(En)Countering Domestic Violence, Complicity, and Definitions of Chicana Womanhood

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Introduction[1]

A powerful and socially negotiated discourse between womanhood and ethnic identity provides the symbolic means through which "culture" is appropriated and used coercively in domestic violence. Domestic abuse appears in a linguistically and culturally specific repertoire reflecting a struggle over what makes a Chicana "good." In these cases, the stereotype of the submissive Chicana dedicated exclusively to her husband and family becomes appropriated as the exclusive demarcation of "authentic" and essentialized Chicana womanhood. This paper will examine the relationship between domestic violence and definitions of Chicana womanhood.

I suggest the ideological features used against Chicanas in abusive relationships are the very same symbolic forces used to construct all Chicanas as "good" or "bad." For abused Chicanas, contesting such a cultural platform would likely exacerbate their physical and symbolic attack. Not contesting those symbolic underpinnings keeps abused Chicanas locked within the symbolic system used to justify their abusers' actions. Neither reaction hastens abused Chicanas' liberation, neither provides an easy solution. Meanwhile, Chicanas who are not in abusive relationships, yet fail to challenge such conventions—of that which makes a Chicana "good" or "bad"—become unwittingly complicit in an abusive structure. Echoes of this discourse and the concomitant battle over the terms of Chicana womanhood also appear in wider kinship circles. Domestic violence and contestations of Chicana womanhood affects family and community spheres; domestic violence is more than the concerns between one man and one woman. Kin networks, both those who are affected by domestic violence and those who are not, engage in competing interests of Chicana womanhood as well as Chicano manhood.

The repertoire of domestic violence so explicitly calls upon a cultural discourse as to appear to be culturally motivated and endorsed. Subsequently, confronting violence in domestic abuse, while crucial, is not sufficient. Merely entertaining this patriarchal stereotype of Chicana womanhood perpetuates the legitimation for abuse and thereby normalizes domestic violence. Indeed my data will reveal the tremendous difficulties Chicanas experienced in decrying violence while upholding the patriarchal demands of Chicana womanhood.[2] In this ethnographic reality check, we remind ourselves that the struggle over the definition of Chicana womanhood is not academic; it is real, painful, and because of the high stakes it is important to analyze. Using theoretical advances in how Chicana womanhood is historically, structurally, and symbolically created[3] I will examine how some Chicanas experienced domestic violence, the symbolic demands made against them under the claims of being a "good" Chicana, and their struggle to reclaim their own definition of "Chicana."[4]

"Good" Chicana Womanhood

The stereotype in question regards Chicanas as passive and silent, and it appears in culturally explicit ways to endorse "Chicana" in the exclusive role of mother and wife.[5] Two separate but converging groups have an interest in Chicana submissiveness. This stereotype has appeared in romanticized narrow cultural nationalist thinking (García 1990; Gómez-Quiñones 1977; Saragoza 1983) and in racist explanations for social oppression (see Andrade 1982a, 1982b; Padilla 1990; Romano-V. 1970). First, men within Chicano families benefit from Chicanas' labor and "submissiveness." Many Chicanos have been historically invested in seeing men's "control" over the family as a byproduct of culture (see Rebolledo 1995; Segura 1989; Anzaldúa 1987; Moraga 1983). Indeed, Chicanas who defy the Chicano patriarchal claim of the authentic and "good" Chicana—passive and dedicated to house and home—risk being denounced as acting white or being a *vendida*, a sell-out (Anzaldúa 1987; Chabram-Dernersesian 1992; Moraga 1983; and others). Second, contemporary capitalist interests sustain labor market segmentation by

manipulating Chicanas' access to institutional advancement using a "cultural" explanation—that is, they assert that Chicanas do not really want a career (Ortiz and Santana Cooney 1984; Segura 1989) nor are they really "legitimate" students (McKenna and Ortiz 1988). In this way, Chicanas' motivation and interests are delegitimized and reduced to the concerns of house and home.[6] The stereotype, then, has been used to serve the interests of the patriarchies (Euro-American and Chicano) as well as racialized capitalism.

The Chicanas I interviewed also explained the gender-ethnic roles they experienced by reference to these "cultural" stereotypes rather than implicating structurally and historically constituted definitions. Such claims implicitly drew from profoundly entrenched gender, class, and racial structural systems that limit Chicanas' access to employment and education (Segura 1989). In contrast to those interviewees who might regard culture as the underlying cause of domestic violence, my interest here is to look at the cultural repertoire that expresses domestic violence and Chicanas' resistance to it.

Endorsing the mother/wife role as a function of womanhood and Chicana authenticity is not the genesis of Chicanas' exploitation, abuse, and oppression. Indeed, these limited definitions exist outside of domestic abuse. Further, focusing on abuse and cultural rules threatens to detract from the structural roots of Chicanas' oppression—economic, racial, and patriarchal systems. However, I believe that we must explore the ways in which Chicanas experience domestic violence and interrogate our own unwitting participation in it.[7] So while culture does not cause domestic violence, <u>how</u> women experience domestic violence is culturally and historically specific (Alonso 1995; Cuellar 1993; Flores-Ortiz 1993; Zambrano 1985, 1994).

Down-playing challenges

I assert that the willingness to dampen, not contradict, the stereotype of Chicana womanhood continues to uphold the extreme. The extreme here is domestic violence—my data included physical battery as well as verbal, emotional, and sexual

abuse. Working-class Chicanas, like Lena Reyes,[8] down-played her own profound struggle with domestic violence and limiting ideas of Chicana womanhood, in favor of a more moderate presentation of "women" seeking educational alternatives. Here she is speaking of Mexican women of Tijuana, where she was raised, and their seeming inescapable fate:

> "Women were not told to stand up for their rights... [they] were not told to go out and be educated and get a job. [In] fact every woman was getting beat on Friday and Saturday nights at their home. Everybody knew, nobody would talk about it, because they just accepted it as a norm. Even the big religious [men], their wives were getting their asses beat every so often by the preacher man/ husband. Because first they are men and then they are whatever.... It was just accepted, but I don't think it is anymore.... I think more and more women are coming up with education." Lena Reyes.

Lena Reyes decried the educational and career limitations imposed on Mexicanas and tied it to Mexicanas'[9] acceptance and normalization of domestic abuse. In her presentation she neglected her own powerful history in which she and her mother both escaped from abusive marriages. In this way we must recognize that Chicanas did and do create their subjective experiences and that they do contest oppressive demands but that doing can be transgressive.

