel and Palestine, and the U.S. and Mexico,

where they have manifested in border fences, immigration laws, and harsh penalties for illegal transgressions of both. In many cases, especially here in the U.S., otherness is defined by whiteness, or rather, that which falls outside the purview of whiteness. However, otherness exists outside of the U.S. By looking at these examples of how cultural identities cope with otherness in situations, it may be possible to extrapolate how they may work in conflicts of identity within the U.S., such as with Latina/o identity. How otherness is defined in situations, where from an outsider's point of view, there is no perceived difference between cultural groups can illuminate ways in which identity is constructed, what norms are established, and deconstructed and then re-constituted. Sometimes otherness is not defined by mere skin color, race, or ethnicity. Sometimes it is the socio-economic political structure that inform conventions of cultural identity that inevitably lead to the cultural, social, ethnic, and racial diasporas that are evident in places like Israel and Palestine, and currently here, between the U.S. and Mexico (Oquendo, 1998).

7.7 Synopsis—What the Serpent Knew

The personal voice is a political voice and women's everyday reality is informed and shaped by the language, constructed meanings, and cultural and social experiences. Women's personal voice becomes a way of relating incidents of discrimination, exploitation, and oppression that correspond to their understanding of the ideological paradigm that shapes the understanding of self and the construction of identity. It is important to understand personal narrative as a step towards self-discovery

and its synonymy with progress towards developing political, social, and cultural understanding as a whole.

Feminist narrative is one way in which researchers can move away from the disembodied voices left over from data, reports, and books that are often overemphasized as the epitome of validity in research. In suppressing the more disturbing aspects in the representation of individuality within the domain of educational praxis, personalized voice and perspective can be neglected. Feminist narrative allows a researcher to move from viewing personalized voice as a non-academic consequence of the research process towards being viewed as an important part of developing more informed research. A researcher, by being attentive to individualized voices, enables the creation of a broader view in which the social realities of the research participants can be examined, and can foster a deeper understanding. According to Michael Schratz (1993), utilizing feminist narrative has allowed researchers to depart from established and conventional approaches of objectivity, reliability, and validity in order to uncover and gain a deeper insight of everyday activities.

CHAPTER 8

THE TWO BECAME ONE

I'm gonna live forever,
I'm gonna learn how to fly,
High.
I feel it coming together,
People will see me and cry,
Fame.
I'm gonna make it to heaven,
Light up the sky like a flame.
Fame, the movie

8.1 Twilight

I am awake. It is twilight--past the purples and pinks of sunset and on to the indigo of day right before night. The sun had gone, but in its wake there is a barely visible ring of lighter blue around the horizon. Weird light--the time of day that feels as though it is waiting to close its eyes, half asleep and half awake. Thunder rolls in the sky outside. Lightning flashes across the gray and black clouds. A crack of thunder pierces the blackness. It rattles the windows, shaking the knick knacks on the bureau; porcelain dolls creak uneasily in place. Wind bustles through the open window; it is cool and filled with the iron scent of wet earth. It becomes quiet, the calm stillness that comes when air lay uneasily in the sky. The lingering, pulsing stillness that comes as the clouds make up their mind. Another gust pushes past the curtains—and then it hits, a solid wall of water, as though a faucet had been turned on in the sky. It is a solid mass of liquid, forceful, accompanied by the sound of thunder, like a locomotive rushing past a herd of stampeding buffalo. Lightning illuminates the sky, a thousand flashes flickering in the darkness. Hail begins to fall. Little balls of frozen nuisance, pelting the windows, the earth, the trees; it sounds like pebbles being thrown about by a restless wind. It

becomes dark again outside; the only sound is the still rushing sound of falling water. I look outside, at the cacophony of sound and movement, and as I peer in the darkness, my hair stands on edge, goose pimples cover my body, the static electricity pulsing around the air signals what I fear most. A silvery bolt of lightning strikes, so close, that I can feel the electric energy pulse through the air; a ribbon of light enticing, yet fearsome. The phone rings and my heart beats through my chest. I jump at the sound. The door to my room flies open. It is my mother. "Hurry, *mijo* hurry, go with Leticia, the baby is coming and Mari doesn't have a car. Hurry! Before the storm gets worse." "Worse?" I thought to myself, "How could the storm get any worse?" The street was flooded, the rain was pouring, and hail was still falling intermittently. Outside the rain pelted my sister Leticia. I could see her little round body running towards the car, her small though powerful legs willing her steps to part the water, daring the flood to take her away. "Come on!" she yelled over the din, "Let's go. It's almost too late!" Leticia was legally blind, and ordinarily needed someone to drive her at night. Tonight, however, she was in rare form. Fueled by love and worry, she hurled herself into the car and drove towards my sister Maricela's house. Mari lived on a ranch about five miles outside of town. It was a used trailer home in the middle of a large patch of dirt. The flooding water had transformed the area around her home into a large field of muddy earth, pock marked with large eroded sections. There appeared to be a large river that had formed in front of her home as the water found its way through the earth. Rain continued to fall, although the lightning dissipated. The thunder continued to roll, and with each passing, the rain feel as though it were falling harder. The trailer sat, lonely in the darkness, lights

in the windows like eyes that seemed to foretell sadness, curtained and appearing like heavy laden eyelids.

The car rolled in as close as my sister dared. Her door opened, and as she stepped out, her foot sunk into the mud. Each step pushed her girth deeper into the slues of clay, the wet suction gripping her feet as though the earth colluded with the sky to keep her from getting to the trailer. As she plodded through the mud, she reminded me of a Clydesdale, her long braided hair acting as her mane and tail. As she neared the house, the river of water grew, and bent on reaching her sister. She willed herself to break past fear and dared the earth and sky to keep her from her goal. In the distance, Mari appeared in the doorway, hunched over. The pain of labor quickly enveloping her whole body. She stopped at the top of the steps that led to her home, and dropped suddenly to her knees, barely holding on to the railing. She let out a scream, a wail that signaled birth was imminent. As though to echo her cry, or to mock her, the sky belched another round of thunder, and more insistent rain. Leticia waded through the river, the water rushing past her thighs. As my sister screamed and the thunder clapped in harmonious rhythm, my sister caught in the muddy earth, slipped and fell onto her hands and knees. She pushed herself up, and persisted through the water. As she reached her sister, she yelled, "Are you alright?" More thunder clapped, and more labor wails descended. Leticia, through some great force of will, through a great summation of devotion, compassion, and love, lifted my pregnant sister into her arms. Fueled by adrenaline and fear, she carried her. Her legs sank deeper in the mud, and her steps lumbered slower, though no less determined. Across the river of water, slowly, she brought her sister to the vehicle. Guiding her in as carefully as possible, soaked and

muddied beyond recognition, Leticia drove to the hospital. Amidst the lightning, rain and hail, my sister Marí gave birth to my niece. My sisters would later remember that night and laugh; my niece knew how to make an entrance.

8.2 Camera

Amanda sat in front of the camera. Her hair was wavy and golden brown. Her shoes were dusty. One shoe had a bow hanging by a thread, and the other had lost its bow completely. Lipstick was smudged beyond her lips, looking as though she had eaten over-ripe strawberries in fistfuls, neglecting to aim for her mouth. She looked at the camera, smiled.

“I want to sing,” she said, in the whiny timbre only a child can muster.

“Alright, what do you want to sing?”

“I want to sing a song...just let me sing okay,” she answered, smiling even brighter, lipstick now clinging to her teeth.

“Okay then sing.”

In a voice, soft and gentle, barely audible, Amanda began to sing, “The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout...”

“You have to sing louder; it’s hard to hear.”

“Okay, let me start again...the itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout...” she began again, this time, even quieter than the first time.

And from the background, like the clapping of horse hooves, a rustley and bustley little figure tumbled in, hair as wild and unkempt as its owner, with a dirty little face, and a mischievous smile to match.

“No Amanda, you gotta sing like this, THE ITSY BITSY SPIIIIIIDDEERRR, WENT UP THE WAAAAAATER SPOUT!” sang Elizabeth, Amanda’s younger sister, in no way remotely close to the correct notes.

Amanda wanted to be a model, an actress, and a singer/songwriter. As a child she loved being in front of the camera. After my father received a video camera for his birthday, every day when my niece came to visit, she would go to my mother’s room, and begin her transformation in front of the camera. Some days she was Madonna, and other days she was Julia Roberts. Her favorite songs were from an album by Linda Ronstadt called *Canciones de Mis Padres*, in which she reconnected with her Latino heritage and included songs from traditional Mexican music. My niece loved that album and would constantly want to sing those songs on camera. Often, she would be displeased with her own particular rendition.

“No, I didn’t like that one. Let me do it over again, pleeeeeeease,” she would plead.

Usually, the routine was that Amanda would stand and emulate the graceful moves she interpreted from watching music videos on television. As she sang, she would break intermittently.

“Ok, let me see.”

“But you’re not finished. Finish the song first then you can see.”

“No, but I want to make sure I do it right.”

“It’s ok, it doesn’t have to be perfect.”

“Yuh huh, it does, I wanna be a star. If it doesn’t look good how am I gonna be famous. Pleeeeeeease, let me look. I won’t do it more than once I promise.”

“Ok, but then you have to finish.”

“I will, and then you’ll see. I’ll do it real good.”

Of course, it was never good enough for her. There was always something missing. Always something that needed to be changed.

“Oh, I know, I’ll be right back,” she said, a smile in her voice as she disappeared into my mother’s room once more.

When Amanda returned, she was wearing quite a bit more make-up, blush on her cheeks that looked as though she had been slapped with a candy apple, mascara that covered her eyelids more than her lashes, and lipstick that was mostly on her lips. She had also managed to rummage through my mother’s closet to find the highest pair of heels she could, and stumbled in.

“Ok, now I’m ready. This will make it better,” and she began to sing once more.

Amanda always wanted to be tall. One of her dreams was to one day become a fashion model and be on the cover of *Vogue* or *Elle* magazine, which she bought every time she saved enough allowance. Although she knew many of the models’ names by heart, Linda Evangelista was her idol. Genetics was hard for her to understand.

Amanda did not know that she would never be tall, and without a lot of hard work, she would always be a little *gordita*⁶¹. Her skin tone would always be the color it is, no matter how much she tried to avoid the sun. Her vision for herself was tinted by the world she saw in magazines, on television, and in the movies. One of the things she remembers most is her early obsession with Ariel from Disney’s the little mermaid.

“I loved Ariel. She was smart and I loved the way that she sang. Plus she was beautiful. I wanted to look like her so much. Skinny, with long beautiful hair and pretty

⁶¹ A diminutive form of fat girl. Usually used as a term of endearment.

eyes, and in the end, she got her dream,” Amanda recounted during one of our conversations.

Her ideas of beauty were often challenged, however, when confronted by the different faces of the women that surrounded her in her home life. My sister, Leticia, and my niece were similar pieces of cloth in the family quilt, if not the same, then at least the same color. They were inseparable as my niece grew into adulthood. Throughout her life, Leticia was there for her, indulging her often childlike and naïve ideas, gently nudging her to be more realistic. The relationship between my niece and her aunt was very much like the one I had with my sister. Afternoons after school were spent in each other’s company, drifting between conversation and reading. Leticia was the center of my niece’s world, and soon, her influence became the strength upon which my niece drew when confronting her identity and defining her sense of self in the midst of angst ridden teen-age years.

8.3 Defiance

Amanda was standing in the doorway, her back to the conversations in the kitchen. My family had gathered for her thirteenth birthday, and many of my mother’s relatives were there, languishing attention upon my niece. My mother’s voice carried over the din of laughter, music, and chewing.

“Amanda, your aunt is talking to you. She asked you how you did in school,” she said to the impassive shoulders and hoodie covered head. My niece did not respond, and the doorway became a little darker, the cheer, in the kitchen, dissipated a little.

“Amanda, I asked you a question. Turn around and respond, join the party. It’s

for you, so the least you can do is come and talk with your aunts. They've missed you, and they came just for you," she continued, her voice a little more assertive, piercing the thunder as it moved through clouds on the precipice of a storm. The rumble was distant, but the clouds grew darker. My mother moved towards my niece.

"I'm only going to ask you once more, either join the party or go away. And don't come back until you've fixed whatever problem you're having. I don't want to see you again until you have a better look on your face. I don't want to see you frowning in front of your relatives. They didn't do anything to you and they didn't come to see you with that ugly look on your face."

My niece turned around. She had tweezed her eyebrows to the point of non-existence. All that remained was a very thin high arch. Her lips were lined in lip liner, a dark and unflattering red, and her eyes were lined in a way that emulated comic book heroines from the late fifties and early sixties. She wore base make-up that was a shade lighter than her actual skin tone, in an attempt to create a purposeful mask-like quality. Her look emulated the *chola* and signified that she was in touch with Latino culture, gang culture, and defiance. My mother hated that look. In her eyes, it stood only to create distance between generations and would remark incessantly that girls today didn't understand the struggle that Latinos in America underwent and continue to experience in the present day. My niece was adamant that she understood more than my mother did about being a Latina in America.

In a voice that betrayed her composure, trembling with fear, anger and sadness, "Coy⁶²! Don't tell me what to do. Look at you all here. You don't even care about what

⁶² A nickname for my mother which is a diminutive form of Socorro.

they're doing to you. You just sit there taking their crap without even thinking for yourselves!"

My mother, a look of shock upon her face, responded as only a matriarch could, "Someone take this girl away from here. She can be as upset as she wants, but she isn't going to spoil the fun for everyone else. Amanda, I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't care either. You can just go away until you've fixed whatever is bothering you. And if you don't come back that's fine with me; we'll just enjoy your party without you."

Now, enraged and defiant, my niece shouted back in tears, "You're the worst one of them all. Why do you let people use you? You can't even speak English right. Aren't you embarrassed to talk to people when they make fun of the way you talk behind your back. And look at Aunt Delia; she's fat, short, and dark. People make fun of her too; they think she's an Indian or something. They call her ugly behind her back. 'Oh look at that fat lady. She's such a fat, lazy Mexican. I bet she eats a lot of beans and tortillas. She's a fat taco eating beaner.' That's what they say about her. They say you can't even speak right, they make fun of your accent, and then when you go out, they laugh at the way that you dress." Tears streamed down her face, her mascara running like little rivulets of ebony upon her cheeks.

My mother responded, never breaking into anger, but her tone, mixed with years of maternal training, was grave nonetheless,

You know what? You don't know anything. One day you'll see how badly you've hurt your aunt. You may think that you've hurt me, but you haven't said anything I didn't already know. In fact, I've heard worse, and to my face. You think I don't know what people think of me? I know. I don't care, and you shouldn't either. I don't care because I know who I am. The only person that I have to live with is myself. I think you're mad because you don't like yourself. Well, you know what, I

don't like you right now either. Maybe when you figure out who you are you'll understand what you've done here. I feel sorry for you right now. You don't know anything about the women you've just insulted. You think we're just here, painted on the walls, waiting to do whatever our husbands tell us to do. Think again. We put up with the name calling, the insults, and the disgrace so that our children can have a better life. Be glad that they're only bad mouthing us and not you. I can live with it so long as my children can find a life where they are respected, and at least respect themselves. You don't respect your family dressing like that and acting like that. As long as you don't respect your family, you don't respect me. If you don't respect me, then you need to go away.

With that, my mother finished, turned back towards the family in the kitchen, and they resumed their merriment, now tinged with discussions of "kids these days" and "you have to be patient" and "they need to learn to respect their elders" mingled in-between. Solemnly, still sniffing, my niece had gone into my mother's room, and sat on the bed. I went to her.

