

“I did not see Sara alone . . . but I did see my mother Margaret, my sister Paula, my grandmothers Lettie and Mary Elizabeth—women who have had a profound influence on my life, women who have shaped my vision of myself, women who have known me ‘from the inside out.’”

—Lawrence-Lightfoot, *Balm in Gilead: Journey of a Healer*

THE MUXERISTA PORTRAITIST: Engaging Portraiture and Chicana Feminist Theories in Qualitative Research

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Abstract: In this article, the author outlines Muxerista Portraiture, an epistemological and methodological approach for qualitative research. In the spirit of portraiture and Chicana feminisms, the author begins by sharing her mother’s story to illustrate how it inspired her to study Chicana mother-daughter pedagogies and encouraged her to create nueva teoría. She then traces the relationship between portraiture and Chicana feminist theories to show where they connect and diverge. Using her cultural intuition, she argues for the collaboration of portraiture and Chicana feminist theories in qualitative research. In an effort to build a case for Muxerista Portraiture, she explains the five elements of portraiture (context, voice, relationships, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole) in a way that engages and is informed by Chicana feminist theories.

Key Words: Chicana feminist methodology, Chicana feminist theory, mother-daughter pedagogies, portraiture, qualitative research

While taking qualitative methods courses, I did a lot of outside reading. One of the books I read was Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1988) portrait of her mother, *Balm in Gilead: Journey of a Healer*. I was searching for a methodology that considered the relationship between storytelling and qualitative inquiry. As I explored Lawrence-Lightfoot's work, I was thrilled to see that she had a book on her mother, as my research focuses on Chicana¹ mother-daughter pedagogies, defined as "the teaching and learning that occurs between mothers and daughters of colors" (Villenas and Moreno 2001, 673). The epigraph above comes from the introduction of the book when Lawrence-Lightfoot has just had her portrait painted and is "... shocked, disappointed, and awed all in the same moment" (9). As she reflects on the portrait she realizes that it is not just a portrait of herself but rather a family-portrait of all the women that raised her, especially her mother. She would later use this experience to develop the methodology of portraiture.

The relationship between my study on mother-daughter pedagogies and *Balm in Gilead* was that I, too, was interested in understanding my mother more. Like Lawrence-Lightfoot, I had a deep desire to understand her, so that I could better understand myself. Yet, my interest in telling my mother's story was more than a longing to understand her and myself; it was also inspired by a body of literature that points to the importance of mothers in the educational achievement of Chicana students (Gándara 1979, 1982, 1995; Gándara et al. 2013). In this article, I use my position as a meXicana² (pronounced "me-chi-cana") scholar to present Muxerista Portraiture, a qualitative research methodology that is inspired by portraiture and Chicana feminist theories. I begin by sharing my mother's story to show how she is the foundation of my research and of my courage to dedicate so much of my life to thinking and writing. I then put portraiture and Chicana feminist theories in conversation with each other. I

conclude with explaining Muxerista Portraiture, by outlining the elements of portraiture in a way that engages and is informed by Chicana feminist theories.

De Tal Palo Tal Astilla

Like Chicana scholars Michelle Téllez (2011), Sofia Villenas (2006), and Karleen Pendleton Jiménez (2013) who have written about their mothers to affirm their wisdom and the concrete ways they influenced their identities as scholars, mothers, and feministas, I begin by sharing my mother's story to illustrate how I arrived to Muxerista Portraiture through her. Additionally, I include my mother's story to talk back to deficit-framed scholarship that continues to portray Chicana/Latina mothers as incapable of educating their children or as passive women.

When I think about my path toward higher education, I am reminded of the many family stories I grew up with; stories of migration and separation, of hard labor and sacrifice, but also of hope and love. These stories have all shaped and taught me important lessons, yet my mother's story of stolen educational opportunities always stuck with me—it affected me much more profoundly. It changed the way I viewed the value of education for Women of Color;³ I understood what a huge privilege it was for me as a young immigrant meXicana to be able to assert my desire to pursue higher education, or to openly discuss and be supported in my academic goals. My mother never had that opportunity, along with many other Chicana/Latina women that have come before me.