In contrast to the submissive/oppressive binary central to the stereotype and present in many instances of domestic violence, Chicanas and Chicanos are, and always have been, creating and living "Chicana" and "Chicano" in non-stereotypical ways. However, we must acknowledge that there is pressure to downplay these challenges in favor of lip-service to that "authenticated" cultural stereotype (such as the above example in Lena Reyes's testimony). The symbolic power of that stereotype wields an ability to create and demand the perception of a more culturally authentic or potent expression of Chicana womanhood.

This stereotype does not reflect any cultural reality as much as it reflects a specifically masculinized vision for Chicana womanhood. In this regard, the stereotype was used as a situational weapon against a Chicana's particular behavior/ relationship. "Everybody knew, nobody would talk about it, because they just accepted it as a norm." It also affected, if only temporarily, the way many Chicanas saw themselves in relationship to others, how they regarded their options, and how they heard the advice of others.

Domestic violence expressed through culture

In my research, I saw the extreme of the stereotype—that Chicanas should serve the interests of mother and wife **exclusively**—imposed in the context and content of domestic violence.[10] The stereotype, imposed by abusers as a means to coerce Chicanas, was not typical, and it was strongly contested by the research participants.[11] For example, Julia Ochoa commented on her ex-husband's violent threats that she remain his wife, his property, threats that persisted even after she left him:

> "I waited a number of years [to file for divorce].... I didn't have the money. And plus he threatened me that if I got a divorce he was going to kill me. Oh yeah, I had a stalker for a while. I wasn't allowed dates. A father-type, you know, the controller." Julia Ochoa

His intimidation and stalking not only served to punish Julia Ochoa for leaving her role and him, but to prevent her from taking legal recourse and from finding another male partner. The demand that Chicanas act only in their roles as mother and wife was not only unreasonable, but impossible.

I observed or heard claims that Chicanas should have no identity outside of the role as wife and mother. These should be regarded as an extreme—not the norm. Researchers have referred to such rigid and limited view of Chicanas' experiences as "cultural freezing" (Flores Ortiz 1993). Angie Vigil explained that her husband wanted her to stay home and take care of their

children. This assertion not only insisted that Angie Vigil had no role outside of the family, but it upheld Mario Vigil's sense of himself as sole economic provider. "I tried this for a while. I got frustrated and started looking for work. But we were not in a good financial situation. I told my husband, Mario, "Love is not enough." Angie Vigil contradicted his ideal and challenged his assessment of their family's economic needs. She insisted that Mario's vision was not realistic; she sought both waged employment and educational opportunities. Mario Vigil answered her contestations with a pattern of abuse that demanded that Angie acquiesce to his appraisal of her womanhood and his manhood.

> "He was being abusive physically, sexually, and emotionally.... He blamed me for all our problems saying that I was using school as an excuse, that I just wasn't being responsible.... He assumed that [taking care of the children] was my duty. [After all], what else was I going to do?" Angie Vigil

By ignoring Angie Vigil's wage-earning capacity and her desire for a career, Mario Vigil could emphasize her responsibilities in the most narrow and rigid fashion and in a way that upheld his self-concept.

My research indicated that domestic violence participated in upholding limited ideals of the Chicana mother-wife in three ways. First, as I just described, abusers used violence to punish Chicanas for not living up to their narrow expectations. Second, they used violence to deter Chicanas from participating in roles or identities outside of their definition of the "good" Chicana mother-wife role. Demands for submissiveness, silence, complicity, and sexual purity all fell under the implicit rubric that a "good" Chicana is foremost a mother and wife. Third, they played upon the broader socio-economic reality that diminishes working-class Chicanas' opportunities, especially as single mothers and as women of color.

Using broad claims to "goodness" and "badness" lent abusers symbolic claim and legitimation for their restrictive vio-

lence. "Goodness" and "badness" were broad in the sense that they were moveable and changeable to the whim of the abuser, yet they were also quite specific in their cultural incisiveness. Patricia Peña described how her ex-husband would demand her silence and enforce his sense of her behavior and comportment:

> "Whenever I would get out of hand, he would hit me. You know what I mean? Whenever he felt like I would talk out or speak out, he would be, "shut up"—(she motions her hand up and swings the back of her hand as if to strike out at a face)—so that he would control me with the violence." Patricia Peña

Literally attempting to keep her from speaking, Patricia Peña's ex-husband would silence her by hitting her in the mouth. The intersection of violence and justification for maintaining his property, Patricia Peña's ex-husband reinforced what was his idea of proper "good" behavior at that moment. For him Chicana womanhood specified her role as passive and silent as opposed to "getting out of hand," "talking out," or "speaking out."

Verbal and emotional assaults specifically against Chicanas' sexual comportment had similar oppressive effect as physical violence. Lena Reyes recalls making friends with another artist and her husband humiliating her:

> "He was constantly putting me down. He would never tell me that I was pretty or nice. He was always disrespectful. I was tired of being so badly oppressed....
>
> One time he accused me of sleeping with one of the band members and this guy was standing right there. Of course it wasn't even close to being true. But right there, in front of the whole band, he accused me and called me a whore." Lena Reyes

By challenging her sexual fidelity, Lena Reyes's ex-husband not only degraded Lena Reyes, but effectively kept the friendship from developing. Calling her "whore" and therefore "bad" demanded that she break off any suggestion of relationships outside the marriage in order to be recast as "good." He thus limited her ability to create any friendship with other men. Abusers defined "good" sexual comportment and they used it to dominate in abusive ways.