"What's wrong *mija*⁶³? Why did you have to yell like that?" I asked, trying to calm the storm.

She responded between sniffles, "Don't you see? I hate the way they get treated by the people outside, and worse by their own family members. I don't want to be like Delia. I hate the way they treat her; she's practically a servant. How am I going to keep that from happening to my little sister? My mom is the same; she's weak. So it's up to me to protect Liza, and they're already starting to try to turn her into one of them—making her do things that she doesn't want to do, making her go to *quinceañeras* and *bailes* so that she can meet a guy. They want to turn her into one of them. I'm not going to let them." She feared what she did not understand. Family members were not the same from her perspective; they were not equal. Aunts were treated like servants, and what was worse, they were mistreated both from within the family and the outside world.

⁶³ A diminutive meaning "my little girl" in Spanish.

8.4 Quinceañera

High school brought a new outlook for Amanda. Here, she began to explore the multiplicity that was her identity. She played in the band, trying her hand at playing music. She was obsessed with getting good grades, and she was obsessed with fitting in and resisting at the same time. During her fifteenth year, the Mexican custom of celebrating a girl's coming of age presented a problem for Amanda, who had begun to explore ideas of feminism and equality thanks in part to my sister Leticia, who had allowed her to accompany her to several of her women's studies courses at the local community college. When it came time for her to celebrate her fifteenth birthday, my niece broke with convention. Originally, Amanda was determined to forego the celebration and instead have a small party with her friends. She didn't care about silly old outdated traditions. Only after Leticia intervened, did she reconsider. Although Leticia was fervent in her pursuit of feminine equality, her belief remained that preserving traditions sometimes superseded personal convictions. Customarily, a celebrant must be escorted by a boy her same age, a throw back to when the celebration acted as a betrothal. Traditionally the quinceañera celebration acted as a mock wedding ceremony, complete with fifteen ladies in waiting and their escorts. Amanda chose not to have the required number of escorts and ladies; instead, her *quinceañera* party consisted of her best friends, and her escort, the girl she had been dating. My mother, though displeased with her choice of escort, did not stand in her way, a compromise to celebrating with the family versus not celebrating at all. Her party was dressed non-traditional. My niece having begun to embrace her Goth persona donned a black dress and severe make-up, and her escort dressed in a suit that would

have easily be appropriate in Dracula's castle. Her choice of escort embodied my niece's budding sense of self, her growing understanding, and eventual melding of cultures. She was living in more than one liminal space. Both existing in the world as a woman of Mexican heritage and American conventions, and living the in-between states of straight and gay. The other member of her party, her best friend, was a boy with whom she was romantically involved. She considered both her escort and her friend to be an equal part of her life.

Sexuality, in her view, is not something that is easily categorized. She believes all people are at least a little bit gay and a little bit straight; she thinks all people fit in the middle and that they would be a lot happier if they admitted it to themselves. "I think people are both. They just don't want to admit it because they think it's dirty or weird," she said when I asked about sexuality.

"What about you? Where do you fit in? Are you gay? Bi? Or something else?" I asked.

Uneasiness tinged her response, though it wasn't due to embarrassment or reluctance to adhere to some prescriptive convention that required her to feel ashamed or deviant. Trying to describe her own sexuality was difficult because she could not articulate completely what she felt.

"I don't think it has to with genitalia. It's not as easy as just I have a cooter and I like girls so I must be a lesbian. Like Marge Simpson said, 'It's not about who has the same hoo-hoo or ha-ha.' It's deeper. It's about how you feel about who you feel about. That's all that matters-- is feelings," she finally responded.

My sister Leticia added, “Well, I don’t know about that. I think it’s not as nebulous as that. I think people know if they’re gay or not; they may not be honest to themselves, but they know. They don’t start out gay and then change their mind most of the time. It’s usually the other way around.”

My niece responded, “What about bi-sexuals?”

My sister responded, in her usual, matter-of-fact voice, “There’s no such thing as bisexuals. They’re just people who aren’t that picky. Most of the time men just have sex with other men because women are hard; men are easy.”

8.5 Bigfoot

Amanda’s belief that sexuality is not something that is easily described became evident throughout her life. All people are open to possibilities. All that stands in the way are popular notions of what is “supposed” to be and how people are “supposed” to act. Although in trying to describe her own sexuality she encountered some difficulty, she remained resolute in refusing to label herself one way or another. Sexually she did not identify with being gay, straight, lesbian, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or anything as concrete or fixed. Labels were not sufficient to describe the complexity of human emotion. She understood herself, and that was enough.

A feminist living in a culture that prizes archetypal femininity creates a problematic existence for women who are unable to meet those standards. My niece is a woman living, at least partially, in such a culture. Although her family is matriarchal, there are still conventional norms by which its members are expected to function. A woman’s strength is found within their capacity to be a mother, and to some extent,

through their ability to choose a man that will provide well for her and her family. Her worth is tied to her home and those that reside within. When Amanda married, she retained her own name, a tradition within our immediately family that began with my sisters, who both refused to adopt their husbands' names. She remained herself. Breaking with tradition was the norm for Amanda. She married at twenty-one, quite older than any of the other women in her family. When she had her son, she broke with tradition again, and gave him both of her last names instead. When asked why she did that and how her husband felt she responded, "Well, when he gives birth, he can name the baby whatever he wants. Since I'm the one that went through the trouble, then I can name him whatever I want. That way, the baby will know he's mine." Her ideas about marriage were strongly influenced by both her aunt and her mother. When she saw them, she saw two women that were strong, but so unhappy. She stated,

I didn't want to be like my mother, getting beaten all the time and having to live the Mexican way. And I didn't want to be like Tisha, married to a guy that she has to take care of because he's sick all the time. Man, I think she's the most unhappy. She had to sacrifice everything, even her job just so she could stay home and take care of him. I tried to tell her she could always get a divorce. Just look at Dorothy [a reference to the Golden Girls]. She got divorced after thirty-eight years of marriage to Stan, and she did just fine. If she can do it, anyone can.

What she did not understand was the auspice that divorce created for a woman from a traditional Mexican household. For her, divorce was something a woman could enter in as easily as marriage.

Unlike many of the women in her family, Amanda believed the answer to life's dilemmas could be found in logic; she has chosen mathematics/chemistry as her major course of study. The answer to being unhappy is finding what makes you happy and leaving behind your troubles. Her desire for logical answers led her to pursue a degree

in chemistry, with a minor in mathematics. In numbers, she found a way to understand the world. She preferred logic, patterns, and numbers to the flaky uncertainty of the arts.

“I used to have a teacher that used to say there could never be any mistakes in art.”

Least favorite of her college coursework was art appreciation, of which she had to say,

I like looking at art, but I don't like talking about art or learning about art. It just seems like people make it up as they go along. At least with numbers, you can see where you've been and where you're going, and when you make a mistake, you just erase it. Unlike art, there's a solution. Art doesn't have any answers, just more questions.

Like her mother, Marí, she is paradoxical in her nature. Although she enjoys the practicality that numbers have to offer, she also indulges her interests in conspiracy theories, cryptozoology, and the existence of aliens. “Did you see that special on Nostradamus and 2012? It was so cool. I wonder if the world really is going to end, or if it's just some sort of mis-interpretation. You know, I watched this other show that talked about the Maya, and they made it seem like they didn't believe the Earth was going to explode but just that things were going to change. Which do you think?” she asked me. “I don't know Manda, what will happen to all the Bigfoots? They'll be homeless,” I said, the sarcasm masked only slightly through the smile on my face. “Oh I know. We need to start a campaign to save all the Bigfoots. Like a Facebook page or something to get the word out there. Save the Bigfoots!” she exclaimed, with renewed excitement. For that moment, like the split second when a butterfly first leaves its cocoon, when steam condenses into water, she was both the child I remembered singing in front of the camera, and the woman the child had become. The two became one, and I smiled.

8.6 Synopsis

Is this the real life?
Is this just fantasy?
Caught in a landslide,
No escape from reality
Open your eyes, look up to the skies and see,
I'm just a poor boy, I need no sympathy
Because I'm easy come, easy go, little high, little low,
Any way the wind blows doesn't really matter to me.
Freddie Mercury, "Bohemian Rhapsody"

Amanda was very close to my sister Leticia. They were inseparable, to the point where many thought she was her daughter and not her niece. Leticia's influence over my niece was very great, although it was even difficult for her to try and make my niece understand the importance of traditions, which not only included cultural practices, but traditions that developed creativity, and artistic thinking. The first movie that my niece went to was *The Little Mermaid*, which had been one of my sister's favorite stories while growing up. It was her idea to take her, although, at the time, going to the movies was a luxury. But, my sister persevered in trying to maintain my niece's childhood for as long as she could. Her biggest fear was that she would be forced to become a woman too quickly, having seen too many of our cousins fall into adult circumstances at an early age. My sister too had felt robbed of her childhood, having been forced to act as an adult well before she was truly capable.

Like my two sisters, Amanda also did not identify with being Latina, or Chicana, or Mexican-American, Mexican, or Hispanic. Though she flirted with chola identity for a while in her early teens, she explained later how and why she adopted that style of expression.

Well, my cousins were dressing like that, and I really wanted to fit in. I thought what they were doing was really cool--the way that they scared people at school. No one really messed with them, and so I wanted to feel that way too. I wanted people to be afraid of making fun of me, because I was dressed the way that I was. They thought we all did drugs or were in some kind of gang. Even the boys were afraid of us. I never thought about dressing like that until one day I was visiting my cousin and she said I looked to wimpy. That I needed to represent *la raza* because I looked too much like the nerdy white girls at school. She said people were going to think I was ashamed of being Mexican. I didn't think I was, but I did like the feeling of being a part of something less white. I didn't think I was white, and I didn't want people to think that I thought that. But after a while, I didn't feel like I really fit into being a *chola*. I hated listening to rap music, and I really hated the way that they spoke; they sounded like they were stupid or uneducated. And even though it was cool to have people be afraid of you, I didn't really think it was cool. Plus, it felt like I was trading being white for being Mexican, and I wasn't either one.

I asked her what it meant to her to be a *chola*. She responded, "Well, Tish says a *chola* is woman that is like a gangster. They're usually really slutty, and act real tough. You know, like Titi--how she's all ghetto and acts real tough. They're usually on drugs and act retarded at school." I asked her, why she thought that. She replied, "well, besides what Tish says, you see them on the Spanish channels all the time. They're really thuggy girls and they usually have ridiculous make up, you know, like on the pictures we found on the internet. You know, the ones that make fun of the girls with the sharpie eyebrows. It's funny because that's what they look like."

"So how do you see yourself, now?" I asked.

"I'm a man, d'uh! Don't you remember Andy," she laughed at the pun she came up with as a child. "No, really though, I am just me. I'm an American, and if other people don't see me that way that's their problem. But really, no one has ever really asked me or corrected me. They probably just look at me and can't figure out what I am. I like that. It keeps them guessing."

“So how do you identify yourself? When people confront you about being Mexican and not speaking Spanish?” I asked.

“I was embarrassed at one time because so many of the Mexican people get after me because I don’t speak Spanish that well. They say well, you should speak Spanish. It’s your culture; it’s your language. They kind of put me on the spot. I think my culture is a mix. I think that the Mexican culture and the American culture are mixed. I’m both, but neither one at the same time. Do you know what I mean? You remember that movie, the *Dark Crystal*, the one with the puppets and things. You know how the good guys and the bad guys were part of the same being, only they had been split apart. Well in the end, when they came together, that’s how I feel. Like I’m both of those things, but something else entirely too-- not just one, or the other.”

CHAPTER 9

RESISTANCE IS FUTILE

When I dream at night—I dream of flight. I hover over waves of yellow and green. There are people swimming, wading, bobbing up and down amongst the sea of ochre, wrapped in bleached and faded clothes, wisps of red bandanas whip around sunburned faces. As I float high above, I feel the sun, and it sends waves of balmy warmth that in any other environment would feel welcome, soothing, and sought after. Here, however, the sun becomes a blanket, a quilt weighed down by sweat and fatigue, an anchor that becomes heavier and heavier as the day progresses. The sun is a yoke and the bags the people fill are their ball and chain. As they wade through their patron's fields, pausing only so often to wipe a brow, crack their back, or pull a splinter from an aching palm, their only respite from the monotony of sun, heat and pain is a passing breeze. Within that breeze, I bob and flit; my mind's eye sees the whole of it. Suddenly, I stop to stare, and I see myself. I'm standing there amongst the weeds. My clothes are bleached, my skin dark, tanned, and leathery. My dream is not a dream, but a memory. I am not dreaming, I am there, in that field, full of a thousand little green torturers each demanding attention.

Night came, the coolness of the cement floor seeping through the quilts upon which I lay was a welcoming respite from the heat billowing in the dark stuffy room. My aunts, like hulking mounds of snoring flesh, cradled me in the crevasse between their bulk, adding to the heat of the room. The curtains moved lazily in the summer breeze as though they were too hot to move. I smelled the scented air, peeking through the odor of stale smoke, old coffee, and feet. The lazy susans mixed their sweetness with the

scent of mint and alfalfa; it was so enticing. Together, they beckoned, whispering their sweetness in the breeze, calling me out into the night. I pried myself loose from the tourniquet of quilts, sheets, and flesh that held me in place. Quietly I walked through the house, passing through the mine field of uncles, aunts, and cousins. As deftly as I could, I opened the back door, which wasn't easy as it creaked and groaned crankily as I forced it to move in the heat. The screen door beyond it was no less irritable, its rusty spring sounding more metallic and begrudging than usual. Once outside, I found the mixture of heat emanating from the earth and the coolness wafting off of the alfalfa fields intoxicating. There, beyond the old tree swing that my uncles had made for me, the alfalfa waved to me, like old friends. Barefoot, I crossed the ditch that bounded the property like a moat, and walked into the field. I looked up, there were so many stars, no moon, and no clouds. I looked up and found the big dipper, which my aunt had always called the cart, and the other constellations familiar only to me and my family, as we created our own patterns out of the disarray of silver in the night sky. The night fell upon me like an ebony blanket, full of humid warmth. A moment passed as the billowy breeze floated past my moist skin; it felt like a thousand fingers gently brushing past me, patting me gently in reassurance. Air filled my lungs as I took a deep breath, and the stillness broke with waves of green gently waxing and waning in the seeming eternal nothingness of summer nights. I exhaled. As breath left my lungs I imagined it pulsing through the fields of vegetation before me, as though breathing upon a cup of coffee to keep it cool. I watched the alfalfa ripple before me. Calm once again overtook the field as the breeze seemed to be dying. Looking up once more to the cart in the sky, I took yet another deep breath, filling my lungs with night. I ran. I ran across that field of green

that earlier was my yoke and master. Faster and faster, my lungs bursting with prickly floral scented needles, I ran until my legs ached from pounding barefoot on the cool moist earth. I ran, as far and as long as I could, until the porch light that crowned the front door to my grandmother's house lay winking in the distance, a fallen star on the horizon. My body collapsed on the cool, wet earth and vegetation, my eyes staring upward towards the firmament. My eyes scanned the sky, looking for the pattern, that familiar pattern in the sky that I felt was only mine and mine alone, and I found him, Orion, sitting low on the horizon. He was the pillar upon which I hung my hopes and dreams, the embodiment of the strength I wished to possess-- the ideal, the man, my lover. Together, Orion and I, spent the night, he would listen to my troubles, to my silent whispers of regret, despair, and even quieter hopes and aspirations. He would say nothing, his response only the twinkling virility that echoed throughout my mind; he was the strong silent type. As he sank lower, readying himself for bed, I would mourn and think about tomorrow, when we would be together once more. The lilac twilight of dawn began to trickle over the field. The shackles beckoned, and I would have to run home and begin my argument with the sun once again. I bid goodbye to my friend, my confidant, as my bare feet carried me home, pounding to the beat of the crowing rooster. The toll had rung, and back into a pumpkin I would turn. There was no escape, from the rooster's call. How I hated those birds, as though their own incarceration was just cause to mock. They were the master's horn, calling us to another day. I could not resist. No matter how far I ran, the day would always catch me, the sun, was always faster.