As the only daughter among four children, my mother grew up distinctly aware of her gender. The responsibilities and expectations at home and in school were different for her. She was asked to do more than her brothers at home, yet in school she was asked to do less, to settle for vocational classes.

Due to economic and family challenges, she grew up going back and forth between El Norte⁴ and México. Her family finally settled in Santa Bárbara, California, where she completed high school. She excelled in her studies despite the racist practices of schools and responsibilities of home. When it came time to apply to college, she applied in secret.

She was offered admission to various universities including the University of California, Santa Bárbara, the local campus about fifteen minutes from her home. With tears in her eyes she retells the story,

I remember thinking once I get in [to college] how could they [referring to her parents] say no . . . and then it was no, your grandpa was like no, no puede ir and I think it was like she can't leave the house, it was like a woman's place is in their house, para que va estudiar si ya se va a casar and at that point it was like fine ok I am not going and that was it I never asked again (Personal interview, 29 Apr. 2012).

I probed her angrily, "Why didn't you fight it? Why did you listen?" I could not accept her decision. This story was very difficult for me to understand, because between my maternal and paternal grandparents, I have the closest relationship with my mother's father, Bolo.⁵ The grandfather that would always ask about school and remind me that I was going to become the first doctora in the family had at one point denied my mother the opportunity to go to school: I could not make sense of it.

It would not be until years later when my Chicana sensibilities had developed more that I would be able to fully grasp the workings of patriarchy in this story. Portraiture would also allow me to seek the "goodness" in this contradiction, to understand my grandfather's perspective in a way that

humanized (not justified) his imperfections and failures. It allowed me to understand that with the goodness, we must also “. . . document the beautiful/ugly experiences that are so much a part of the texture of human development and social relationships” (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2005, 9). This helped me reconcile the conflicting view I had of my grandfather and to maintain a relationship with him, even with its complications.

My mother’s story shaped my identity as a muxerista. *Muxerista* literally translates into *womanist*; the “x” replaces the “j” to signify a connection to the ancestry and languages of México and Latin America (Tijerina Revilla 2004). Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, and Elenes (2006) describe it as an “. . . approach to power, knowledge, and relationships rooted in convictions of community uplift” (7). They explain that they use the term *mujerista* (they spell it with a “j”), rather than *feminista*, because often *el feminismo* is not part of the everyday realities of ordinary women. This is the case for my mother. Although she may not necessarily identify as a feminist, she certainly raised me to be one. Her experiences as a racialized immigrant Woman of Color informed the strong work ethic she instilled in me. Her demand that I always speak up and stand up for myself comes from her not always being able to do that, and her insistence that I put up with the discomfort of being in predominately white classes throughout most of my K-12 education was so that I could be as competitive as possible for college.

Therefore, Muxerista Portraiture begins with my mother, with my othermothers,⁶ in the recognition of their critical practices that shaped my identity, and their unconditional support to be able to theorize and claim space in the academy (Cruz 2001). Muxerista Portraiture, as I explain in this article, is a qualitative research methodology that aims to create portraits that honor the unique life experiences of Chicanas through a

framework of agency or what Lawrence-Lightfoot calls “goodness.” The title of my dissertation, *De Tal Palo Tal Astilla*, is a common dicho (saying or proverb) I grew up hearing. In English, it can be understood as the saying, “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” I use this dicho to show that in order to understand the education of Chicana students we must look to their mothers; we must explore their teaching and learning practices, their life experiences and *mujerstorias*⁷ (Tijerina Revilla 2004), and their pedagogies of the home⁸ (Delgado Bernal 2001).