While there is tremendous symbolic power in the perception of Chicanas as defined by their spouses, there are also "real" and practical connections as well. Many of the Chicanas I interviewed understood that their access to economic security was through their male partners.[12] The often-abusive men were also aware of this. Patricia Peña recalled her ex-husband insisting that she could not leave him because she had no way to support herself except through a man:

> "He used to say, "Who is going to want you? You have two kids. Who is going to want you? What are you going to do with your life? You don't have an education, you've never worked, you don't have any experience." Patricia Peña

Her ex-husband exacerbated Patricia Peña's legitimate concerns regarding her economic independence by emphasizing his belief that she had no ability and that she had little hope for finding another husband. Against these fears and odds, many women including Patricia Peña did leave those abusive conditions despite their husbands' economic advantage, control, and not infrequently a substantial age difference. At 15 years of age, Julia Ochoa found herself living with and playing housewife for a 25-year-old man and his young daughter. At age 18 and pregnant, Julia's then-husband became physically abusive and began using drugs. Julia Ochoa had no money and little education, while her husband had a master's degree and a steady job. Although she was completely economically dependent upon him, she took the children and left:

> "He beat me so bad, I couldn't take it anymore.... I went to live with some cousins, a girlfriend...I sold my wed-

ding ring. I had no money, nothing. I didn't even take the clothes that I owned. He wouldn't allow me to." Julia Ochoa

The widening circle domestic violence and culture

I have argued that the linchpin of domestic violence against Chicanas is a narrow and unrealistic construct of Chicana womanhood. Contested by most as extreme, its power is nonetheless derived because it is partly accepted. It enjoys a hint of endorsement. Given the harshness of domestic violence, I heard Chicanas explain the shocking ambivalence their families and community members expressed. Indeed, to challenge domestic violence required a challenge to what constitutes Chicana womanhood.

While some—like Julia Ochoa's cousin—reacted with outrage, I was surprised to hear the stories of family members and community members not contesting the abuse. The efforts to "normalize" abuse asserted that 1) men are violent, 2) cultural tradition teaches Chicanas to endure abuse, 3) the women could have stopped the violence, 4) Chicanas have no viable alternative, so enduring abuse is the best plan, 5) that the abuse victims misbehaved, transgressed "good" Chicana womanhood, and therefore deserved punishment.

Chicanas described turning to other family members, seeking intervention. However, rather than receiving support, many heard claims that men, by definition, were abusive. Carmen Velasco, a young mother and accountant's assistant, was counseled to endure the abuse of Pablo—her unemployed boyfriend and her daughter's father:

> "...And [Pablo] started beating me up at his mom's house. And his mom was just like my mom. "Women get beat up all the time, Carmen. Just put up with it. You have to accept it."
>
> I was like, "Okay, okay," and I played along with it. But one time he beat me twice in a row. We were looking at a house and we had it in escrow and [we] were about to close on it the next day. And that day he grabbed me and beat me up. And I said, "Look, we cannot live like this. We cannot buy a house, Pablo." Carmen Velasco

Carmen Velasco did have economic opportunities and alternatives, but her family and Pablo's family insisted that abuse was a normal part of life. Both Carmen's mother and Pablo's mother encouraged Carmen to endure abuse and overlook her own economic viability in order to preserve their sense of order. Women's submission seemed universal to the mothers, although Carmen herself was more ambivalent and eventually left Pablo—not incidentally because she could support herself and her daughter.

Others, such as Patricia Peña, had alternative models in their mothers: "My mom always told me it [whether or not to leave my husband] was totally up to me." However, her mother's opinion lacked cultural authority. Patricia Peña's mother had divorced and therefore provided an example that Patricia could have potentially followed. But it was her grandmother with whom Patricia imbued the power of the cultural standard-bearer. Patricia inscribed her grandmother with Mexican-ness.

> "But my grandmother, who passed away, is very traditional, a very traditional Mexican woman who believed..."No matter what he does you stay with him. He is the father of your children, he is your husband, and stay with him." Because back in those days that's how those women were raised." Patricia Peña

In contrast to her mother, to whom she attributed no cultural authenticity, her grandmother's advice to endure abuse was interpreted as "traditional" and "very Mexican." In this way, Patricia aligned herself with masculinized interpretation of Chicano culture. And though she was a woman it was the grandmother who acted as agent of that patriarchal position.

Other Chicanas I interviewed believed that women could evade domestic violence. This familiar strain—the debunking of which is a cornerstone in domestic abuse literature (Dobash

and Dobash 1977; Rosewater 1985; Walker 1979) – insisted that women had power to stop abuse, and were thereby complicit with it. Alexandra Muñoz insisted that her mother's abuse was avoidable: "I see a lot of machismo. Part of that is the woman's fault. You don't have to let it get that far." So while she saw this as a power issue, she thought that women could control it by putting their foot down. She continued to indicate that it was a matter of personality rather than socialization or lack of options: "I wouldn't let men step on me." And with this proclamation, she did not look for alternative sites of resistance on the woman's part.

> "She [my mother] was [passive] like that. Now she does what she wants; my step-father changed his ways. He is less demanding. As my younger brother got older, he wanted less conflict between my younger brother and himself." Alexandra Muñoz

Rather than attribute to her mother new-found and self-created independence, Alexandra Muñoz assigned her brother's efforts to the change in her step-father. Alexandra wanted to see her mother engaged in direct confrontation as an indication of agency and resistance, ignoring the symbolic ties that were abusive and degrading to her mother.[13] In other words, it seemed that Alexandra Muñoz would have preferred to see her mother engaging in a masculinized version of resistance and in doing so she delegitimized an apparently effective yet subtle form of her mother's endurance/resistance.

In contrast to this unrealistic demand that abuse survivors could simply assert their independence was the insistence that Chicanas had no viable alternative, so enduring abuse was the best plan. Flavia Solís's mother believed that all women need men, that nearly all men are abusive, and therefore, drawing from her experience, that a woman could only aspire to have a man who was employed. This was based on Flavia Solís's perception and telling of her mother's choices and views; I did not interview Flavia's mother. This notwithstanding, Flavia Solís commented on this untenable position:

> "Most of it [the abuse] was physical. I don't mind if you use this, but I used to go home trying to get help from my mom. And she was not there for me. And I used to go with a black eye and I would go home to get away from him. So I would talk to her [to ask her] to help me, and there was no help.... For her it was normal, it was a part of life. And to me it wasn't. Therefore, she pushed me back to him. And I felt helpless. I didn't have anybody to help me or anything like that.Even if not endorsing the abuse, Flavia Solís's mother believed Flavia so wayward from "good" Mexican womanhood, that the abuse was nearly irrelevant: I was pregnant for about two months, but because of the physical abuse, I lost the baby. Then I was using the pill.... Of course, my mom didn't want me to take it because she wanted me to have kids...." Flavía Solis.
> MRR: And so what would it mean [in your mother's eyes] to be a Mexican woman?
> FS: To do things like be in the kitchen, cook.... To have kids, number one. That is probably one of the things that she resents that I haven't had any kids.