9.1 Evolve or Perish

We are the Borg. Lower your shields, and surrender your ship. We will add your biological and technological distinctiveness to our own. Your culture will adapt to service ours. Resistance is futile.

Star Trek: First Contact

Night time in the rural farmland blanketed the sky in pitch black. All was darkness save the lamp posts, where my grandmother's house stood. The stars lay like pinholes in a velvety blanket shining bright and crisp, as though a giant hand had thrown fistfuls of silver glitter into the air. Many nights after a hot summer day of working, we would sit outside in the cool darkness, talk, laugh, play and look at the stars. Our favorite spot was on the hood of my grandfather's '67 Chevy pickup truck. There we would clamor for a spot, near my aunt who sat on the hood, the warmth of the sun still radiating off of the light blue metal. Carefully so not to scratch the paint on the truck, we would circle my aunt Lupe's great girth. She would tell us about the constellations, picking out the most prominent ones, and relating their stories. She would tell us about the old man who, because of pride and greed, was condemned to pull around a cart that was full of sustenance, but when hunger prodded him, the cart would empty as he turned for food. Later, in a science class, I was corrected rather abruptly that this constellation was better known as the Big Dipper. She would tell us about the great cross in the sky, a reminder of faith, and the crown, the promises of afterlife's rewards. My favorite was the strong man who sacrificed himself and held up the sky. He held the abyss at bay for the love of his children and wife so that they would live happily without fear of death.

As I lay back, listening to the tales of constellations, I would think about traversing the stars, like the travelers on *Buck Rogers*, *Star Trek*, or *Battlestar*

Gallactica. I would lay back and stare into the speckled blackness and imagine myself booming through the universe aboard a Starfleet vessel. My aunt was the person to introduce me to Gene Roddenbury's universe of utopian congeniality in *Star Trek*, well defined hierarchic roles, and green women. She and I adored this show, eagerly setting aside chores and braving my grandmother's stern and eager reprimands for us to continue working. The show was unlike anything I could imagine, even though, at the time, I really didn't understand what was occurring, both linguistically and conceptually. All I knew was that the future looked exciting, new, and indifferent to poverty.

9.1.1 Ethnography

It is important to note that in both anthropology and education, there is a lack of consensus as to the true all encompassing definition of what comprises ethnography and its meaning often intersects other research approaches (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Hymes, 1996). Ethnography is a form of research focusing on the sociology of meaning through close field observation of socio-cultural phenomena which has its roots in anthropology (Newman & Benz, 1998). Typically, the ethnographer focuses on a community, not necessarily that of a geographic nature, selecting informants who are known to have an overview of the activities of the community, which for the purposes of this study, have been identified as my mother, my two sisters and my niece (Hymes, 1996 ; Winthrop, 1991).

The participants in an ethnographic study can all be members of a cultural, ethnic, or gender group and may act as informants that identify others representative of this group (Hymes, 1996). In an ethnographic study one is able to use multiple forms of

sampling. Members of the cultural group can be interviewed and observed by the researcher in order to obtain common cultural understandings on a subject or phenomena. Ethnography is a way to explore the social interactions, everyday situations, common language, traditions, and beliefs in an ongoing process which is recorded in descriptive detail (Newman & Benz, 1998).

The ethnographic descriptive approach to exploring common cultural understanding among the group is interpreted by the researcher and may be more significant than numerical quantitative data (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Through ethnography the exploration of the communication, interaction, and shared belief systems within the cultural group being studied can provide a more meaningful, vivid, and relevant view of the research participants and may more fully answer the research questions. Ethnographic research can be used to show the differences between reality and the expectations or assumptions of those outside of a specified community. The approach to this research can be emic, which allows us to gain an understanding of others' culture by providing an "insider's perspective," or etic, which describes behaviors as those outside a community view them.

When thinking of ethnographic research, I picture myself as a member of Starfleet, on an away mission to some exotic planet, full of oddly pigmented humanoids. In this scenario, one of our team members has unfortunately been chosen by the retro-humans to be wined, dined, and then dined upon. It is their way, they honor their friends in a cannibalistic ritual by which they aim to become closer, intimate in the most extreme way. I wonder, do I save the fleet member from an untimely demise, or do I remain passive, a non-intrusive observer? Is it even possible to remain an interloper on

the outside of the individuals being studied, or is the researcher's presence enough to inexorably change the participants? Although the example based on a campy science fiction show is somewhat facetious in nature, it is nonetheless my feeling concerning cultural study. Whose right is it to inflict upon a developed cultural practice one's own ideals and beliefs, nevertheless altruistically intended, that may lead to inevitable oppression? I am reminded of the Aztecs whose lives and beliefs were irrevocably altered by a people that did not understand them. In a way, the Aztec culture was devoured by a group whose understanding of their practices was inaccurate. Like Starfleet, the conquistadores came to the Aztec's home, and before an attempt to understand the people which they encountered, instead chose to obliterate what they did not understand. The consumption of culture is a practice that is often found in ethnographic research practices. A critical ethnographic study recognizes the possibility that research practices centered around the study of cultural groups make a researcher's role difficult to remain passive. It may be possible, through participation, that views are superimposed on the participants and that a reciprocity of ideas and voice occur between researcher and researched.

9.1.2 Critical Ethnography

Central to critical ethnography is the investigation of the relationships between knowledge, power, gender, perceived truths, social justice, and positions in the world.

As Madison (2005)states:

the phrase 'knowledge is power' reflects how narrow perception limited modes of understanding, and uncritical thinking diminish the capacity to envision alternative life possibilities...Knowledge is power relative to social justice,

because knowledge guides and equips us to identify, name, question and act against the unjust. (p. 6)

Critical ethnography acknowledges the subjectivity of interpretation and the reciprocity that subjectivity creates in the role of the researcher in terms of representing the *other*. The researcher and the researched are not subjects unconnected from one another in the research process, but rather, act in unison, in dialogue with one another. The multiplicity of voices and viewpoints is connected within the dialogue, each, researcher and researched, informing the other's viewpoints and altering the course of the research as it progresses. The research participants are as much a formative part of the research as the researcher. Lives are altered from the mere process of research, and this influence is inevitable as both researcher and research intersect one another's lives. Though the research begins and ends, and the researcher moves on, the effects of the research linger on in the lives of both participants. Critical ethnography addresses the nature of the research process, and no longer views participants in the light of static existence. Both researcher and researched are not perceived in contexts of unchanging fixed states of being, nor is it possible to completely know everything from one viewpoint. Fluctuating states of existence are integral to both critical ethnography and poststructuralist philosophy wherein they both seek to investigate how language and action combine to make meaning, and both underscore the potential for the reciprocity of power between subjugation and liberation. A researcher reflects and examines the power centers that serve to inhibit, repress, and constrain culture, knowledge, and action. The aim of critical ethnography is to investigate the hidden agendas that exist to create dissonance between dominant cultures and those they suppress (Thomas, 1993). The reflective process that occurs between researcher and researched in a

critical ethnography examines possibilities, seeks to keep culture open rather than contain it within a bounded set of systemic norms. Critical ethnography is about questioning those norms and the political purposes they serve. Metaphor within critical ethnographic studies are used as mechanisms in which the intent to obviate knowledge and ways of seeing is shifted in preference of creating analogues that reveal subtle qualities of social control (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnography considers the interrelationship between structural constraints and agency and the places within discourses of emancipation found within groups that experience alienated identities (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2008).

9.2 The Carrion Eaters

The sea of blue before us met the earth in a field of red. It was as though the ocean had turned on end, broken by small waves of wispy clouds. Citrusy sage scented the air that flitted and danced across the desert-like plain. Mountains in the distance, echoed the blue in the sky, mixed with lavenders, greens, and white, standing as islands on the tundra. The smell was clean and crisp, as though the desert had only recently showered. We walked, my family and I, amongst the cedar and sage, the gravelly ground beneath crunching under the weight of our footsteps. Over a small hill, the lemony, herbal breeze mingled with another, more uncommon smell, like charcoal mixed with burning paper, plastic, and wood-- a sharp unflattering smell. The smell of decay, of dirty diapers, old food, rotting fodder and the sickly sweet of carrion; like meat that had spoiled and rolled in a sewer and mixed with sugar. The closer we walked, aiming towards the smoke that now peered over the hill, the smell became stronger,

more smoky, acidic, and piercing. The ground became sandy, muddy, and sticky. The air now smelled like a belching inferno, mixed with the sickly sweet smell of decay. We walked down the winding paths that intersected the manmade heaps of refuse. All around were the discarded broken bones of domesticity-- toys, furniture, clothing, car parts, dishes. All around there were flecks of color, blues, pinks, yellows, like petals growing between the charred earth. Slowly we meandered, perusing the bits and pieces of someone else's life. My siblings and I enjoyed our time there, sifting through discarded memories. As we walked around, my keen eye settled on a bit of brilliant, translucent plastic, the color of sky and water, a blue so enticing I had to get closer. Blue fractured light flicked on the ground, as I kicked the bit of plastic from its resting place. Like three sapphires, large and beautiful gems linked together one on top of the other. It was a lamp, the most beautiful I had seen. Carefully I picked it up, examining as the fixture turned in my hands. Appearances indicated that there was nothing wrong with the lamp, all seemed intact save for the wobbly light bulb socket. I was happy. Smiling and giddy with my find, I carried the lamp to my father, for his inspection, hoping that nothing other than the obvious was wrong. His leather fingers twisted the lamp's cord, prodded at the connections between each of the three gems that made up its base, and finally, wriggled the socket to see if it could be repaired. I was delighted, a slight nod indicated that at some time tonight, my lamp would cease to be refuse and become a treasure. Skipping, hopping, happy to have my prize, I met up with my siblings, each of whom had also found a piece of happiness; a dollhouse with most of its walls intact, a toy fire engine with a lot of rust but all of its wheels. Even my mother had found a box of old rags, someone's quilting project entombed in cardboard and

cobwebs. We acted as archaeologists, mining the past of others and appropriating the artifacts that no longer held value for them, ascribing values of our own. We looted, pillaged and plundered, as well as recovered and preserved these bygone objects. As the purple of the evening sky, encroached upon the manmade hills, we walked back to the truck where we would stash our haul and await the next treasure hunt.

9.2.1 Visual Culture

Based on the work of Mirzoeff (1999), the idea that things communicate meaning is a prevailing theory in visual culture. Objects like furniture, packaging, clothing, homes, magazines, and even landscapes among others aspects can be considered signs and subject to be read as texts (Tilley, 2008). Meanings found in objects can reflect the cultural dynamics that are part of poststructuralist and postmodernist theories; objects are no longer static things equivocal to the fluctuating nature of culture, identity, and texts. The agency of people in reflecting power/knowledge relationships is part of the processes of interpretation of visual culture. Texts found in the material world are accessed through the use of metaphor. Metaphor, both in material culture and narrative inquiry, reflects the way that individuals make sense of the world. Images along with other interrelated representations are part of the visuality where meanings are constructed from experiences and mediated through cultural and social perceptions. Individuals are capable of creating metaphors that are infinitely generative in their perpetuity of meaning construction (Gibbs, 1994; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; Tilley, 2002). The use of metaphor continues in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry and visual culture make use of metaphor in order to convey multidimensional expressions that

serve to keep discourses open rather than contain them in closed systems of knowledge. Facilitating meaning construction, metaphors contribute to the relationship between what is viewed and how it is viewed, what is seen and how it is seen, what is known and how it is known; these perceptions weigh into ways of knowing about the world reflected in the meanings that are ascribed to things. Things acquire value because they have meaning, though not intrinsically, and that meaning is inherited, constructed, imposed and resisted simultaneously (Giddens, 1984).

9.2.2 The Relationship of Narrative to Critical Ethnography

Narrative inquiry helps locate those sites of resistance that are present in the liminality, the in-between spaces of knowledge, power, and culture. Critical ethnography creates the potential to then critique the narratives that are being told. The stories the women in the study are not viewed as sacrosanct, but as a starting point for critique and introspection. Narrative inquiry examines the discourses that enable the researcher to analyze the multiple ways in which things can be read and understood. The relationship of the researcher to the researched is not ignored in critical ethnography, and within narrative inquiry, the researcher's voice is often intermixed with the participants' voice. Critical ethnography in conjunction with narrative inquiry do not deny the role the researcher has in the final outcome of the study and the way in which the study and narratives are organized. Metaphors are one way in which individuals organize what they know about the world. Narratives utilize metaphor in order to express individual and group understanding of the world in which people live reflecting their beliefs, history and practices. Narrative inquiry, visual culture, and critical ethnography relate to one

another in their use of metaphor, the exploration of the multidimensionality of voice, the relation of power and knowledge, and in their potential and propagation of the political. As Laurel Richardson (1997) put it “as science is the child of metaphor, metaphor is the child of politics” (p. 17).

This type of inquiry utilizes storytelling to refer to the interactive process by which meaning is constructed. Narratives enable participatory interaction between the teller and the audience in a way that the meaning of experience can be more fully articulated and understood. According to Bakhtin, there is no fixed meaning to any narrative; therefore, it is always open to multiple interpretations (Booker, 1995 ; Holquist, 2002). There is a plural quality to a narrative. The audience is given insight into the teller’s version of reality in the way that his or her story is constructed. Storytellers are able to convey their interpretation and explanation of events as they see them, through the filter of the language that they use, metaphor, the imagery they convey, visuality, and interconnectedness of both, intertextuality. The ability of narrative to tap into the social context or culture in which meaning is constructed and how it relates to the complexity of identity contributes to the ways in which states of being are consistently remade. Within narrative lies the potential for examining deeper insights into the individuals of which they speak. Stories are available to many cultural groups and inform the way in which they are understood. Narratives are not universal, yet they retain the qualities that make entering the discourses to which they relate much more easy. Stories contain knowledge that works within and through structures of power in their potential to be both informed by outside forces and destabilize them as well (Cortazzi, 2008; Leonard & Patricie, 2007). They can give the audience the opportunity to visualize what

experiences do to those who are in its midst. Narrative inquiry contributes to research in the way that stories relate individual ways of knowing and knowledge that is contained within individual understanding. In this sense, the dissertation can be constructed as a narrative in which the researcher inserts his/her own understanding of the researched. The knowledge attained from doing the research is related utilizing storytelling techniques where meaning is unfolded through the connection of the story's elements (Leonard & Patricie, 2007).

Narrative inquiry makes possible access into the experiences and perceptions of individuals, cultures, and societies. Researchers are able to investigate the way information is organized and how experiences become meaningful in the lives of those they research. Time is conceptualized in relation to the understanding of those whose narrative is revealed. Using narrative inquiry provides information as to the way individuals construct and interpret the reality in which they live. Within a narration, researchers can gain a sense of the way participants reveal how culture can shape understanding, and how identity is affected by power/knowledge intersections (Rossiter, 1999). Individuals relate how they view themselves in the stories that they tell, a story containing a sense of, among others, their historical, cultural, sexual, gendered, and visual experiences (Richardson, 1997). Researchers become storytellers in the creation of knowledge. Critical ethnographers tell the story of the group they are studying, relating their experiences from both their personal perspectives and those that are interpolated by the subjects of their research. Researchers construct the story and its meaning (Merriam, 2002).