At the Crossroad of Portraiture and Chicana Feminist Theories

My calling to tell stories through research is what led me to graduate school; I wanted to tell stories that could inspire and encourage us to think more deeply about ourselves and the society we live in. This goal turned out to be much more difficult than I expected. My introduction to qualitative methods courses left me feeling cold and insecure about using research as an avenue for telling affirming stories of Communities of Color. Research, after all, is rooted in a history of colonialism and imperialism; Western academics have used research for years to strip Communities of Color of their dignity or to claim ownership of their ways of knowing (Smith 1999). I struggled with the notion of objectivity; that one could know something without any emotion or interpretation (Dixon 2005).

My dissatisfaction with my introductory classes pushed me to venture outside of assigned readings. I wanted to find a methodology that could speak to and honor the experiences of Communities of Color; it was then that I came across portraiture. A friend and colleague pointed me to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ (1997) *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, which delineates the methods, strategies, and process of how to do portraiture.⁹ Prior to arriving at portraiture, I was very familiar with the literature on Chicana feminist theories (CFT) and knew that I was going to use this epistemological orientation in my

research, yet I was struggling to find the right methodology. As I read through the scholarship on portraiture, it began to resonate with me because of how deeply connected it was to CFT. In this section, I consider the ways in which portraiture and CFT are related and distinct. I first briefly introduce portraiture and CFT and then discuss their similarities and distinctions.

The Art of Portraiture

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) define portraiture as “a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (xv).

Portraiture is used when the researcher wishes to produce a full picture of an event or person that tells as much about the subject as it does about the researcher or portraitist¹⁰ (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2005). Lawrence-Lightfoot’s experience of having her portrait painted (as described earlier) inspired her thinking of portraiture. As the subject of a portrait she became aware of the close relationship that is nurtured between the artist and subject, the power in the medium of art, and the negotiation of how the perspective of a person is captured. Years later in her attempt to capture what she called “life drawings” of high schools, she saw the possibility of merging the realms of science and art, and thus portraiture was born.

In all, portraiture requires detailed description developed through sustained interaction between researcher and collaborator(s),¹¹ tracing and interpreting emergent themes, and finally piecing these together into what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call an “aesthetic whole,” (243) which can be understood as the final portrait. She offers five elements as part of the portraiture process: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole. These will be discussed in more detail as I present Muxerista Portraiture.

Chicana Feminist Theories (CFT)

Chicana Feminist theories (CFT) center their analyses on the experiences of Chicanas in the United States through a critical, social, economic, political and cultural perspective. They draw from a theory of agency (modes of acting upon their world) as a way to highlight how Chicanas struggle against intersecting forms of oppression, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and linguistic inequalities. They speak to the issues and needs of Chicanas and are dedicated to showing how Chicanas have not passively accepted racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist institutional and cultural practices (Delgado Bernal and Elenes 2011). Through CFT, the experiences and realities of Chicanas are understood as foundations of knowledge.

Drawing on CFT, Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) developed a Chicana feminist epistemological framework to center the distinct life experiences of Chicanas. This framework is “. . . concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas, about who generates an understanding of their experiences, and how this knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized” (560). It challenges traditional Western notions of objectivity, universal truths, and dichotomies like objective truth versus subjective emotion. It begins with the stance that Chicanas experience different opportunity structures than men and white women. While there are similarities with Black feminisms, it is different in that it addresses issues that are unique to Chicanas, such as immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and Catholicism.¹²

Now that I have provided a brief introduction of what portraiture and CFT are, I turn to how they are alike and different by explaining the following: 1) the role of the researcher and collaborator(s), 2) positionality, 3) the search for goodness, and 4) relationships.