Flavia's enduring abuse legitimized Flavia's mother's choices and priorities. Flavia Solís's mother endorsed a vision of Chicana womanhood, in which being mother and wife was primary and the perception that agency and choice was not an option. This did not mean that she believed Flavia should have been abused, but it upheld the legitimacy of abuse. By sustaining the claims to the Chicana wife-mother, many family members of abuse survivors by extension helped maintain the abusive relationships.

This final position, that the abuse victims misbehaved (they were "bad" Chicanas) and therefore deserved punishment, presented domestic violence as an answer to ensuring proper and "good" Chicana womanhood. Family members, not only the abuser, participated in this legitimation of violence and control. Angie Vigil's brothers agreed with her abusive husband that she

was unwilling to 'do her duties' as a mother and wife; they likened her attending school with 'roaming the streets.' By this they implied she abdicated her motherly and wifely responsibilities and that her freedom was specifically sexual and immoral. Angie Vigil reported that she went to a hotel to escape the abuse, but returned to her husband, "Because my brothers were not supporting me."

Symbolic ties in non-abusive relationships

The symbolic and cultural claims made on Chicana womanhood move beyond domestic violence. Even in non-abusive, less extreme examples, Chicanas were still expected to participate in a notion of Chicana womanhood that placed them in the service of the patriarchy. Albeit much more moderate, I argue that participating in those demands nonetheless upholds and normalizes the extreme, violence.[14] I obviously disavow normalizing of violence, yet show that accepting conventional/patriarchal constructs of the Chicana mother-wife is at the root of this normalization. In my research Chicanas reported those patriarchal expectations and typically explained how they tempered and challenged them.

Maribel Pérez explained her grandmother's efforts to inculcate the importance of being a wife and mother as a part of being a Mexican woman:

> "My grandmother has never let up. She thinks that Mexican girls.... don't need school, they should get married, they need to be barefoot and pregnant and in the kitchen all the time." Maribel Pérez

Returning to the idea of what makes a Mexican girl "good," Maribel Pérez spelled out the submissiveness her grandmother believed necessary. She tied ethnic validity to gender specific behavior. Maribel's recollection of her grandmother's perspective in such a banal cliche ("barefoot and pregnant and in the kitchen") made her grandmother's advice seem removed and all the more stereotypical. Maribel Pérez's contestation of what

makes a "good" woman also put her at odds with being a "good" Mexican. Maribel Pérez quoted her mother, specifically in Spanish, again denoting the explicit cultural claims made vis-a-vis marriage and motherhood.

> "She [my mother] used to say, "*Mi hija, ¿Cúando te vas a casar y tener niños*[15] and this and that?" My mother knows now that I don't ever want to get married and if I want to have kids I don't need to get married." Maribel Pérez

Confronting such a powerful disclaimer against her cultural authenticity, it was consistent to hear Maribel Pérez seek Mexicana nationals to provide her with a cultural affirmation.[16] Maribel Pérez asserted her own re-interpretation of womanhood and drawing from alternative models to authenticate her claim:

> "While living in México I had preconceived notions that all Mexican women are the same, that they all want to get married and have kids. But it is not so, I got to know a lot of the women in San Cristóbal. I came to realize I'm not the only Mexican woman who feels this way. Many Mexican women living in small towns feel the same way as I do, that it is not a necessity, that we can get by without a man." Maribel Pérez

Learning to rework the terms of Chicana womanhood meant confronting the ideals imbued in that symbolic construct. Other women like Sara Cabildo only nominally participated in the expectations set out for her. In this way she secured the ethnic and gender specific demands. In an inversion of resistance, she pragmatically accepted the first offer of marriage; she understood that she was expected to marry, although she never intended to stay married.

> "When I was 18 or 19 I knew that I had to get married. I know because that is the way my dad was: "You live in

this house until you leave this house wearing white and married to your husband." ... [My ex-husband] was the first person to ask me to marry him, and I said, "Yeah, hey, I am outta here." But I wasn't expecting it to last that long. My marriage was going to be in and out." Sara Cabildo.

Sara Cabildo's resistance strategy, to participate in the roles without embracing them, promised a modicum of freedom that she wanted. She was not confronted with abuse in her family of origin nor in her relationship with her husband. We can extrapolate the substantial symbolic power motivating her to marry.

I argue that this symbolic terrain, while quite disassociated from domestic abuse, allows for a community wide acknowledgment if not endorsement of what it means to be a "good" Chicana. There were variations on this idea, but each fundamentally shared a notion of marriage and motherhood. Rita Lomas understood her extended family's Catholic-based demand that she marry upon getting pregnant, but she was confounded by her friends' insistence that she is trapped in her marriage. The friends' competing assertions were based in an ideology of street-lore rather than religion, but nonetheless affirmed substantially similar claims. "They tell me that he'll leave but then he will always come back. I get frustrated with them because they are telling me that I have to stay with him." Something akin, although oddly more extreme, than the insistence that a "good" Chicana stays with her husband, Rita Lomas's friend suggests she cannot leave him.

> "She always says, "You guys started wrong and you are going to end up wrong.... That's the way it is, whoever you go out with. *Así son los hombres. Así es.*[17] That's it. There is nothing you can do, if you leave him for someone else, you are gonna get someone who will treat you the same." Rita Lomas

Rita Lomas's narrative demonstrated the ideology of Chicanas'

subservience outside of family networks. While in a different form than in domestic abuse or in culturally marked styles, Rita Lomas's friends perpetuated their own reading and interpretation of this essentialized construction of Chicanas in relation to men. Consistent in their interpretation is a normalization of women's inability to change their circumstances, that women's subordination is normal, and that men are, by definition, disrespectful to women.

Challenging domestic violence is not enough

I have argued that within domestic violence Chicanas' agency is stripped in culturally specific ways that have parallels in broader networks outside of domestic abuse. Moreover, I argue that simply entertaining the notion of Chicana mother-wife as an "ideal" normalizes domestic violence, and thereby acts in complicity with it. The symbolic component is the linchpin to real and concrete violence.

Norma Alarcón suggests we consider how Chicanas as women are socialized to assume a subject position which downplays their potential for agency in favor of a position in which their role as a woman can be judged as "good" or "bad."