9.3 Skinflowers

I'm the bitch you hated, filth infactuated
I'm the pain you tasted, fell intoxicated
I'm the firestarter, twisted firestarter

Deal

Night time came once again--the stars silvery and bright against the velvet sky. The air was crisp with autumn, not cold, but cool-- coolness that lingered on the skin like butterfly kisses, light and feathery, enough for goose pimples but short of inducing shivers. I breathed in the night air, filling my lungs with the concrete of the downtown buildings. I was in a parking lot, surrounded by a herd of empty vehicles. My body felt the pulse of the traffic, lights blinking, horns honking, motors revving, and the heartbeat, a slow, deep, rhythmic pulse. I could feel the beat resonating through my body; feel it thumping against my rib cage, pounding deep inside the recesses of my soul. The sound beckoned to me, calling me closer. Like a moth, I flitted closer to the flame, the heat, the deep vibration of the music—with hope the destination would be a candle and not a bug zapper. Slowly, I pried the metal door, a label on the outside warned the faint of heart. A loud and toothy person, in a drunken stupor passed me by, his laughter echoing in my mind—abandon hope all who enter. I closed my eyes and walked in. I was wrong; it was neither candle nor zapper that wrought the flames.

Sweat and smoke lingered in the air. The dampness of bodies heaped in a closed space mingled with perfume, cigarette smoke, and liquor. Lights bounced off of glistening limbs, chests, foreheads; they were faerie lights beckoning, tempting, luring, like siren songs to self destruction. I was drowning in the scent of decadence, music pounding in my chest like wheels on steel rails. The blitzkrieg of lights and sound hit my

body with the passion only a lover knows. I gave in, lost in the cacophony of flesh gyrating, pulsing, and undulating—one organic being, and was swallowed whole into the fold. The massive throng of heat and music, faces, smiles, caressed me, indulged me in knowing fashion. This human body, brought to life by music and light, welcomed me, accepted me, and made me whole. A flash of skin, a blur of motion, a kiss, an embrace, a longing, and a sadness slithered through, moving from one visage to another, from one body to the next. In the midst of this bacchanalian frenzy, reality, it seemed, could not be escaped.

There was a man, who appeared in his forties, dressed in his finest. He wore a button up cowboy shirt in black with red piping along the pockets and red stitched embroidery along the shoulders and cuffs. A red embroidered cluster of roses adorned the back of his shirt, and he wore a red felt cowboy hat to match. Sweat stained his armpits, his collar, and back, and his belly splotched with dampness, whether from the beer that sloshed in a glass in his hand or perspiration that dripped from his face one could only guess. He moved forward, towards an unsuspecting drag queen. His grin and demeanor did not indicate he was asking for the time, nor did the eventual oncoming result—the drag queen, in a display that can only be described as a rather unfriendly brush off, slapped the man and began to yell at him, which unfortunately drew the attention of her fellow drag maidens, and like a gaggle of geese began pecking and swaggering in such a manner that the only resolve was for the man to slink away, back into his dark lonely corner.

He was not the conventional beauty, nor was I. He was not like the statuesque go-go dancers perched atop platforms around the dance floor. They were like chiseled

pieces of golden sculpted forms—they were perfection. They were products, meant to sell the fantasy, the myth of idealized sexuality found only in Grecian friezes, Renaissance statues, and pornography. These men, were, in reality, over processed, artificially sweetened canned products. They were empty calories for the soul, to be indulged sparingly, lest they cause uncontrolled bouts of self esteem depletion, or the occasional canker sore. They were not real, or so my sister explained. They were like the advertisements in women’s magazines; they were meant to sell a product. She hated them, these male-dominated proclamations of beauty. Advertisements were designed to make a woman feel bad enough about herself that she would pay any price, buy any cream, elixir, or pill to make her appear as similar to the women in advertisements as possible.

If only there were an elixir or pill. I wanted to look like the men on the podia. I wanted all to look at me, with the same lust and desire that the go-go boys devoured. However, as is often the way, my life has been a series of unwanted attention. And, like clockwork, the man in his now sopping wet gay cowboy attire, redirected his attention towards me. He sauntered over, smiling so widely that I could see his gold teeth behind the bristle of a mustache crowning his lips. He neared, and his breath greeted minutes before he did. In his cowboy suit, he reminded me of something off of *Hee-Haw*.

He pelted me with alcohol and smoke, his voice thick with both, “My name is Horacio.” I smiled, and shuddered deep within the recesses of my mind.

Please, God, make me invisible, I beckoned internally. “Nice to meet you,” I said, meanwhile thinking, *Oh my god, you’re so stupid, why did you say anything, now you’re just encouraging him*.

“Me piace tua faccia,” he slurred.

“Pardon me? I didn’t understand that.” I lied, I did understand, but hoped that my stupidity would entice him to leave.

“Me. Piace. Tua. Faccia,” he repeated, though this time some unknown bit of jetsam hit my cheek as he spoke, allowing me to chew slowly on each word and his breath.

“I’m sorry I still don’t understand.” Internally I wished for death.

“Oh, well, my friends, they told me you spoke Italian, I was intrigued, I thought...well, never mind. I think you’re very handsome.”

“Well, thank you.” Why was I still smiling? I can only blame my sister, who taught me one must never show one’s emotion on one’s sleeve.

She would say, “If you show what you’re feeling, anyone can control you. If you smile, the world will smile with you. People will leave you alone, if they think you’re happy. They will leave you alone if they think they can’t hurt you.” And so I learned, you could let people deceive themselves, and they would let you be, so long as you did it with a smile.

Leticia always smiles. When she is angry, when she is sad, when she works and when she plays. I have been on the receiving end of her biting wit many times, all the while, her smile hides the truth. I feel like a jackass, still none the wiser to her game. Her name means joy and she tries to live up to her name as much as possible. When I would brood, or frown, she would remind me that all the world could see my face, and know what I was feeling.

“You are very handsome, come home with me, I can teach you some Italian, or maybe some French.” He laughed. I assumed it was meant to be funny, so I laughed as well. He leaned in, spoke very softly. I bent backward, weighed down by his breath, and proximity.

“I think you’re very very sexy,” he slurred, light bouncing off of his gold teeth, and sweaty brow. He leaned closer.

Oh my god, he’s trying to kiss me, please don’t let him get any closer, my mind raced, and I looked for a way out, a way to break free of this unwanted attention.

And then it came to me, the lessons my sister taught me. Let people think what they want, and circumstances, be what they may, can be controlled if you live by your wits and common sense. She told me this after having read *Jane Eyre* to me when I was younger. Well, she read part of it and let me read the rest. This was, and still is, one of my favorite stories. Leticia loved it because it reminded her of herself. Both she and I spent most of our childhood with my grandmother--outcasts within our own family. She was always reading, smart and commonsensical, she always knew the right thing to do. I would confide in her, and ask her opinion on my life’s dilemmas. Her strength came from her unrelenting resolve that no matter what the answer, people would always do what people wanted to do, even if it was self-destructive. She was my first teacher, and I remember her lessons well. She taught me how to treat both disappointment and success with a smile.

“Hey,” I said grabbing his hands and forcing space between us in a false show of amicability. All I could think of was my sister’s warnings, of the many medical books she showed me. She let me see the perils of acting on impulse, of allowing my libido to

proceed unrestrained. I still remember the pictures. There were bumps and clusters of bumps, papilomae, a name that belied the ugly nature of these warts. They looked like broccoli, or cauliflower. There were also chancre sores red and inflamed, clustered, sometimes alongside the clusters of papilomae, like fields of flowers, though none you would want to pick. To say I was scared would be an understatement. Whenever I looked at a potential partner, because of this lesson, I wouldn't see a cute face, or a well formed body. All I could see was a potential case of syphilis, or gonorrhea, or herpes. Was he boyfriend material, or a bout of crabs lying in wait.

“Hey, I would love to, meet me outside. I'll be out in a moment. I just have to use the restroom.”

I left, and he went outside to wait for me, trusting and eager. I fell back into the mass of flesh, eager to disappear.

9.3.1 Post-Marxism

Categorizing people as either plagued or healthy can seem extreme. People are either diseased or not is not a condemnation nor a practice that seeks to isolate, it is a metaphor for a paradigm that relates to the potential capacity of benefit or harm a group or individual has. My sister utilized the pictures from her nursing books in order to relegate my sexual behavior. She knew I was a homosexual, however, she also became a nurse during the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. Leticia took care of many who lost their lives to the disease. The visuals from her book had a profound effect on me. I began to see any potential partner from the perspective of health. Inadvertently, or purposefully, the message she conferred to me was that there were two types of people

in the world, healthy individuals who restrained their libidinal debauchery. And there were those who suffered for their lack of indiscretion. An underlying message I inferred was that in some way, I think she might have been saying that being gay was in some way equitable to being dirty, or unhealthy. From a post-Marxist perspective, all individuals have the potential to undermine the practices of other individuals. Like disease, colonialism infected communities establishing hierarchies and subjugation. Landry (2000) explores theories of colonialism where oppressive states of existence are manifested as a result of economic socio-political situations. Like a disease that spreads, oppressive conditions are what forces one group to band together against another based on the perception that each is the source of their oppression. Without the subjugated, subjugators' own cultural identity is open to dismantling. Fear, a desire for control, for isolation, can provoke drastic measures such as the creation of walls and fences which create barriers in a metaphoric and physical sense. In this process, *otherness* can be reinforced through the visual where some are allowed to *look* and others are *seen*. Seeing is not universal and neither is access to the visual, especially in oppressed states of being where the visual is dominated by the oppressor and similarly the oppressor uses the visual to dominate the oppressed. It is important to note that visual culture does extend beyond the visual and that positions in the dynamic between oppressors/oppressed can also be negotiated. When speaking of the oppressor and the oppressed, it is often beyond the visual, in visualization, where cultural meanings are constructed, and contested. In a poststructural critique, the dynamic between oppressor and the oppressed may give way to multiple relations of entry, where the so-called oppressed may actively resist limitations. In this context, narratives are

interwoven structures of semiotic, trans-verbal realities that allow meanings to emerge through the visual (Kristeva, 2002; Rogoff, 1999).

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) resituate institutions of power and oppression in the poststructural theory of *différance*—a term created by Jacques Derrida. Instead of the hierarchic top-down structures of power found in Marxist philosophy, power is redefined as unstable and in constant renegotiation between social agents (Foucault, 1980; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). The antagonistic, and binary qualities found in friend/enemy, oppressor/oppressed relationships are too simplistic. Yes confluences of power exist, but they do not reside in one ominous and potent entity. Power can be overcome, its only real threat is to the contributions in which individuals view one another. Us versus them, or me versus you scenarios only serve to incapacitate the potential to act politically (Mouffe, 2005). According to Foucault (1977) in relation to discourses of power he suggests that:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms; it “excludes,” it “represses,” it “censors,” it “abstracts,” it “masks,” it “conceals.” In fact, power produces, it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (p. 194)

Derrida (1997) challenges binary oppositions found in Marxist thought as well through his critiques on the implicitness of systems—like systems of power—and signs. He challenges the assumptions in modernist beliefs that the consciousness is unmediated and has a direct correlation with reality; individuals’ actions are based on rational and universal understandings. Power in Marxist philosophy is a cause/effect relationship by those who have and those who have not. In Derrida’s view, reality, like Laclau and Mouffe’s view, is constantly reconfigured and infinite. There is no foundation

or point of origin. Power, in a deconstructivist paradigm, does not begin at point A and then move to point B and so on. Like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, there are infinite points that lead to infinite points the lead to still more infinite points. Identity contains a multiplicity of existence, and individuals are capable of multiplicity of understanding. The universe, including identity, culture, gender, power, and knowledge, is destabilized. Social interactions can be deconstructed as well. Individuals are imbued with the knowledge and behaviors that are learned and passed down-- we are taught to hate, to love, to be attracted to, to acknowledge and to fear. Unlike Marxist philosophy, post-Marxism recognizes that individuals are not blank slates and come with preconceived notions. Individuals have well established social parameters by which they function in the world. Post-marxists like Laclau and Mouffe (2001) understand that the social forces whose intent it is to create dichotomous power structures open themselves to exposure, which leads to ambiguities, paradoxes, multiple, and sometimes conflicting states of being.

9.3.2 Post-Marxism and Culture

Patti Lather (1991), a post-Marxist, building on Gramsci's thesis (1971), states that knowing is connected to culture or that it is bound to culture. She goes further to state that understanding "meaning-making" sometimes necessitates dealing with the contradictory nature of ideologies—namely those found between feminism, post-Marxism, and poststructuralism. It is through this concept of convergence that Lather suggests that Marxism and postmodernism both parallel and interrupt one another and

that the ambiguities and paradoxes in power/knowledge/identity relationships is illustrated.

Critical ethnographic research and narrative inquiry deal with power, dominance, and social structures in relationship to visual imagery and identity formation. Focusing on post-Marxism in relation to poststructuralism helps in the understanding of the women and the complex interplay of the social relationships that they form amongst themselves and in society that often include “engendered by patterns of production, ownership, and inequality” (Winthrop, 1991, p. 185).

Regarding the formation of cultural identity, what answers lay to questions of why we, as individuals, align ourselves with particular groups in favor of others? Sometimes, those idealistic and philosophical alignments that create our own identity create a systemic dichotomy, a paradigm from which one side, in some cases, dominates another creating an oppressive state. According to Hegel, alienation is part of a dialectical exchange or scheme in which one idea will inevitably provoke its opposite (Bencivenga, 2000; Lauer, 1977). Hegel's view of consciousness and thought was that one idea constantly informed the next, one thought brought about another and another until at some point, a higher state of consciousness would be achieved (Dupré, 1966). Marx carried this idea of alienation away from a solitary existence within an individual mind and realized it in a larger context, the constant struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed; that one would inevitably lead to the other (Bochenski, 1963).

The ways in which individuals interact socially are part of post-Marxist philosophy, traces of which are contained in critical ethnography and narrative inquiry. Poster (1990) believes that the ways in which individuals form social connections and

construct cultural collectives is intrinsically linked to the disruption of subjective practices. According to Derrida's idea of *différance*, the critique of binary logic, the twofold system of oppressor and oppressed that many believe are to be found in structures of power could not account for the diversity found in world political systems today. Furthermore, poststructuralism criticizes structuralist semiotics for its prevalence for disregarding or discarding anything that does not fit the system; or forcing it to conform (Derrida, 1997).

The capacity for mediation of behavior rests on the human need for symbolic models of and for reality resulting in cultural templates that are socially accessible to the community. These symbolic templates act as an external control system for human action as implemented between the connection of culture and mind (Olssen, 1999). This idea, however, might imply that society, people, and communities are passive sites of cultural programming instead of being decisive in their pursuit of purpose and meaning within their own cultural awareness. Real people are replaced by disembodied systems or structures without any particular concretized reality. The cultural system evolves and remains in the ether. Cultural rituals and symbols become more figurative in a world of visual culture ruled by capitalism. The symbolic transcends the figurative and becomes lived experience through the rituals of everyday living. Within visual culture, meaning is important when taken from the vantage of those who have become the meaning makers. In this interpretation, the symbol is indistinguishable from the resulting behavior. As participants transform in the development of personal identity, the perception of reality is dictated "under the control, dominant if not exclusive, [by] a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media)" (Foucault,

1980, p. 131). Ritual, behavior, and cultural identity become one through the socio-economic burdens imposed through capitalist dominated visual imagery.