The Researcher and Collaborator(s): A Collaborative Inquiry

Portraiture and CFT are both intentional about nurturing relationships of trust and reciprocity between the researcher and participants; Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) refers to them as collaborator(s). In portraiture, portraits are shaped by a close and fluid relationship between the researcher and collaborator(s). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) explains, “The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image. The encounter between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and is crucial to the success and authenticity of the rendered piece” (3). Portraitists must, therefore, be prepared to be active listeners; there is a difference between listening *to* a story and listening *for* a story. The former is more passive, where one absorbs the information and does little to give it shape and form. The latter is active and engaged, in which one tries to tease out the central themes of the story. This does not mean that one directs the story, but one does participate in selecting the story and searching for patterns to build coherence (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997). While there is never a single story to be told (as there could be many), the portraitist selects the themes that will make up the final story, along with the points of focus.

Chicana feminist epistemology emphasizes the political and ethical issues involved in the research process. Delgado Bernal (1998) argues that Chicana researchers have unique viewpoints, what she calls cultural intuition. Cultural intuition includes four major sources: one’s personal experience, the existing literature, one’s professional experience, and the analytical research process. Part of the analytical research process is to include research participants in the interactive process of data analysis. In my research on Chicana mother-daughter pedagogies, both the mothers and the daughters participated in analyzing their own narratives and shaping the findings. In portraiture, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) explains that rather than engaging in one-way

interview with her research participants, they functioned as “collaborators” or “co-creators” of their life stories. This shows how portraiture and CFT similarly understand the role of research participants in the research process—both see them as central and active.

Positionality: Cultural Intuition and Voice

One important distinction between portraiture and CFT is cultural intuition. While there is a relationship with portraiture’s idea of voice(s), which can be understood as a researcher’s positionality, cultural intuition focuses on the distinct insights that Chicana researchers bring to the research process. Cultural intuition can be understood as a process in which we must be critically reflective of the assumptions, life experiences, and values that frame what we see and do not see in our research. As such, cultural intuition will look different for each of us, similar to the way that voice in portraiture will vary by person. Both cultural intuition and voice emphasize that we be critical of our positioning by being conscious of the epistemologies and ideologies we bring to the research process. Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, and Vélez (2012) have expanded and rearticulated cultural intuition to include the ways place, relationships, spirituality, and the brown body affect the experiences of Chicana researchers.

The Search for Goodness: A Framework of Agency

The emphasis on the search for “goodness” in research is what ultimately helped me see the relationship between CFT and portraiture. The search for goodness is an intentional research process that seeks to illuminate what is affirming and vigorous, yet always assumes that expressing goodness is tied with imperfections. This examination should not be misinterpreted as disregarding the contradictions we all experience, as this is central to the expression of goodness. This is reminiscent of Chicana queer feminist Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1987), who urged us to embrace our dualities through her

concept of mestiza consciousness. Mestiza translates to a woman of mixed ancestry; however, to Anzaldúa and other Chicana feminist scholars, mestiza has come to mean a new Chicana consciousness, to show the ways Chicanas straddle cultures, languages, races, nations, sexualities, and spiritualities. A mestiza “. . . copes by developing *a tolerance for contradiction*, a tolerance for ambiguity. . . . She learns to juggle cultures” (579). This ability to embrace, examine, or situate our dichotomies is significant to both portraiture and CFT.

We are walking contradictions; our brown bodies are products of multiple ancestries—we carry both the colonizer and colonized in us (Pendleton Jiménez 2006). It is in our attempt to bridge this clash in our experiences that informs our epistemologies and identities as mestizas/os. The way we negotiate this binary of colonized/colonizer is an example of “the power of paradox” that Lawrence-Lightfoot problematizes with portraiture (2005, 9). She explains, “. . . that one of the most powerful characteristics of portraiture is its ability to embrace contradictions” (9). Portraiture’s concept of “goodness” embraces these oppositions as part of the research process. This is another way that CFT and portraiture are comparable; they push back on Western rationality; rather than thinking in binary terms, both acknowledge the fluidity of identity and paradoxes of the human experience.

Through this search for goodness, portraiture resists research that focuses on pathology rather than resiliency. While identifying things that *do not* work is arguably important to identifying things that *do* work, the focus on failure often leads to the blaming of the victim or the justification of oppressive practices. This is indicative of how CFT look for the agency of Chicanas to show how they actively resist intersecting forms of oppression, instead of using a deficit framework that positions Chicanas as passive or compliant in their own oppression.