> "The symbolic contract within which "woman" is the repository of meaning and not the agent, constantly presses her to align herself with the symbolic; in this way she is forced to live the life of a "woman/mother." To refuse to live the life of a "woman," which is both literal (body) and symbolic (iconic/linguistic configurations), throws her into a crisis of meaning" (Alarcón 1988, 157).

The meaning of woman is symbolically constructed and culturally specific. I add that for Chicanas to refuse to live the life of Chicano woman/mother further exacerbates this crisis of meaning.

The many efforts to rewrite and reclaim Chicana womanhood have rested upon the very questions of who gets to define Chicano and woman, what constitutes cultural tradition, and how

those definitions have benefitted men. Writers and scholars have abundantly identified the symbolic claims that lock Chicana/Mexicana icons in an agency-less space (Alarcón 1981; Chabram-Dernersesian 1992; Cisneros 1991; Del Castillo 1977; Rebolledo 1995; Rodríguez 1994). Research has also uncovered the power of this symbolic alliance and its detriment in the icons and constructs of Chicanas/Mexicanas in real life (Romero 1992; Zavella 1987) and in contemporary cultural expressions (Fregoso 1993; Broyles-Gonzáles 1994).

Outside of expressly abusive contexts, the efforts to define Chicana womanhood in broad symbolic alliance to a Chicano patriarchy is clear. Therefore, simply confronting domestic violence is not enough. The underpinnings of how "Chicana" is defined reveals the symbolic power in and outside of domestic violence. For example, Julia Ochoa sought refuge in her parents house when her husband started to beat her. While her parents did not wish her daughter to experience domestic violence, they insisted that she return to her husband because her role and "goodness" would otherwise be threatened. After the abuse started, "I went home first to my mother and father. They made me go back to him because of religious reasons. We had children and they were Catholic." Julia Ochoa, like other women, was expected to uphold patriarchal values, "religious" reasons, within the family to be construed as "good." I have suggested that ethnic allegiance and "goodness" threaten to disassociate "Chicana-ness" from Chicanas if they departed from the mother-wife role. Further, I disarticulate the daily experiences subsumed under the device of mother and wife to include: maintaining a long term relationship, being feminine, being domestic servant/ housewife, being a "complete" woman through marriage and motherhood, assessing personal success through male partner, being mother, being primary child-care provider, being sexually faithful and modest, and upholding constructions of Chicano manhood. It is through Chicanas' accommodation of the symbolic mother-wife and the daily, concrete expectations of that role that Chicanas' agency and ability to define their own subjectivity is stripped (see Haug 1992).

Similarly Patricia Peña put into question the symbolic implications of domestic violence on her children's concepts of what it meant to be a man or a woman, Chicana or Chicano:

> "One day we were watching this movie and it was about spousal abuse. I remember we were sitting at the dinner ' table, my son was in the high chair... and my daughter [said], "Mommy, that's what daddy does to you, huh?"
>
> And it was like, whoa. Talk about something hitting you, and telling you, "Gosh, what am I doing?" That's when things started clicking inside my head where I was saying, "I do not want my daughter to grow up believing or even thinking that this is how a woman should be treated by a man. Or that it is something to be tolerated. Nor do I want my son growing up believing that this is how you treat a woman or that it is something that he has right to do a woman." And that point, I started to really realize that I needed to get away from the situation. You know, get out." Patricia Peña

Patricia Peña concluded that her children's perceptions and socialization were more important than her complicit subjugation. Patricia's realization that she must eventually leave her husband emanated more from her concern for her children than from her concern for herself—yet she identified that challenging the violence was not enough. This presented a contradiction in which Patricia Peña could see that abuse was "bad" role modeling for her children, yet that leaving her husband was also "bad" for them. This was a crisis of meaning that had been deftly avoided when abuse seemed only "bad" for her, and therefore tolerated to preserve her standing as mother-wife. Patricia could identify abuse as gender specific behavior that she did not want her daughter or son to learn, but only began to see herself as participating in that construct. She could identify and advocate that 'a woman should not be treated this way,' but she did not yet see herself primarily as that 'woman.' In her marriage, Patricia Peña understood her identity mostly as 'mother/wife/family woman.' She felt that her

daughter's perception held more importance than what could have been an equally valid assertion: 'I don't believe I should be treated this way.' Indeed, the salient issue for Patricia Peña was not only how to avoid the abuse, rather it was how she could find her way through the symbolic mesh that entrapped her without entering into a new form of patriarchal subordination.

The struggle over the definition of Chicana womanhood

The efforts to define and reconceptualize Chicana womanhood have real and critical implications. Political and academic forays illustrate the symbolic and theoretical arena through which one might interpret Chicana womanhood. Similarly, I argue that the symbolic lock evident in domestic violence presents stereotypical and essentializing ideas of Chicana womanhood—all the more reason for considering the battle over Chicana womanhood. Concurring with my data and interpretation, Alarcón's reading of Chicana fiction suggests that Chicanas do make efforts to move away from essentialized and stereotypical demands made on them, but that, "The task before us is to continue to measure the delay and its painful implications" (Alarcón 1988, 158).

Chicanas (both those who have experienced or witnessed abuse and those who have not) resist against those patriarchal and limiting claims of Chicana womanhood. They create and live a range of non-stereotypical expressions of Chicana womanhood, thereby fundamentally disarming the symbolic and coercive power invested in domestic abuse. The women I interviewed spoke at length about how they shared their insights with other Chicanas. Julia Ochoa remembered that she was socialized to believe her looks were enough to secure her economic future as a wife.

> "I was told by my daddy that I was pretty enough to get a husband who could take care of me, when we were talking about college. I was about 15, right after my quinceañera, right before I left home. And those were his answers...And I believed him. I thought that was my role, I really did." Julia Ochoa

Julia Ochoa certainly did not pass along this message and instead encouraged her daughter, Lisa, not to depend on her husband for economic security. Importantly, however was Lisa's husband's compliance with this plan. Because many Chicanas do see economic support as critically tied to being able to be "single," suggesting that Lisa should get job training threatened her husband's role as husband/provider. Here, Julia Ochoa approached an explanation by placing Lisa at the center of the question and decision, but moving into a recollection of "talking" to Lisa's husband to convince him that Lisa should be able to support herself. Linguistically and figuratively, Julia reflected the power shift taking place here. Lisa made the decision to get job training, but only after her husband agreed that Lisa might need an economic support system separate from his providing for her.