Cultural identity resonates with post-Marxist investigations into cultural homogenization and the universality of western values and behavior through the “ideological domination of the poor and the working class” (Bourgois, 1989 p. 7). In the differences of a historically rooted class, their racial, ethnic and national structures fall behind, and inevitably are deemed as obsolete by the dominant culture. The relationship between human agency and social structures, is explored in post-Marxist philosophy, critical ethnography and narrative inquiry.

CHAPTER 10

THE MOON AND OTHER VICES

Sana, Sana,
Colita de rana,
Si no sana hoy,
Sanará mañana⁶⁴

10.1 Darkness

Darkness had fallen. The stars in the sky were covered by the thin veil of winter. The crispness in the air bit the skin as wafts of air billowed around, spreading the deadness that gripped the night. Lights were on in the bedroom of the trailer home that sat in the middle of a cold desolate field. It was on the outskirts of town, far from civilization, though there were streetlamps, they were so far apart that they may as well have been fallen stars feebly lighting the blackness. The gate leading up the broken concrete that served as a walkway swung slowly, carried to and fro by the icy wind. Outside, all was still, and quiet, save for the low and whiney creak of the gate. In the din of night, a scream pierced the silence, a loud, shrill, blood curdling scream. A scream that signaled either loss of limb or imminent doom, as cold and pointed as the cold night air. Only moments before, Elizabeth had been lumbering slowly, taking her time as she made her way to visit her sister Amanda. After the scream pierced her skin, she rushed through the gate, bounded through the broken concrete, and up the rickety steps that led to Amanda's trailer home. The doorknob was reluctant to give way; it was locked. Elizabeth tried to turn the knob, tried to pry it open, but it was no use. The door, though

⁶⁴ Traditional Mexican saying that mother's often recite when a child is ill or gets hurt. Literally it translates to "heal, heal, with a frog's tail, if you don't get well today, you will tomorrow."

old and rusted, was proving to be a formidable opponent. Another scream, followed by another, both in a tone that shivered the spine. Then she remembered, the window on the front door was only cosmetic, held in place by strategically placed duct tape. She pushed and it gave way, allowing her access to the door's locks and bolts. Frantically, she pushed the door open, meeting resistance by rusty hinges, and boxes that had been placed in front of the door as a blockade. Elizabeth rushed to the source of the screams. They came from her sister's bedroom, the door was closed, but she knew that's where they originated, as the trailer's paper thin walls reverberated with Amanda's screams, now much more intense and severe. She pushed against the door, it too was locked. Another scream, this time followed by discernable tears, its tone filled with a sadness that bordered on despair; Amanda's cry was on the precipice of madness. Elizabeth, foregoing any pretense of feminine decorum, summed up her strength, and plowed through the hollow door, and, with the sound of lumber splintering, she smashed it from its jamb, the door took a small chunk of the wall with it. She entered the room, lit only by the ambient light of the television screen filled with static, snowy, silent images. As she entered, she looked towards the bed upon which sat Amanda, the look upon her face, vacant, staring at a world only she could see.

She was screaming incoherently, "My baby, my baby, he's trying to take away my baby!" As she screamed, she pulled out chunks of hair from her head.

"Who Amanda? Who's trying to take your baby? Answer me!" Elizabeth said frantically, as she grabbed Amanda's hands, trying desperately to keep her from doing more damage.

“He’s saying he doesn’t love me anymore, and that I’m a sick person. He says that I’m not a good mother, he’s trying to take him away,” she said, her voice mixed with tears and helplessness. Elizabeth moved from the bed, and towards the kitchen, and there, she found her weeping nephew, and her brother-in-law.

“What did you do to her Larry? What did you do? How dare you threaten to take away a mother’s child, don’t you know what that means? What that does to a woman? Of course not, you’re too stupid to think anything,” she said.

“Butt out Elizabeth, this is none of your business,” he screamed at her.

“This is my business. She’s my sister, and unlike you, I care about her,” she screamed back.

“Just shut up and get out of my way, Liza,” he said, moving towards the door.

“Oh no, you’re not going anywhere. I’m calling Mom, and Coy⁶⁵, and Tisha, and tell them what you’re doing. You better not even think you’re going anywhere with that baby,” she said as a matter of fact. Shortly afterwards, the cavalry arrived, and together, the women took Amanda home with them.

Elizabeth has a very close relationship to her sister Amanda. They are similar in that they both believe women should be strong, but their similarities end there. Where Amanda is like the earth, Elizabeth is primordial fire. She is a warm crackling fire on a cold winter’s day. She is the magma boiling just beneath the Earth’s surface. At once she is both a small flickering candle flame and an inferno threatening to consume all in her path. Because of her tempestuous and often unpredictable behavior my sister Maricela calls her Liza Jane, after Liza Jane Doolittle from *My Fair Lady*. Elizabeth often

⁶⁵ This is the name my nieces and all of my family members use for my mother. It is a diminutive form of Socorro and is used as a term of endearment.

burns the hottest when confronted by her grandmother's ideas which she finds too traditional and antiquated for her tastes. Though Elizabeth and my mother are often at odds with one another, they both understand their confrontation stems from their deep seated passions.

10.2 Fitting In

Night had come and settled in. The hour was late, past midnight. The house was quiet, the only sound that of my uncle snoring on the couch as he watched television with his eyes closed. I was awake, and worked in the makeshift studio my father had created for me in the garage. The air was still outside, balmy and warm, heat dissipated from the hot summer day. As the moon grew higher in the sky, me working in my studio, I heard a noise, like the sound of metal scraping against metal. I recognized that noise. I had made it once a long time ago. Stealthily I crept out and into the house. I heard the noise again. The sound came from the old window in the bathroom. The bathroom was at the end of a hall, at the very back of the house, the room furthest away from bedrooms. I walked slowly towards the bathroom, and stopped, still for a moment. I heard whispers, low, but not very quiet. These were the sort of whispers that were mingled with alcohol and desperation. I crept closer, just enough to peer into the open door. My niece was being hoisted into the open window by two unknown shadows, though their silhouette and their voices were enough to tell me they were boys.

“No, no, my shoe. It fell off. Would you quit pushing me. Ouch! My flards,” my niece whispered.

Quietly, I entered the room and turned on the lights, “What are you doing!?” I startled her. The silhouettes ran off into the night, outlined by the moon’s brightness.

“Andy! You scared me. Help me I think I’m stuck,” she said.

I laughed and moved towards her, “That’s why you should always put a chair in here before you go, it makes it easier.”

“Quit laughing at me and help me. Ouch, this hurts,” she whimpered, frustrated.

“I’m sorry, you just look so funny. That’s what you get for going out and getting drunk without having a plan B,” I chuckled.

“Would you just get me down,” she huffed, “and I have not been drinking, I just was just having fun.”

“With those two guys? I bet.” I teased.

That was one of many nights that I helped my niece sneak her way back into the house. I remembered my own youth when I too had the need to break free from my parent’s authoritarian yoke. Being a girl in a traditional family like ours was even harder. Especially with my father’s traditional values. He believed in the Mexican concept of *valór*⁶⁶ a family must have honor.

I asked my niece about the times she snuck out of the house, she answered, “I just had to get out. All of my friends got to go to parties, and have fun at night, especially on the weekends. I didn’t understand why I had to always stay in. Coy was always afraid that I was going to get raped and Papí didn’t want me to hang around any boys.”

I asked, “So what did you do?” and she responded, “Well, it started with the astronomy club. I wanted to join because it was another club, and they took trips to places.”

⁶⁶ Value, honor. Sometimes the word is used to refer to a woman’s virginity.

Elizabeth's teenage life was spent in extracurricular activities in more than just a scholastic sense. She continued, "I tried to do everything that made me normal. I joined the French club, I was on the student council and I tried out to be a cheerleader, but I was too fat. My favorite was being in show choir. That made me feel like I was accomplishing something with the popular kids. Other people knew who I was, but I didn't know who they were, so I guess I was a little popular. I didn't want to be all emo like Amanda and not participate in anything. I wanted the other kids to like me."

And when I asked her if she was popular to which she replied, "I don't think I was the most popular, but I did hang out with the cool kids. When they were joining astronomy club I joined, but not just because they were doing it. I wanted to join because I loved looking at the stars, and I used to want to be an astronomer. I loved looking at them, and wondering what kind of life was out there. But Papí and Coy wouldn't let me go. Coy always used to say 'what are you going to go out there for, a decent girl has no business being out at night.' So I started sneaking out to go. But then, when friends would go have fun, they would invite me, so I started sneaking out to see them."

"Papí and Coy were afraid that you would get into trouble with boys?" I asked.

"Yes, but they were too late. I didn't think there was anything wrong with having sex. It was just fun. My first time was way before I started sneaking out. It was when I was in the seventh grade, there was a boy that I really liked, and we were playing one day. He asked if we could kiss, and I said yes. I had never kissed a boy before, so I just pretended like I was one of the women from the novelas and did what they did. After we kissed it just started happening. I didn't think it was that big of a deal," she recounted.

“Were you afraid Papí would find out?” I asked.

“Yes, I was worried that he would find out and then he would treat me like he did my mom,” she said.

“How is that?” I asked.

“You know, the way he didn’t talk to her or even look at her after she eloped with my dad. It was like she didn’t exist. I didn’t want that to happen to me. But that didn’t stop me, I just tried to be really sneaky about it,” she answered.

10.3 *Desgracia*⁶⁷

The screams echoed throughout the house. Loud voices, harsh words, violent outbursts, these had become the normal Saturday morning.

“Why can’t you be like a normal grandma? Why do you always have to make life miserable for me? I’m not you Coy, I’m not afraid of everything. Just let me do what I want to do. Geez! Why is it any of your business anyway?”

“If I had ever talked to my mother that way I would have been beaten. Liza, you think you know everything. I can’t even tell you anything. I say one thing and you get crazy.”

“No Coy, you can’t tell me anything if everything you say is a criticism. Yes Coy I’m fat. I am okay with it.”

“But you used to be so beautiful. All I want you to do is try these pills. Your cousin Maya saw them on T.V. and she said they work. It won’t hurt to try. Look at you. I can’t even look at you.”

⁶⁷ The loss of value or grace.

“Me? You can’t look at me? Look at yourself, you’re not perfect either. You’re just as fat as I am.”

“*Desgraciada mendiga*⁶⁸! I’m also older than you and have had several children. If I’m fat it’s because I’ve earned it. You’re just fat because you’re lazy.”

“Coy, I’m not lazy, this is just who I am, haven’t you seen the family, they’re all fat too.”

“But I bought you these clothes, how are they going to fit you looking like that?”

“I didn’t ask you to buy me clothes.”

“That’s right you didn’t ask me to buy you clothes, but I bought them for you anyway. You want to look good at school so I buy you clothes. You want to eat, so I make you food. You needed a place to sleep so I bought you a bed. You didn’t ask for any of it, but I gave it to you anyway. Now all I want is a little respect and for you to quit acting like a crazy woman.”

“You didn’t buy me anything. You don’t work. All you do is stay at home or go visit family. You’re the one who’s lazy.”

“*Floja*⁶⁹! Yo! You are the one who is too lazy to even wash properly. Look at you, you’re so black.”

“Coy, that’s the color of my skin. Yes, Coy, I’m dark, get over it. No amount of scrubbing is going to take it away, so just deal with it and move on.”

“No, you used to be so white, when you were little, when you were a good girl. Now, you’re just a fat, dirty, spoiled brat. Why are you such a *burra*⁷⁰!”

⁶⁸ Literally this means “miserable beggar woman” but connotes a woman who is usually worthless.

⁶⁹ Lazy

“Hey! Don’t call me names. I know what that means and I’m not going to let you call me that.”

“Elizabeth, *ya callate*⁷¹! *Vete*⁷²!”

“*No callate tú*⁷³!”

And with that, my father who, until this moment had remained on the sidelines, intervened. He got up from the chair on which he had been sitting quietly, seemingly disengaged from the whole conversation. He stood slowly, but with purpose. The look on his eyes was serious and stern, a look like cold granite. My mother started, “Oh Fernando, leave her, she’s just crazy right now. Once she calms down she will be better, don’t...”

My father interrupted, “No! She has to have respect. You may let her yell at you but I will not let her be disrespectful to you.” He moved towards Elizabeth, “Your mama has done so much for you and you are so ugly. How did you become so disrespectful that you think you can do to us this way. Get out, and don’t come back until you learn some respect.”

“Ay, Fernando, *déjala*⁷⁴. *Pobrecita*⁷⁵, she doesn’t mean it. She just does not understand.”

“*No! Ya, se acabó*⁷⁶!” he responded.

⁷⁰ Literally the term means “donkey” but in reference to an individual, means “stubborn, hard headed” but in the sense that the person is acting irrationally, like an animal, as opposed to a logical and rational human being.

⁷¹ A term in Spanish that is usually used from an elder to the young. It means “shut up” and the tense is the informal you that is used from older to younger, or authority to subordinate. It is considered rude to use the informal you when a younger person, or subordinate is speaking to an adult or authority figure. The term is very harsh and is usually reserved for tense moments.

⁷² “Go away, Now!”

⁷³ “No, you shut up!”

⁷⁴ “Please leave her alone.”

⁷⁵ Poor little thing.

And with that, Liza left the house. She was 17, and in my parents traditional mindsets, should know how to behave as an adult. Liza went to live with her boyfriend's family. She spent half of the school year living with them. She remembers:

I loved living there. They were a normal family. John's dad would take us places, he would play games with us. They ate dinner out a lot, and not regular places like McDonald's but fancy places like Red Lobster. I loved it. The mom acted like a mom, his sister acted like a sister, for a while anyway. Then I got to know them. They didn't seem very close to one another.

I asked her what she meant and she explained:

Well, they never really talked to one another. John's sister and her mother didn't have a close relationship. At night, after dinner, everyone would do their own thing. John's father would watch television and smoke in his den, alone. John's mother would exercise and then disappear. None of them really knew what was going on in each other's lives. Sometimes, I was the only one there, even John would go do something by himself. It wasn't like home. At home, everyone is there. The house is never empty. Even though I think it's annoying sometimes, everyone knows your business. There aren't any secrets really. Like John's sister, she smokes pot. I've caught her a few times, and no one in her family knows about it. I can't imagine doing that at home.

I asked her why and she responded, "because, Coy knows everything. She knows almost every Mexican in this town. There is no way I could hide it from her."

After having spent a few months with her new family, Elizabeth decided to make amends, she went back home.

"I was so worried about you living away from us," my mother told her.

"Why Coy, nothing was going to happen to me. I was safe," Elizabeth responded.

"No, girls who live away from their family, something bad always happens to

⁷⁶ A phrase used to denote that the argument is over, and is used to silence all parties. Typically, once an elder uses this phrase, that means that the conversation is over, and most of the time, everyone complies.

them. You see it on *Laura*⁷⁷ all the time. These girls, they go away from their family and bad things happen to them,” my mom stated, her eyes wide for affect, and her voice almost a whisper, “girls who leave their family and live alone, they get” her eyes wider, and her voice now a whisper, “raped.”

“No Coy, that doesn’t happen,” my niece responded, in an exasperated voice.

“I was so worried,” her voice filled with mock sadness, “here. Come here. Sit by me. Comfort me. I was so scared for you.”

My niece rolled her eyes in resignation, “Okay Coy, whatever. Here, I’m sitting.” My mother tutted her teeth, and huffed, annoyed, “Not like that! What kind of comforting is that. *No vengas con esa jéta*⁷⁸. Just sit here and talk.”

“I am talking. *Ay*⁷⁹ Coy, you’re just like the women on those novelas you watch. You’re so dramatic,” Elizabeth said in resignation.