> "The reason **she** [Lisa] decided to go back to school, is because I had a long talk with her husband.... I don't want her to be complacent: "Well I have a husband so it will be okay." I explained to **him**, "You could drop dead tomorrow." We don't know what we have in store. It doesn't necessarily mean that they have to split up in order [for her] to wind up alone. He could wind up dead or just unemployed. Let's have a back-up (emphasis mine)." Julia Ochoa.

Like Julia Ochoa's intervention on behalf of her daughter, most Chicanas I interviewed encouraged other Chicanas to rework those conventional "ideals."[18] The Chicana lesbian participants often used social and political organizations such as La Alianza de Lesbianas specifically in order to share strategies for retaining the claims on chicanisma while discarding the homophobic and patriarchal underpinnings. Bisexual and heterosexual Chicanas tended not to be involved in formal organizations that centered on their Chicana identities and therefore used their kin and informal networks to induce other Chicanas to challenge the

limitations imposed upon them.

> "Sandra [my son's girlfriend and grandson's mother]. Well, you know, she's eighteen. I don't let out on her. I treat her more like a daughter than I do [anything else]. And it's not that I'm talking bad or against my son, it is just that I want to tell her all the things that her mother should have told her. I tell her about my experiences how hard it was for me to realize that I didn't need to have a man or anyone in my life to be who I am. That I can be who I am within myself." Interviewee

Others received tempered or contradictory expectations about their roles as Chicanas. Tanya Escobar felt that her father limited her mother to being exclusively a "mother-wife," yet he held different and broader expectations for his daughters:

> "It is really strange, because my dad always treated my mother in a certain way that all she could do was have children and cook and take care of him. And that was the role he had for her. But when he looked to his daughters, he gave us the idea that anything was possible and that if we went to school and stayed in school that we could do anything that we wanted to. We didn't have to stay home and have children. In fact I never got that message from my dad, you know: 'To be a good woman you have to be married and take care of your husband and have your children.' He never gave us that idea or that impression. He never wanted us to fall into that role." Tanya Escobar

Tanya Escobar could readily identify the particulars of the role and name the expectations as specifically gendered and implicitly cultural. She saw how concretely these expectations were held out for her mother and her exemption from them.

Other Chicanas did not particularly struggle with or heed the demand that they become mothers. Raquel Arellano heard messages about raising a family, but did not feel constrained by

them: "I'm the feminist of the family. I don't agree with the thing of women raising the family.... I want to do something with my life and I know I need an education to get that."

Some women, especially women who had been in abusive relationships, distanced themselves completely from that Chicana mother-wife role. Those women found little or no advantage in the role and described it as dangerous. They sought their sense of agency outside of that configuration. Lena Reyes unapologetically redefined herself and her needs:

> "I guess through all the suffering I went through I've become really very selfish. And that's why with these two men that are in my life right now, I told myself, "I'm going to be as selfish as I possibly can about what I want and how I feel and how I want to lead my life." And if [they] accept it, fine. If not..you know. Instead of me always adjusting myself to them.
>
> Like this [coffee] cup. If the cup is round, then I [used to] come around it, like my hand is me: I fit around it. (She molds her hand around the cup.) Now I want to be the cup. (She slams the cup down on the table). Fuck them all. I am the cup. And if it feels good to have their hand around me, then hey. But I am still going through that struggle, I'm still struggling with that. But it feels good. It really does." Lena Reyes

Lena Reyes remade herself and claimed a space of self-definition that had been denied her in an abusive marriage and in non-abusive relationships. Still, many women, Lena Reyes included, could not simply have a change of attitude in order to leave abusive partners. Several women spoke about creating strategies to leave their husbands while realizing the economic impact it would have on them. Amy Durán explained how she planned ahead to get a stable job before and in order to leave her husband. Patricia Peña described it as a process:

> "And of course, it took me a while to get away. I wasn't

> going to be able to just leave. A lot of things had to be done. I really had to start putting it into my head and really start building up the strength inside of myself to get out.... I think he was able to control my life, because I was so completely dependent on him for everything, for income, for housing, for everything." Patricia Peña

Many Chicanas who had experienced abuse explained how long it took to create viable economic circumstances and that they had to confront the symbolic claims that also tied them in these relationships. Still, they understood and strategized around the many different variables including the threat of violence, the threat of economic disaster, and the cultural/ symbolic claims of being "good" Chicanas.

This direct refutation of that role, certainly spoke to their survival and strength, yet it also had its drawbacks. On a political or community level, the Chicana mother-wife space has been rearticulated to create a powerful force of social change. Organizations such as "The Mothers of East L.A." maximize their claims to familial and community power specifically through this purview of Chicana mother-wife (Pardo 1990). Recent radical student movements included both an embracing of cultural and historical metaphors of familia while reworking the role that Chicanas occupy in that space (Russel y Rodríguez n.d.). We see similar political organizing techniques in Chicana labor unionizing efforts as well as family-type informal job networks (Ruiz 1987; Zavella 1987). In these cases, political actions utilize Chicana mother as metaphor for agency—predicating power within the Chicano family. So those who outright rejected that role also lost claim to a historically valuable avenue of power. Further, acting as Chicana mother/wife had clear economic benefits. Chicanas, as women of color, have even more limited claims to economic advancement as single women or single mothers. Having access to men's higher wage earning capacity provided a direct benefit for being a wife. The acting as mother-wife or leaving an abusive marriage had real economic as well as cultural implications.

Nonetheless, nearly all the abuse survivors reported fundamentally questioning these underpinnings that symbolically and economically tied them to men and men's authority. Only one Chicana abuse survivor described her rejection of domestic violence while not further questioning the symbolic ties that held her in that relationship. Lourdes Ortiz privileged the cultural kudos implicit in her grandfather's insistence on the notion of completeness, detailing her duties that would make her a "complete woman," a wife, a "good" Chicana:

> "[One day my grandfather] wanted to talk to me. He was trying to explain to me that, "When or if I ever got married this is what you must do for your husband. And once you decide that that's the man you want you have to stick by it, obey him. You are not a complete woman if you cannot cook and you do not know how to sew. Remember that." Lourdes Ortiz

Her grandfather's assertions came to mind when Lourdes considered leaving an abusive husband. Although her parents urged her to divorce, she reflected on her grandfathers' admonitions. This provided a crisis for years preceding their divorce:

> "I left him because he tried to kill me three times.... (whispers) But I wanted to leave him ten years ago, really. You know, I've been told, "No, don't say it was because of the kids." But it was because of the girls. They loved their daddy so much." Lourdes Ortiz

In her recollection, the emphasis was not on the physical threat that her husband made against her life, rather how she placed her concern on her daughters' need to have a father. She resisted and survived the violence, but had not fundamentally altered her perception of her role as mother and wife. For example, while she had attended a community college for nearly 10 years, she had no intention of getting a degree. She pinned her economic future on the support of another male partner. Further, she continued to

evaluate her success through her man: "My mom is pretty proud of me. She's very proud of what I've got now. They really like this guy a whole lot. They really like him." What Lourdes said her mother was proud of was not her independence and self-created success. Rather, what she has "got now" was a man whom she felt would make her a "complete woman," just as her grandfather articulated. For her, leaving an abusive marriage did not presuppose that she reconfigured her own participation in this "ideal." Here, "success" was in her ability to get another man. Lourdes continued to align herself the unattainable expectation that she be the perfect mother and wife.[19] Her continuing effort to assess her success through her male partner is perhaps the most convincing testimony to the overwhelming power of these symbolic claims. Still, she was unique. And while Lourdes wanted to embrace those "ideals" she decidedly contradicted those dangerous limitations and did leave her abusive husband. All the other women I interviewed openly challenged or disclaimed those symbolic demands.

In addition, recent artistic and political statements clearly critique this historical relationship between Chicanas' power and patriarchal demands. One participant was an artist herself and commented on this new venue of Chicana expression:

> "My girlfriend, ____, she's really direct about the things that she writes about. She has a [piece] that she's written about domestic violence. Every once in a while I'll get real fanatic like that, too. I have a [work] called, "Misogyny," which is about society looking at women as what they are on the outside, instead of what their essence is and what they are really about." Interviewee

I have argued that Chicanas resist domestic violence and that they hotly contest the effort to have their priorities defined or experiences disarticulated from what they know to be true. Even those Chicanas who "bought into the whole thing," challenged the terms of Chicana womanhood thrust upon them. In this way, while the stereotype of the submissive Chicana wife-

mother may be wielded as a cultural "ideal," Chicanas' challenges to that role are also equally culturally valid and real. It is quite consistent, then, to identify Chicana resistance to domestic violence and broad expressions of Chicana womanhood as part and parcel of real, lived Chicano culture. Further, not challenging those limited roles would place a Chicana in an even more tenuous and marginalized role within the Chicano family. For example, when Lourdes Ortiz announced her divorce, her family responded, "Finally!" Consequently, we must understand that the continual effort to create the cultural stereotype of the submissive Chicana mother-wife co-exists with equally powerful expressions of Chicana agency. In that same vein, challenging domestic abuse can and should be made under the rubric of appropriate cultural expression rather than the threat of being a "bad" Chicana that is so often asserted in challenges against the patriarchy.

Conclusion

Chicanas' experiences of who they are supposed to be and what it means to act "Chicana" has become a stereotype of submissiveness where women are culturally bound to act as wife and mother. I argue that such "ideals" are used in domestic violence as a means of symbolically coercing Chicanas in narrowly circumscribed and culturally charged positions of powerlessness. This culturally specific manifestation of domestic violence is not the root cause. However, the ways in which the construction of Chicana womanhood is used as an underpinning of that violence then becomes complicit with the violence itself. By normalizing the notion that Chicanas depend on husbands and "should" occupy an exclusive role as mothers and wives permits the rationale of violent behavior in the home.

I have illustrated how this image of the submissive Chicana appears in domestic violence, that it has parallels in relationships outside of domestic violence, and that Chicanas can and do challenge that definition. I have further asserted that in the context of domestic violence, it is more than the violence that is at issue. Who gets to define what "Chicana" means, how Chicanas interpret and respond to those definitions, how Chicano

families and U.S. community benefit from a masculinized version of "Chicana" all reflect a greater concern than identity politics. In the context of domestic violence, we see that this struggle over the terms of Chicana womanhood is not merely esoteric theory. The consequences of how Chicanas understand their roles and identities and how they can be coerced by such definitions are real and painful. Further, I argue that our—people, communities, capitalists, Chicana/os, non-Chicanas/os—participation in the stereotypes allows for and legitimizes domestic violence within the Chicano family. The stakes of Chicana identity politics are high and its analysis is important. Indeed, what is at stake here is our willingness to challenge those stereotypes and see its direct ties to Chicanas' oppression in the home, in our communities, and in the U.S. at large.

Endnotes

[1] I am indebted to the women who shared their insights with me in the hopes that their experiences would help other women. I am also grateful to Laurie Kroshus Medina, Lisa Durán, Vilma Ortiz, Karen Brodkin, Neena Malik, Flora Rodríguez Russel, and the anonymous reviewers from **VOCES: A Journal of Chicana/Latina Studies** for their thoughtful criticism on earlier drafts of this article. Field research, which provides the data for this article, was funded in part by the National Science Foundation (BSN#9307466).

[2] Methodological note: I draw this analysis from my qualitative reasearch among working-class Chicanas and Mexicanas in Los Angeles. My research solicited information from working-class Chicanas as to how they conceptualized their priorities and how those daily priorities contributed to an over-all sense of Chicana womanhood. In the context of interviewing Chicanas about their personal, professional, and educational choices nearly 75% (18 of 25 women) described experiencing domestic abuse and/or witnessing domestic abuse within their immediate family.

I conducted 25 directed informal interviews with working-class Chicanas (Pelto and Pelto 1978). The interviews solicited information about their career and educational experiences, choices, and personal aspirations. Of the 25 Chicanas, I selected 5 to act as long term participants. I conducted episodic interviews, engaged in participant observation, and interviewed family members and friends. The five key participants and their families not only provided daily examples of identity negotiation, but gave fuller accounts of their life backgrounds. Here, I got a richer insight into how childhood experiences, expectations from family members, and personal crisis contributed complexity to what can seem to be air-tight constructs of identity that often accompany a single interview "performance" (see Zavella 1987). For example, Lena Reyes at one point reported that women "just accepted" domestic violence whereas from her later accounts and her mother's interview I knew that they both actively fought against domestic abuse.