“Well if you’re going to act like that then forget it,” my mother said, any trace of sadness now replaced by frustration and anger.

“Alright Coy, alright, what do you want to talk about?”

My mother looked at my niece, and then over to the clock, “*Valgame Dios!*⁸⁰ It’s already past 5. Laura is on. Come here, let’s watch together.”

“Oh my god Coy, why do you like this show. The people are always so annoying.”

“*Calle*⁸¹, she’s talking to some women who have cheating husbands, look, listen, you might learn.”

⁷⁷ *Laura en America* is a Spanish language talk show that airs on several Spanish language television stations. The show is the equivalent of the *Jerry Springer* program in the U.S. and is often incendiary and provocative.

⁷⁸ “Don’t come here with that horrible look on your face, like you don’t want to be here.”

⁷⁹ “Ay” is a term that is equivocal to being exasperated.

⁸⁰ “Oh my God!”

⁸¹ “Hush.”

The two sat watching, and for a while, the only voices were those from the television.

10.4 *Sin Verguenza*⁸²

Birds chirped outside and fluttered in and out of the trees. Their tweets were loud and shrill. Mating season had arrived, and the birds fought with one another, screeching and flapping their wings, tumbling and fumbling amongst the tree branches. Dawn had arrived. The spring still was blanketed with the lavender, pink and orange clouds. In the house, my mother's voice mingled with the shrieks and caws outside. She was singing, one of her favorite things to do, though many around her would hardly call it that. My mother was tone deaf, but still, she enjoyed singing her songs. This was a Saturday morning, and my mother bustled around the house in her house dress, one of many that she made herself in a traditional Mexican style. Her morning routine on a Saturday included cleaning, and because this was her routine, so too, it was everyone's routine. No one escaped, not even her grandchildren.

"Elizabeth," my mother called.

"*Qué*"⁸³ my niece responded.

"*No se dice qué, se dice mande,*"⁸⁴ my mother said in a stern voice.

"I'm not going to say that, I'm not your servant," my niece responded.

"Do you think I am your *criada*⁸⁵? I do not have to wash your clothes for you, or make your bed, or clean up your mess. Is that what you think of me?"

⁸² Without remorse, or shame.

⁸³ "What do you need?"

⁸⁴ In Spanish *qué* translates to "what" in English. When answering an adult who call you to them, the general answer would be what in English, however answering the same way in Spanish is considered rude especially when in response to an adult. The term *mande* literally translates as "at your command" or "at your disposal" and is considered the proper way to answer.

⁸⁵ Maid, servant, slave.

“I’ll get to it in a minute, calm down Coy.”

“*No te estoy preguntando, te estoy mandando.*”⁸⁶

“Fine, what do you want?” Elizabeth asked.

“Wash your clothes, they smell like the *porquerías*⁸⁷ you were getting into last night,” she said, with a tinge of both disappointment and disgust.

“What? I don’t know what you are talking about,” she said.

“Si, como no?” my mother said, thrusting the dirty laundry into Elizabeth’s hands, “I know what you did last night, and I’m ashamed.”

“Whatever, Coy, I didn’t do anything wrong.

“*Putá! Porque no atendiste tu valór*⁸⁸? I know what you did, do you think I am a fool. Take care of these clothes, and watch yourself. I won’t tell your Papí because of what he will do, but you have disappointed me.”

“Why, sex is a natural thing. I’m not pregnant, and even if I was I know how to take care of things. I’m not ashamed of what I did. I’m not like the ladies on your novelas, I won’t fall apart without a man and I won’t be stupid and marry the first man that I have sex with,” Elizabeth said.

“Oh you girls, you think you are so modern. You think that women like me are old and don’t know anything about lust. But we were not *desvergüenzadas*⁸⁹ like you girls today are. We had respect for ourselves,” my mother stated as she moved out of the room.

⁸⁶ “I’m not asking you, I’m ordering you to.”

⁸⁷ Literally “dirty things” but used in reference to sexual activities.

⁸⁸ “Slut! Why didn’t you value yourself.”

⁸⁹ Sullied, shameful, unchaste, slutty.

“Coy, you’re so old fashioned. That’s why I take birth control,” Elizabeth countered.

My mother stopped, and turned, “You take what? Don’t you know that is a sin? How do you know about birth control? Who took you to get it?” she said angry and frustrated.

“Duh, Coy, it’s not like I don’t know about it, you see the commercials on television all the time, even on your Spanish channels, besides, it’s my body, not yours.”

My mother turned around once more, and walked away, shaking her head, “*Ay María Purísima, hazla que entienda,*”⁹⁰ and her prayers trailed off.

In the silence, my niece picked up her clothes and threw them in the hamper. Quietly she closed the door to her room. On the other side of the hallway, my mother closed hers as well.

10.6 Father Figures

I watched Elizabeth play *The Sims* nearly every evening. There was a house she created, and recreated several times, rooms within rooms, furniture, garden, pool, electronics, there was even a doghouse for a pet that was yet to be created. She tended to this house as though it were her own virtual geo-dome, the electronic version of Sea Monkeys. Living within this virtual home, was a family of her own creation. She started with one character, but through controlled interaction, through the playing the game, she used the game mechanics to influence the character to marry, produce offspring, divorce, produce more offspring, who have, in turn, produced offspring of their own. Her original character is under her complete control, as are the others. Her character, Bill as

⁹⁰ “Holy Mary Mother of God, make her understand.”

she has named him, has come to symbolize her ideal parent. She has grown up without a father, and Bill has come to represent emotional fulfillment, she laughs as she makes him do silly things, and reprimands him when he is annoyed with his family members. She has watched him age, and is sad because he is nearing the virtual deathbed; his binary death knell does approach. She speaks to me and wonders if she should stop playing with Bill, not because she is tired, but rather, she hopes it will lengthen Bill's life. I wonder if it's healthy to have such a personal regard for Bill, a sentient being in her mind, made of zero' and one's. Bill, she confessed later, was her idea of a virtual father and the representation of a father that she wished she had had.

"I wanted him to be like Papí, but I also wanted him to have a career, to be smart, not that Papí isn't smart but I mean smart in a college kind of way." Elizabeth was very close to her grandfather.

She remembers, "I missed not having a dad, Papí was close, but he was still my grandfather. I remember watching kids on television, my favorite was Seventh Heaven. I remember I used to wonder about what it would be like to live in a family like that, in a nice home, in a neighborhood that wasn't ghetto."

My father used to call Elizabeth *La Chilindrina*⁹¹ after a popular Mexican comedy show. *La Chilindrina* was a young girl with an innocent, yet mischievous and volatile demeanor. He called her that because she reminded him of that character whenever she would throw a tantrum. Often, he would purposefully goad her into throwing a fit, just so that he could laugh at her silliness. Elizabeth was always close to her grandfather. He was the only father figure she really knew after her own went to prison.

⁹¹ The word *la chilindrina* denotes a person who is small, a nuisance, a mischievous girl, or a thing of little value, or something that is inconsequential.

She and her grandfather used to watch the show *El Chavo del Ocho*⁹². They laughed together and my niece loved the character. After a while, my niece was known throughout the family as *La Chilindrina*.

I asked her how she felt about her nickname and she responded, “I didn’t mind. For a while I didn’t really understand why people called me that, but after I watched the show, I understood. I like it, that’s who I am. I’m La Chilindrina. I remember my friends at school would ask me, ‘why do they call you that?’ and I would just tell them that it was a family nickname. I wasn’t embarrassed, but they wouldn’t understand. There were just certain things that I couldn’t translate.”

I asked her what she meant, and she responded, “There were certain words in Spanish that I don’t know what it is in English. In our family we mix Spanish and English together. I would know one word in English and I wouldn’t know what it was in Spanish, and I would know something in Spanish but not be able to say it in English. Even Tisha says there are things in Spanish that there is really no way to translate them into English. Words like *mitotera*⁹³, or *chisme*⁹⁴, or *chiple*⁹⁵, those are words that we mix with English because they’re better words to use. They’re closer to what we mean. That’s what I tried to tell the kids at school, that my *Papí* called me *La Chilindrina* because I was such a *mitotera*. They still didn’t understand. I liked it when Papí called me that. I think he liked the character because she was always a little girl. The actress was old, but she always played that little girl. I think Papí wanted me to stay innocent and young.”

⁹² A popular Mexican sitcom that began in 1971 and still continues to air as reruns in syndication.

⁹³ A woman who is easily affronted. Can also mean a woman who is fond of creating scandal. A woman who exaggerates everything.

⁹⁴ Gossip

⁹⁵ A spoiled brat

10.7 Synopsis

Elizabeth feels resolute in her sense of identity. Her identity is formed within the mirror of whiteness through which what it means to be a Latina is reflected. In her narrative there is a connection with the whiteness she watches on television to what she imagines as the perfect world. To her, being white meant being rich and being happy, and being normal. However, when she experiences living within the world of what she perceives as normal, she comes to the realization that the differences between her family and her boyfriend's family are just difficult to negotiate and goes back home. She understands that there are differences, but also understands that there are differences between herself and women like my mother. Elizabeth doesn't view herself as Latina, nor does she view herself as Mexican, or white.

"I'm not Mexican, like Coy. Well, Coy's not even Mexican either like the family in Mexico. I don't like being called Hispanic, and I'm definitely not a Chicana or Chola. So I don't know," she stated after I asked her how she identified her ethnicity.

Amanda, her sister, added, "Well, if we're not Mexican, or Latina, or Chicana, then what are we?"

Liza responded, "I'm not sure, I just say I'm an American and leave it at that. If people can't figure out where I come from then they don't need to know."

Elizabeth's stories illustrate the complex nature of identity. The answer to whether or not a person identifies as Latino, Chicano, Mexican-American, or even American lies within a cultural, racial, and linguistic gap that often feels too wide to overcome. Women like Elizabeth who are reluctant or unable to identify themselves in a particular way in regards to ethnicity often feel as though they are on one unable to

reach one end of the cultural divide or the other. Identity for the women in the study like Elizabeth is constantly moving between location. The women in the study constantly move between states of being that is fueled by what they hear, see, feel, say and are told (Alcoff, 2006)

Elizabeth's perception of being Latina is framed by the images that she has seen on television, specifically, channels such as Univision and Telemundo, both of which offer programming in Spanish but are American channels. She watched the programming on these channels with her grandparents, with whom she spent much of her life. Novelas that appear on these channels often work to reinforce the idea of beauty tied to whiteness. Many of the female protagonists in novelas are light skinned or appear Anglo and portray idealized images of beauty. The antagonist is usually a person, often a woman, who is dark-skinned. My mother watched these programs religiously. Because my niece was always with my mother, she watched the same programming as well. Talk shows like *Laura en America*, was the other type of show that my mother liked to watch. On shows like this, especially *Laura en America*, many of the topics center around infidelity, and usually, male infidelity. Women on this show are typically either portrayed as the victim or the antagonist; the victim usually being the wife, and the antagonist usually portrayed as the other woman. Programming like this reinforces imagery that might be perceived as demeaning or offensive: highly sexualized women, vulgar language, violence, etc. However, for many like my mother and to some degree my niece, this type of programming intermingles with cultural norms to produce representations that become part of the cultural collective (Dávila, 2001).

Much of Elizabeth's identity is formed in relation to her grandmother. She sees the world framed against the traditional concepts of womanhood that my mother has maintained, despite efforts to resist them. The two women share a resolute sense of identity—both think their way is the only way. Their conflicting nature stems from the shared desire to be treated respectfully, though each has a different concept of what comprises respect. Body image and sexuality are at the center of their conflicts, with Elizabeth preferring to take a more liberal stance. My mother's concept of body image is based in part on the perceptions of beauty that have been instilled within her both culturally and through media. She believes Elizabeth is not living up to her potential beauty by being fat and by being dark. Dark skin is equated with being unattractive in my mother's eyes which reflects her cultural upbringing. Many Mexican traditions of beauty regard dark skin with the native population of Mexico. People with dark skin are often equated with *indios* the term that is used to label the many diverse Indian tribes within Mexico. *Indios* are viewed as being dim-witted, slow, lazy, dirty, and poor. Because my mother was brought up with these ideas, they have become a way in which she sees the world and is reinforced by many of the *novelas* that she watches. Women in *novelas* are often portrayed as light skinned, long haired, curvaceous, and well proportioned. Women are not too skinny and not too fat. What is not evident in my mother's understanding is the highly sexualized nature of women portrayed in Mexican *novelas*. Elizabeth embraces her sexuality and has used it as a way to rebel against my mother's traditional values. My niece is able to see the sexual nature of women in *novelas*, but she also views them in a way that my mother does not. Elizabeth sees

women in novelas as weak, manipulative, and only able to function in the presence of a man.

When I asked her why she married a white man, she answered, “I didn’t marry a white guy just because that’s what I was looking for. But really, I didn’t want to wind up with a guy like my dad, or our cousins. They’re just too ghetto. I didn’t want a fat Mexican man that was lazy. I wanted to be taken care of.”

Her sister replied, “Liza, you shouldn’t worry about being taken care of, you should be able to take care of yourself.”

“I know Amanda, but there’s nothing wrong with wanting to be taken care of, besides that’s the way Coy is.”

“Yeah, and you act like her too,” said Amanda.

“How?” replied Elizabeth, quizzically, and slightly annoyed.

“Well, like when we’re eating, you do the same thing she does, you serve John. You make sure he has his plate and his drink, it’s just crazy. You act like the old Mexican women in the family,” Amanda said.

“There’s nothing wrong with that Amanda, you’re just saying that because you’re a crazy militant feminist,” said Elizabeth.

“Yeah, and proud of it,” she laughed, “you’d never see me doing that for my husband.”

“It’s not like that Amanda. Think about it, when I give John his food, I’m in control of what he eats. He has to wait for me to give it to him. When the women in the family, like Coy, serve the men, they aren’t being servants, they’re showing the men that they have the ability to provide for them. You think any of the men in the family can cook?”

They would be lost without the women. I know because I've seen it. When Uncle Chano was alone, all he ate was bologna sandwiches. He didn't even know how to make his own coffee. That's where women have power," she replied.

CHAPTER 11

FINDINGS

What a difference a day made
Twenty-four little hours
Brought the sun and the flowers
Where there used to be rain.

María Grever, *What A Difference A Day Made*

11.1 What a Difference a Day Makes

The morning began anew. Pink and purple filled the crispness of the winter sky. The sun warmed through the blanket of frost that lay on the ground making the yellowed grass glisten and glitter. Warmth penetrated the chill in the air and moved its way through the frosty windows. Golden beams of sunlight pierced the sleepy shadows that lingered in the home like logy memories shuffling through the corridors of the mind's eye. Sunlight moved through the quiet of the living room past the Christmas tree made of tinsel that begged for attention. Quietly the sunlight crept through the room, awakening the altar upon which an old but loved nativity scene sat. Finally, the sun beams made their way into the kitchen, where it joined the lively banter and laughter of the women that bustled about, like a hive of bees, their buzz rising and falling like waves. From the kitchen, the warmth echoed throughout the house, as the women busied themselves with Christmas preparations. The room was large. My mother had insisted that the kitchen be the largest room in the house. My father obliged by knocking down walls and rearranging cabinetry so as to accommodate the family's largesse. At the center, was an old table that served as both a place to prepare food and a place on which to eat. The table was large and took up much of the kitchen space. Around the table was a mishmash of unmatched chairs, each of which had a particular owner.

There was a metal chair, made of cast iron, ornate and full of flowery scroll work. This chair and its sister, were meant to hold the girth of the largest family members. There were wooden chairs that my mother bought at a garage sale and had decided to paint bright colors. There was an old office chair that had lost a leg but had since been repaired with those of another. There were stools and large metal flour bins that served as seating. These chairs matched the family, a mishmash of difference brought together and made whole--separate, but functional.