[3] Such advances are the hallmark of Chicana/Latina feminism. Located in a variety of disciplinary "homes," Chicana/Latina feminist theories engage the constructed meanings of Chicana/Latina womanhood and its concomitant presentation. See especially Alarcón 1981, 1988; Argüelles 1990; Chabram-Dernersesian 1992; Rebolledo 1995; Sánchez 1995; Sandoval 1991; Zavella 1987 as exemplary among many outstanding contemporary scholars.

[4] The question of domestic violence within Chicano communities is a particularly insidious issue. Those familiar with the topic understand that domestic abuse occurs in all socio-economic and ethno-racial strata (Flores-Ortiz 1993).

[5] The insistence of limiting Chicanas to roles as mothers and wives is not exclusive to Chicana womanhood. European theorists explore the limitations being mother and wife impose on women (Irigaray 1985; Kristeva 1986; Haug 1992). Substantial U.S. feminist literature regarding the Southern Anglo (Welter 1976), Anglo womanhood of the U.S. Southwest (Griswold

1988), and Black womanhood (Carby 1987) discuss the ways in which women have experienced the intersections of class, race, gender, and sexuality in relationship to their historically and culturally specific definitions of womanhood. Here, how women experience the demand that they participate in motherhood and marriage reflects broader patriarchal constructs as well as domination by women according to their race and class.

[6]This contemporary and capitalist-centered version of the "Culture of Poverty" argument has a long tradition in the social sciences (Baca Zinn 1982).

[7] Indeed, as a Chicana anthropologist, I fear contributing to the perception of Chicanos being more "machista" and violent, and Chicanas being more submissive than their Anglo counterparts. Though I insist that Chicanas fights against stereotypes and abuse, by detailing the daily encounters with ideology and practice risks my colluding with and reinforcing selective interpretations of Chicana/o culture (see also Alonso 1995; Harvey and Gow 1994).

[8]Lena Reyes's comments come from my research. Her name and other names and institutions associated with my research are pseudonyms. Some features have been slightly changed to obscure the identity of the participant.

[9] I use the term "Mexicana" to denote the regional and political variation of women of Mexican descent living in the United States. I included some women who were born in México and raised in the U.S., some born in the U.S. and raised in México, while most were the second or third generation living in the United States. At least one woman's family had been in the U.S. Southwest when it was still part of México. Their ethno-racial identities varied and posed no correlation to their nativity or how long they had been in the United States. I use the term "Chicana" to describe this group as a whole.

[10] However, that Chicanas should be **primarily** invested as mothers and wives was more common — indeed as it is common in Anglo communities.

[11] While experiencing/witnessing domestic abuse appeared in a high number of the interviews I collected, this should not be read that all of the men in their family-community constellations behaved this way. Indeed, it was the power that those abusive men wielded that was notable, not the pervasiveness per se. Furthermore, not all the abusers were Chicano/Latino. One respondent, Eve Wright, married an Anglo man who was abusive. In this case, he nonetheless adopted what he felt were culturally legitimate ideas about how his Mexican American wife should behave.

[12] It was not always the case that Chicanas were economically dependent in abusive relationships. Carmen Velasco, for example, was the main income earner. Also. it is not always true that a Chicana's abusive partner is male. I did not interview any Chicana lesbians or bisexuals who reported abuse from women. I can only speculate that the issues of control are similar, but perhaps the concern of gaining economic advantage would be less clear with a partner who is a woman as opposed a partner who is a man.

[13] Sandra Cisneros's fictional character, Chayo, from the short story, "Little Miracles/Kept Promises," echoed such hopes:

> I wanted you bare-breasted, snakes in your hands. I wanted you leaping and somersaulting the backs of bulls. I wanted you swallowing raw hearts and rattling volcanic ash. I wasn't going to be my mother or my grandma. All that self-sacrifice, all that silent suffering. Hell no. Not here. Not me." (Cisneros 1991, 127).

Chayo, like Alexandra Muñoz, privileges a warrior-vision of woman's resistance. Unlike Alexandra Muñoz, Chayo gains insight into the power of this subtle, behind-the-scenes manipulation and political might.

14 Some, such as Haug suggest that women, "By desiring marriage and motherhood, or at least by secretly longing for them or striving for them, become willing accomplices in their own oppression" (Haug 1992, 7).

15 "My daughter, when are you going to get married and have kids?"

16 Inherent in this idea is a popular perception of México as a cultural base and Mexican citizens as having "more" culture. Furthermore, indigenous peoples of México, such as those with whom Maribel Pérez spoke and lived, are seen to have the "most" culture. From this indigenous and nationalist purview Chicanas and Chicanos are accused of being "less" cultural or of having "lost the culture" (see Frankenberg 1993).

17 "That's how men are. That's how it is."

18 As Sánchez notes, "In reality the question is transitory for it leads in some instances to a new patriarchal subordination, but nevetheless it is crucial to see how gender discourses articulate with discourses of liberalism and class to permit the construction of certain antagonisms that will in turn be the catalyst for modification of the patriarchy" (Mouffe 1988 cited in Sánchez; Sánchez 1995, 191).

19 This is much like the character Olga Ruiz in Helena Viramontes's short story, "Snapshots," (1985). The aged Olga Ruiz had always aspired for the Chicano version of the All-American-Family.

His wife in the kitchen wearing a freshly ironed apron, stirring a pot of soup, whistling a whistle-while-you-work tune, and preparing frosting for some cupcakes so that when he drove home from work, tired and sweaty, he would enter his castle to find his cherub baby in a pink day suit with a newly starched ribbon crawling to him and his wife looking at him with pleasing eyes and offering him a cupcake (Viramontes 1985, 93).

Far from appearing to be the "ideal" Chicana, she provides an unfamiliar and eerie sketch of what a Chicana who accepted her "cultural role."

I never move. Just sit and stare.

"Mother."

She pronounces the words not as a truth but as an accusation (92).Precisely because there is such a demand to participate in that role, it is clear why she occupies that sapce of "mother." However, in trying to reach that unattainable ideal, she becomes unrecognizable as a figure who is completely without agency, who just "sits and stares." By failing to self-consciously move away from the "ideal" demanded of her she appears culturally unfamiliar.

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