At the center of the table, there was a large red metallic bowl, which had been in the family since before I could remember. My mother knew it from her youth, when beautiful painted flowers blossomed along the bowl's edge. My grandmother had received this bowl as a wedding present many years before. Now, there were only flecks of paint and more chips and dings than flowers. Inside, the bowl contained a mound of dough, as white and fluffy as the snow outside. Three women worked to knead the dough, plunging their fists into it, forcing and bending it to their will. They laughed and joined in the banter around them. Other women worked around the kitchen, some washing and preparing dried corn leaves, and some working on various fillings. The women were making tamales, a traditional Christmas food. Making tamales was not something that could be done alone; the task took many. At the stove, two women worked at stirring a giant pot of reddened meat, the chili sauce that would serve as the filling for some of the tamales. On the opposite side of the table, a group of women worked to shell pecans, prying the nut meat that held on stubbornly to the shell. My mother, was at the center of the it all, moving between groups of women, sharing her insights, giving her opinion, and teaching.

“Make sure to keep stirring the *chile* it needs to be thick, and it needs to look red, if it isn’t red enough add more *chile*.”

“Socorro, how do you know when the dough is ready?” asked one of my aunts who was working on the dough.

“When you drop it in water, it should float to the top,” she replied.

“How many pecans should we shell? Is this enough?” asked one of my cousins who was working on shelling pecans.

“When there are half the pecans as there is coconut,” she answered.

“Coy, I’m tired of stirring this *chile*,” stated another cousin working on a meat filling.

“How are you going to be a wife if you get tired from a little bit of stirring, besides, who’s going to make tamales when we’re gone? You know you’re *mamás* are not going to last forever. One day it will be your turn to pass this along,” she replied.

In the midst of teaching, the women passed other lessons along.

“Did you watch your *novela* last night Socorro?” asked one of my aunts.

“*No, se me pasó*⁹⁶, what happened?” she asked.

“Well, you’ll never guess what, it turns out she was pregnant, and the father is not her husband. Now she has to figure out how to tell her mother; it will probably kill her,” my aunt relayed the information, shaking her head and in a voice that echoed concern and disappointment.

“She was a young girl, but that’s what happens when you let men seduce you. But that kind of man is no good, getting a girl pregnant and then not having the courage to stand up and take care of his responsibilities,” she said, with a long sigh at the end.

⁹⁶ “I missed it.”

“These girls today think it’s so easy. They get pregnant, and they go to the hospital and have an abortion, or they have the baby because they can get welfare.”

“Ay Socorro, you’re so old fashioned,” said one of my older cousins. “It’s okay for a woman to get pregnant if she wants to. A woman doesn’t need a man to take care of her.”

“I know that. You guys think getting pregnant and left alone is a new thing? That’s what happened to my mom’s mom. That’s why she grew up with her aunts--her mother left her because she was so ashamed. All my mom knew of her dad was that he was some white guy with red hair and green eyes. I’m just saying, learn from them. *No sean pendejas*⁹⁷. It’s not so easy; welfare is not the answer. Sure you have your *mamá*, but not forever. And besides, why should she take care of your kids, she took care of you, isn’t that enough?” she chuckled. “Besides, Reagan’s cheese is not that good; I don’t even think it’s food. They just give it to the poor people and hope they die of constipation. Ay, I ate some one time at your *tía* Josefa’s house, and I was so constipated afterward I didn’t shit for three days.”

“Coy!” exclaimed one of my nieces. “Oh my god, you’re so embarrassing. Don’t listen to her guys she’s just trying to provoke you.”

The women laughed at my niece’s embarrassment, “Oh Elizabeth, she’s just kidding,” said a disembodied voice above the chortles.

“What? It’s true Liza. I’m just saying what happened. We all go to the bathroom. It’s not a secret, even you,” she smiled in response. My niece rolled her eyes and went back to shelling pecans.

⁹⁷ “Don’t be stupid,” or can also mean, “Do not let yourself be made a fool of.”

The women shared more than traditions. In the confines of the kitchen they showed one another their beliefs, their joy, and their suffering.

11.2 Informal Education and Visual Culture

Informal education encompasses more than addition and subtraction. In the home, where most informal education begins, what individuals are taught goes beyond public school pedagogy. Children and adults teach one another traditions, family history, myth, stories, fables and share their understanding of the ways in which the world works. Individuals educate one another on how to see the world. Vision is constructed and becomes inseparable from language, culture, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (Rose, 2005). Language encodes culture and the ways in which language is used relates individuals' vision of the world (Riley, 2007). These all conspire in the construction of meaning. Vision is not something that is relegated to the physical senses. After completing the study, what became clearer to me was that vision happens in the mind. Visual culture is more than what is seen. Yes, the word visual is in the term visual culture, but what this refers to is visuality. The social construction of vision and the visual construction of the social are part of the interplay between visuality and intertextuality found within visual culture (Mitchell, 2002). Using these concepts, visual culture is not just what individuals see, but the meaning making that occurs (Barnard, 2001). Vision in this sense, is what is seen, heard, felt, touched, engaged, discussed, retold, and reinterpreted (Riley, 2007).

In the study, visual culture is not just what is seen with the participants' eyes, but encompasses a whole mindset and socialization. The stories that the women in the

study relate/ illustrate the interaction between what the women see and the perceptions they form. Their perceptions are altered by one another, by their surroundings, and through authority figures. The narratives about the women in the study interweave the way they understand one another, and how they were formed, by each other, by the outside world, and then through factors that remain elusive, known only to themselves. In the study, the women make sense of the world and constantly reinterpret what they see, hear, and experience through filters of culture, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and other factors that make their understanding individual. Though their understanding is individual, the meanings that they make are not unique. The women in the study share their ideas with one another, at times, to influence the way another sees. This is not unlike teaching in a formal setting. Educators often share their ideas and understanding in an attempt to influence another. The way that the women in the study share with one another is sometimes reciprocal, sometimes univocal, or unilateral, and sometimes rejected. What is important in the study in regards to the creation of meaning and understanding is that influence occurs from outside of culture and from within. The women in the study often subvert one another as well.

When describing culture as a molecule, the analogy is made to describe the unknowable forces that tie groups together. Like a molecule, culture seems to be easily defined. Culture is often described by what characteristics are included and what is excluded. Seemingly, the way a culture is defined is by stating, “this belongs,” and “this doesn’t belong.” But the function of culture is like a molecule. In a superficial way, culture, in dominant multicultural practices is seen to work and be structured so that the lines and boundaries that define culture are clear. Once the surface is broken, however,

culture, like a molecule, becomes complex (Ballengee-Morris, 2003). So too, culture is unstable, and there are underlying forces that are not easily understood or defined. In dominant art education practices educators encounter resistance from students or are reluctant themselves to deal with issues of culture that can seem controversial or uneasy i.e. racism, sexuality, and gender politics. Cultural identities shift from relations of representation to the politics of representation. According to Hall (2006) culture exists outside and within the discursive of cultural politics, identity is subject to specific conditions, limits and modalities. Molecules are not stable, and there are underlying forces that science has yet to understand. What this means for multicultural pedagogy is that culture cannot be easily encapsulated. Teaching diversity then becomes much more difficult. The diasporas of culture becomes insurmountable, but that does not mean the subject should not be approached. What multicultural curricula in dominant art education practice neglects is that all individuals comprise diversity. Desai (2003) notes that multicultural art education often limits educators' understanding of the complexity found within the ways in which sexuality, race, ethnicity, gender and social class intersect with one another. What I mean by this is that there are elements of cultural diversity within all learners and educators. By listening to the stories that students have to offer, understanding the diversity from which they make meaning in the world creates the potential for an experience in art education that is not an empty exercise. Too often dominant multicultural pedagogy neglects the diversity of the educators as well. Teachers too, are part of the narrative that comprises multiculturalism. When teaching about cultures other than the one they perceive to be their own, art educators include their position and their politics through the discourses they choose to include and

exclude (Desai, 2000). According to Clifford (1986) images and representations are positional, linked to history, power and dominance in ways that educators are both aware and unaware. Art educators are part of the discourse on multicultural art education in the ways they choose to talk about art. Whether art educators include or avoid polarizing issues found within multicultural art curricula reflects their divergent views. Some art educators in dominant practice believe that imparting the entire content of a culture is impossible, while others believe that including the relationship of power, dominance, to economic, political, and social processes are necessary parts of understanding culture (Adejumo, 2002; Desai, 2000). Multicultural art education is often confused with global education and as such an art educator can create confusion and misinterpretation of culture in their students (Davenport, 2000). When misinterpretations and misrepresentations of culture are perpetuated by art educators in dominant practice, and students are unable to conform to these assumptions, a rift may be created between what the teacher is trying to teach and what is being learned (Stuhr, 1994). Understanding where, when and why misinterpretations and misrepresentations occur for art educators in multicultural curricula is important to understand the complex relationship between educator, student, and the ways in which each views the world. The contradiction found within what a student sees versus what an educator sees and how the discourse that occurs is as important to the ways in which learning occurs as is the consensus. Cultural knowledge, art making, and understanding are reconstituted in the classroom, and are connected to the informal and individual meaning that is made through cultural associations, ideas, opinions and beliefs (Freedman, 2003).

11.3 Issues of Empowerment

In the study, women empower themselves in the face of traditional values. In Maricela's story, when she is confronted by her teacher, she empowers herself through resistance. When she is placed in the corner, she cries, but does not change. The way she envisioned the world was in negotiating her father's perception of what a good girl was and traversing the line between good girl and bad girl. The choices that she made in life were often a way of negotiating the traditional roles of femininity set by her Mexican heritage, and the more liberal roles she perceived as existing in the U.S. She worked in a warehouse on the border, but also wore make-up and fussed over her hair and clothes. Maricela's identity was shaped by her perceptions of man and woman, mother and daughter, good girl and bad girl. The world of Mexican men that she sought to deny became the world that she later embraced. She did not see herself as a Mexican-American, Hispanic, Latina, or Chicana, and instead found the power to define herself as she saw fit. In some instances, Maricela allowed her identity to be in line with *Latindad*, and at other times, she embraced her American identity. The way in which she empowered herself was through using either identity, her American and her Latina identity, to fulfill the role that she needed. Leticia found empowerment through silence, and used it to create distance between herself and the world. She too had to negotiate the world but in her stories, the struggle to define identity becomes clearer. Leticia is caught between two worlds, never truly being able to abandon either. She finds empowerment in the traditions she values, but also lets go of those that she feels are antiquated.

The women in the study empower themselves to both maintain their heritage through traditions and also embrace those from the U.S. In the study, the women reject the terms Latina, Chicana, Mexican-American, and Hispanic and prefer to label themselves as Americans. Traditions are not so much embraced as they are interwoven with new traditions based on the American traditions that have been reinterpreted through their own cultural perspectives exemplified in my mother's narratives when she learns how to make Thanksgiving dinner although this holiday is not a traditional Mexican celebration.

What becomes clearer for me in looking at the study is that issues of identity are complicated. The women embrace many aspects of who they are, and find places where they can empower themselves in defining who they are. However, in light of the study, I have come to realize that relationships of power are not usually one to one, nor are they always reciprocal or found within hierarchies that are structured in predetermined ways (Foucault, 1980; Richardson, 1997). There are definite institutions of power that are evident, and the women in the study encounter them, but they are not always crippled nor is their identity stifled. In many ways, the women in the study find a path that incorporates who they are and who they want to become.

The women in the study operated under perceptions of identity that often conflicted with one another. In Amanda's story, as she negotiated her identity, she encountered and embraced her otherness in her Chola identity. In embracing her inner chola, and bringing it outward, Amanda sought to destabilize perceptions about herself within the family and at school. She perceived herself as an *other* and by donning the Chola identity, further segregated herself from the norms that she encountered.

Amanda embodied otherness to an extreme degree, embracing a stereotypic identity in order to gain power. She understood that in being a Chola, she engendered fear.

Though the study involves relations of power, there is no one site where power is the nexus, no place where there is clearly a point where power begins and subordination ends. In the study all participants are complicit in their empowerment and in their subjugation, there is no universal, not whiteness, not maleness, not heterosexuality, *latindad* where subjugation is clearly shown to originate.

11.4 Personal Ideas of Otherness

The women in the study felt their otherness in relation to the world outside and between one another as well. In the narratives the women relate, otherness becomes an issue to contend with from many perspectives. Leticia relates her sense of otherness in a direct way as she negotiates communication between what she perceives as the white world and her family. She is placed, literally and figuratively in a liminal space, existing within the traditional confines of her heritage and the institutions of authority with which she is expected to relate. Leticia bridges these two states of being through the knowledge that she gains through different media like television and books. The knowledge that Leticia gains both reinforces her otherness and allows her to contend with issues of acceptance and rejection between both the outside world and her mother. As this relates to art education, otherness is not something that is easily defined. Representation in education is not immune to otherness. In a postcolonial feminist perspective representation is neither neutral nor innocent (Peters & Lankashear, 1995). Individuals are *othered* by the cultural groups to which they belong and by members

outside of them. Addressing the sites in which *otherness* can occur is important in multicultural pedagogies by understanding the pluralities of struggles within and throughout collective cultural identities (Batra, 2004; Bhabha, 2003). There is a tendency in art education to treat the art, visual media, and objects of other cultures as though they were harmless or voiceless. Failing to examine the art of other cultures without taking into account the cultural ramifications, politics, ideology and history can create the potential for further marginalization (Collins & Sandell, 1992). In art education curricula understanding that *otherness* is not a temporary state but rather a persistent one can help to further redefine pedagogy that enables people to embrace their difference. By embracing a more critical multiculturalism that is framed in the idea of agency art education can begin to create pedagogy where the understanding that individuals are both cultural creators, cultural negotiators. Art education should begin to address the struggle that individuals undertake in developing identities that retain values that are important culturally while simultaneously challenging the limitations imposed through acculturation and colonialist attitudes. In some ways, individuals like Amanda embrace their *otherness* as a way to set themselves apart or gain control over how people perceive them and how they want to be perceived (Chalmers, 2002; Nieto, 2002). After conducting the study, two questions arise for me in relation to otherness, multiculturalism and art education. One, is art education doing enough to address otherness? How can multicultural pedagogy in art education acknowledge the importance of diversity and difference in the perception of identity?

Multiculturalism works with the interplay of multiple and plural identities, however, hybrid identities destabilize the boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity,

culture and language (May, 1999). Recognizing that the potential to focus on a unitary, or homogenized view of cultures can result in negative attributions, is important to art educators in understanding the potential pitfalls that can be encountered when engaging issues of diversity (Erickson, 2010). What the study has shown, at least in part, is that definitions of how individuals identify themselves is not pure, even within cultural collectives. The women in the study live their lives on the periphery of *latindad*, but also move through Latino identity and beyond, taking with them the pieces that they feel comfortable with and leaving behind the ideals that they do not agree with. However, this is not to say that they are not affected by heritage, traditions, language, and culture. The complication in identity construction, at least for the women in the study, is that in many ways, even though they have all tried to leave behind the parts of their heritage they do not agree with, they do not escape them entirely. This is seen in the way my mother always references traditional ways of being that are reinforced through the novelas that she watches. My sister Leticia, as a modern woman and self-proclaimed feminist, adheres to the traditions that she finds to be a part of her identity. All of the women in the study find power in their difference and otherness. The inability to focus on the source where difference or sameness originates is one of the factors that lends to the destabilization of identity. The problems that surface within the study in lieu of difference is that identity is not stable. The women in the study, specifically visible in Amanda's stories and Maricela's stories, try on different identities, move between one identity and another, keeping what they like and discarding the elements they do not agree fit their sense of self. In the study, the women do not deny that the world views them in a particular way, but they reserve the right to accept or reject that view or parts

thereof. What this means to art education is that students may see themselves differently than they are perceived. Creating pedagogy that reflects the perception that all students are individuals can allow differences to become something that is acknowledged and not something that is denied or made irrelevant.

11.5 The Shifting Nature of Symbols within a Cultural Collective

In the study, the way that the women view their culture shifts and changes from generation to generation. My mother's fascination with novelas shifts the perception her daughters and granddaughters like Maricela and Elizabeth view representations of Latinas. In turn, their ideas of womanhood contained within *latindad* shifts and is reflected in their ideas of what womanhood means in the U.S.

Language plays an important part in the way the women in the study understand their world. Terms arise that are difficult for the women to interpret from one language to the other. Specifically in terms of identity, labels sometimes take on a different connotation when translated. Words used to describe an individual or how an individual describes herself do not have a one to one direct correlation and so create complexity when trying to understand how identity is constructed. Objects also lend to the difficulty in translation for the women in the study. For example, how my mother understands the clothing she creates does not necessarily represent the way another understands them.

Language also plays an important part in the way the women in the study educated one another. They taught one another how to understand the world in relation to the language that they had available. At times, both English and Spanish concepts were blended to help each other in understanding the world.

11.6 Stereotypes

Representation is a difficult topic to approach in education. The tendency is to remain politically correct at all costs in most institutions of learning and dominant practices . This can lead to creating clean lines of distinction in through which individuals are categorized. In dominant education practices the purpose of creating clean lines is aimed at managing the many differences that are encountered in the world and in the classroom. Remaining neutral and politically correct is a way to ensure that no individual is marginalized and the potential for offence is minimized. The result in dominant practice is to create a world where culture is clean and easily understood. But culture is not clean, liminal spaces exist and the lines between the perceived *us* and *them* become blurred. In the process of creating political correctness, dominant practices in multicultural teaching fall prey to creating generalities in order to avoid conflict in the classroom. As an example, in my own practice of teaching pre-service teachers how to incorporate global aesthetics in their lessons, many students are pre-occupied with ensuring that they represent a culture the “right” way. Many of my students avoid anything that might seem controversial. The topics they avoid include the practices of other cultures they perceive to be too “dangerous” like politics of gender or sexuality. Though they see these issues as important, my students are blinded by their attempts to remain neutral and politically correct. How cultural beliefs influence vision, perception and creative practices are important. Stereotypes fall into this same area of avoidance. Acknowledging and creating discourse about stereotypes can create spaces for critical discussion, self-reflection, and deeper understanding of cultural practices. Stereotypes are not inherently good or bad. From a post-structuralist viewpoint,

stereotypes just are, they exist because they are a way of understanding the world. Not everyone agrees on what is a stereotype and what is not. According to Ramírez Berg (2002), “stereotyping describes a value-neutral psychological mechanism that creates categories and enables people to manage the swirl of data presented to them from their environment” (p. 14). Dominant practices in education fail to explore, perhaps out of fear, or other reasons, that stereotypes exist in cultures outside of the U.S. Many cultures are as complicit in making judgments about other cultures based on gross generalities as cultures in the U.S. Many of my pre-service students did not realize that people of other cultures, people of color, all people can be racist. In this study, the women in my family had their own ideas about the world outside of their cultural group. Often, especially my mother, the women in the study associated authority with whiteness, often referring to the negative things they encountered as “white” . The idea of whiteness had both positive and negative connotations for them. At times being white was associated with things they perceived as good such as wealth, education, success, and happiness. While at other times, the women in the study associated “white” with negativity such as loss of culture, bland, sexual promiscuity and being unclean.

Stereotypes exist within cultures as well, since ethnocentricity is found within almost any group. Groups can and do define the world and categorize the world through the measurements and viewpoints which garner themselves at the center. Groups perceive the world as though they are at the center, and everything else is measured against or rated in reference to themselves (Ramírez Berga, 2002). What is more important than stereotypes exist at all is that stereotypes are believed. Continuing curricula that explore the ways in which stereotypes work within and throughout culture

is important for art education in approaching multicultural practices. Many individuals, like my mother as a cleaning woman, feel the brunt of being invisible. Individuals like her and her counterparts are dismissed or overlooked as fixtures, or part of the hum-drum banality of daily life. Without stereotypes, individuals like these become even more invisible.

11.7 Sexuality and Gender

The women in the study experience different perceptions of sexuality and gender that are based in part by the cultural traditions they experience and the hegemonic norms in which they live their everyday lives (Anzaldúa, 1990). Sexuality is addressed in different ways by the women, and conflict with specifically my mother's ideas of chastity and religion. Latinas' ideas about the body and sexuality reflect beliefs that are intertwined within colonial forces and liberated practices (Castañeda & Zavella, 2007). Her ideas of how a woman should act as a proper dignified woman are reinforced by the television that she watches. But she too has conflicts with the perception of Latinas and more specifically herself as a sexualized being. For herself, my mother believes that a woman is free to choose how she wants to act, but when confronted with the realities of her daughter's and her granddaughter's promiscuity, she resorts to the established traditional norms that have cultivated her identity. In a sense, she believes it is alright for her to behave a certain way, as an empowered and independent woman, but only because she believes only she has the conviction or control to conduct herself properly. My niece Amanda understands sexuality differently. She allowed herself to experience a wide spectrum of sexual activity, moving through boundaries that my mother would not

have allowed herself to experience. Dilemmas did arise for her as she negotiated her sexual identity, because she had to integrate who she was sexually within the context of who she was culturally. Identity in her experience is not something that exists or is constructed in isolation. Although Amanda tried on many identities—Chola, lesbian, bisexual, Latina, Goth, actress—in the study, she did so within the perceptions and ideals of the other women with whom she was connected to, specifically the women in her family. In art education, specifically within the context of visual culture, mass media is seen as a pervasive way in which students are influenced. However, mass media, in art education, is only viewed from a hegemonic perspective, where sometimes the assumption is that all students watch traditional American television (Vargas, 2010). Though multicultural and visual culture theorists in art education acknowledge that the everyday imagery that informs meaning and culture are important, they do not readily specify within in what or which cultural capacity this may occur (Duncum, 1997). Put more simply, the vantage point is almost always from a perspective that neglects the images that may be viewed in different cultural collectives. What the study shows is that the women who participated watched American television but also watched programming that originated outside of the U.S., specifically Mexico and other Latin American countries, where perceptions of sexuality and gender often conflict with the images portrayed on traditional American television. And sometimes the two types of television programming collide in such a way as to reinforce stereotypes (Anzaldúa, 1990; Nieto, 2002; Vargas, 2010). In relation to the study and sexuality, women in Mexican programming and women of color in American television were perceived in specific sexualized and weakened positions by the women in the study (Báez, 2008).

11.7 Limitations of the Study

Because the study was focused on a specific group, the possibility of generalizing the information to a larger group is essentially not possible. The goal of the study was not to create a document that would serve as a comprehensive understanding of all Latinas and how visual culture influenced their construction of identity. The purpose of the study was to focus on the cultural, sexual, gender, and ethnic identity of the women in my family and how they perceived their identity in connection to visual culture.

Another limitation of the study was my relationship to the women. Though I was allowed to enter into discussions that other men, even other men in my family would not have been, there were still discussions that in which I was not allowed to participate. My understanding of the women's narratives was also framed by my own perceptions of them. I understand them in particular ways and because of this, I inevitably related their narratives to my own perceptions. One of the most predominant limitations in studying the women in my family was my gender. I am not a woman. Because I am not a woman, I do not know what being a woman is or means, I can only infer from my observations.

11.8 Further Research

Visual culture in art education is concerned with the idea that television, film, the internet, advertising, and other forms of cultural production inform the creation of meaning, understanding that in turn informs creative personal expressions (Freedman, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Garoian & Gaudelius, 2004; Kindler, 2003). Though, in general, the basic terms of what is included or excluded in visual culture art education

are not agreed upon (Duncum, 2006). As visual culture continues to be a part of art education, understanding how the visual world influences the way individuals make meaning becomes more important as education begins to reevaluate individuality in pedagogical practices (Duncum, 2006; Freedman, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004). Issues of diversity and the complicated nature of culture and identity make the study even more relevant.

In art education there needs to be more discussion regarding issues of hybridity in relation to multicultural pedagogy. Studies in the ways that cultural lines are blurred could benefit a better understanding for art education practitioners in the construction of curricula that addresses the diasporas of diversity in a more comprehensive and individualized manner. How others are defined and the complications this creates in art education is a possible site of further education. Questions that can be asked are: How do we define others? What happens when we are allowed to define others? Who has the authority to define others?

Studies that explore the connection of culture to identity in relation to the ways in which individuals learn and construct meaning can help art education practitioners create curricula that addresses the complex nature of hybrid identities. There can be a disconnection between how an individual perceive themselves and how they are perceived. When an individual is viewed in particular ways the possibility of subjugation exists, even in multicultural practices (Bhabha, 2003; Collins & Sandell, 1992).

Visual culture has become an important part of art education, although there is still room for further studies that include the way in which vision is related to culture and in turn, how that is related to the way in which individuals perceives themselves.

Questions that can be asked are: What does visual culture look like outside of the U.S. and how does that affect the way identity is constructed in the classroom? What is the relationship between vision and identity in relation to people outside of the U.S. and how does this affect learning?

Stories that individuals tell are related to the way that they see the world. Studies that explore the relationship of vision and the construction of narratives can add to discourses in art education by creating a richer understanding of the way individuals create meaning. There are questions that can be asked based on the study in relation to visual culture and art education such as; 1) How does visual culture work from the bottom up?; 2) How do individuals empower themselves within hegemonic media constructions of identity?; and 3) How do individuals create subversive narratives that resituate and reinterpret visual culture?

Issues that are specifically related to post-Chicano and post-Latino identity are scarce in art education studies. Further research in the way that individuals perceive identity within a poststructural and postmodern framework can help art education researchers and practitioners better serve marginalized populations.

11.9 Conclusion

This was not the story that I thought I would tell. What the women in the study had to say was much more than I could ever have imagined. I wanted to portray my vision of beauty, to show the women in the study in a beautiful light, where they met the challenges in their lives with swords and shields. I wanted to portray the women in the family as conquerors of inequity, and as pillars of strength that were immune to the

trappings of power, corruption, and domination. What they showed me was a different kind of beauty. Their lives were not perfect. Their interaction with one another and with the world was ugly, vicious, and horrid at times. Though they were the source and recipient of mistreatment, they were never the victim. That was not my goal in the study. I did not want to portray the women in the study as victimized or powerless. The women in the study illuminated a perspective for me that I had never known. They shared thoughts and feelings that, in some cases, I did not want to know. The women in the study understood the complexity of their identity because they understood the complexity of existing as a woman in a cultural Diaspora. Womanhood was the veil through which the women in the study saw the world. Through their eyes the experiences that constructed their world and their understanding muddied the already murky waters of identity. Through narrative, the women in the study shared the ways in which they constructed lives, histories, traditions, memories and meaning. When the women spoke to one another, they spoke in ways that utilized the language of family, the language of ethnicity, and the language of culture. What they spoke was the language of womanhood. They mixed the language of pain with joy, and the language of suffering with hope. Traversing the line between bitter and sweet, what they said, was neither and both. Their words were like feathers falling on water, and the ripples they caused echoed past one another, through generations and across genders. The women spoke of a place between sea and sky, a place only they could enter, and only they could see. Their words were many, for they believed, we too are many. Their words were myth and their words were truth, mixing both with ease-- love and lust, mingled

with virtue, the moon and other vices. The women moved between past and present and within their words the two became one.

APPENDIX
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Art Practices

1. What do you consider art?
2. What do you remember about your art classes?
3. What kind of art do you have in your home?
4. What kind of art do you make?
5. How do you make art? If you don't think you make art, how could you learn to make art?
6. How would you describe yourself as an artist?
7. How do you view traditional crafts as art?
8. What are some of your fondest and worst memories about art classes you may have taken?
- 9.
10. Are the embroideries you make art?

Ethnicity

11. What do you consider your ethnicity to be?
12. How do you react to the terms Latina/Chicana/Mexicana/Americana/Gringa?
13. How would you describe yourself?
14. Do you consider yourself gay, straight, bisexual or somewhere in between?
15. Are you more comfortable speaking English or Spanish?

Religious Iconography

16. Do you consider religion to be a component of your ethnicity?
17. How do you view religion in connection to your ethnicity?
18. How do religious icons fit into your construction of identity?
19. Why did you choose the religious images that you have displayed in your home?
20. What are some of the religious images that you can remember, from books, television, church, etc. that you feel you have a connection with or have influenced you in some way?
21. Did seeing the way women were portrayed in religious icons affect the way you felt about yourself?
22. Were there some images that made you uncomfortable? Why?
23. Can you relate to the religious icons/imagery of belief systems outside of your own?

Comic Books

24. Did you ever pretend to be a superhero?

25. What are some of the Mexican comic books that you remember?
26. Why do you remember them?
27. Could you read the comic books?
28. How were these comic books the same/different from comics in the United States?
29. Were there any comic book characters that you wanted to be like?
30. Did you ever identify with a male character in a comic book?
31. Could you ever see yourself in a comic book?
32. Did you feel that you could find yourself, your ethnicity or evidence of the way you identified your beliefs in comic books in the United States or Mexico.
33. How were the women portrayed in comic books? Did it make you uncomfortable, angry, sad, or did you agree with their portrayal, or were you indifferent?
34. Do you think the way women were portrayed affected the way you thought of yourself?

Television

35. How did you feel about the women in the Mexican novelas that you watch or used to watch?
36. Did you like the novelas?
37. Did they make you uncomfortable, angry, sad, happy etc. and why?
38. Have you watched a lot of television, English programming?
39. What were some of your favorite programs? Why?
40. Who is your favorite television character, either in Spanish or English programming? Do you identify with him/her?
41. When you were younger, what were some of the programs you used to enjoy watching? Why?
42. How do you think television has affected how you think about yourself?
43. Do you prefer watching Spanish programming or English programming?
44. What were some of the programs that you absolutely did not like? Why?
45. Are there characters from Mexican or American television that you like/don't like?

Film

46. What are/were some of your favorite movies?
47. Which movie character do you feel you are most like?
48. What are some of your favorite Mexican movies? Why?
49. What were some of the most memorable characters in Mexican movies for you?
50. What were your least favorite Mexican movies? Why?
51. Are there differences between Mexican movies and American movies that you can think of?

52. Did you choose to watch Mexican movies or did you watch them because it was your only option?
53. How do you feel women are portrayed in Mexican movies versus American movies?
54. Do you identify more with the themes presented in Mexican movies or American movies?
55. Do you understand the cultural nuances in Mexican/American movies?
56. Do you understand the language in Mexican/American movies?
57. What are some of the most memorable commercials for you?
58. Why are they memorable?

Advertising

59. What do you like most/least about advertisements?
60. How do you feel about the way women are portrayed in Mexican advertisements? American?
61. What advertisement, on television or in a magazine, had a profound effect on you whether positively or negatively?
62. Do you think advertisements relate to your ethnicity?
63. What are some of the most sexually provocative advertisements that you have seen? Did they make you uncomfortable, angry, sad or did they make you feel indifferent?
64. When you look at magazines, how do you feel women are portrayed in them? Can you relate to them?

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