The Spiritual in Relationships

The emphasis on interactions and relationships is also important. Building trusting relationships is central to portraiture; the portraitist must be vulnerable and also know how to process or sit with discomfort. CFT see relationships intimately connected to spirituality. This means being in partnership with our collaborator(s) and acknowledging the differences between us, while insisting on our commonalities. It is these commonalities that can serve as catalysts of transformation or what Anzaldúa (2015) called spiritual activism: spirituality for social change. Spiritual activism requires us to do the inner work of healing and personal growth so that we can do the outer work of activism. Anzaldúa (2002) explained that although most of us define ourselves by what we are not, she urged us to define ourselves by what we include—what she described as new tribalism. Rather than use our differences to separate us from each other through binaries of “us” versus “them,” Anzaldúa encouraged us to identify them, cultivate relationships, and create bridges of solidarity. This allows us to connect and be fully present with our collaborator(s), becoming allies in the work. In this way, the work is no longer just research, but part of a larger vision to change the world.

Creating a Partnership

As I read through examples of portraiture (Chapman 2005, 2007; Dixon 2005; Dixon, Chapman, and Hill 2005; Harding 2005; Hill 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot 1983, 1988, 1994; Newton 2005), I realized that the pairing of portraiture with other theoretical frameworks was not new. For instance, Chapman (2005) discussed an alliance between Critical Race Theory and portraiture, and Dixon (2005) employed Black feminisms and portraiture. Yet, with the exception of a small number of dissertations, I found few examples of CFT and portraiture.¹³

Despite portraiture's similarities to CFT, I recognized its limitations in narrating the stories of Chicanas; it did not entirely account for the role of bilingualism, immigration, colonialism, and Catholicism, themes that are often central in the lives of Chicanas (Delgado Bernal 1998). This allowed me to consider the possibility of creating a partnership between CFT and portraiture in order to capture the nuances of the everyday lives of Chicanas.

As I have shown, portraiture and CFT are more similar than different; however, they are also unique in their own ways. I began by discussing how both portraiture and CFT center the role of the researcher by highlighting the political and ethical issues involved in the research process. The two regard research participants as integral to the research design. For instance, Lawrence-Lightfoot refers to participants as collaborators to acknowledge the importance of detailed interactions. With regard to the research process, scholars using CFT emphasize the need to include research participants at all stages of the research process. Positionality is also important; while voice and cultural intuition are similar, CFT focus more closely on the unique insights Chicana researchers embody (Cálderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, and Vélez 2012; Delgado Bernal 1998). Both portraiture and CFT also challenge traditional Western ideas of research that rely on notions of neutrality and the creation of binaries in the production of knowledge.

Most notably, both are grounded in methodologies that use an asset framework to look for the goodness in research and how agency is enacted. Although it is clear that relationships are important to both methodologies, CFT use an element of spirituality to acknowledge our interconnectedness. While Lawrence-Lightfoot does not necessarily say that portraiture is a specific methodology for Communities of Color, in its attempt to tell stories beyond the realm of academia we see the focus on marginalization and empowerment. Similarly,

CFT do specifically focus on the marginalization and empowerment of Chicana/o communities. In the next section, I outline what portraiture with a Chicana feminist sensibility looks like, what I call Muxerista Portraiture.

Muxerista Portraiture

Necesitamos teorías that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods. . . . In our *mestizaje* theories we create new categories for those of us left out or pushed out of existing ones (Anzaldúa 1990, xxv-xxvi).

Moved by Gloria Anzaldúa's call for *nueva teorías*, in this section I outline what I refer to as Muxerista Portraiture or the Muxerista Portraitist. As a meXicana scholar examining Chicana mother-daughter pedagogies, I argue for the partnership of portraiture and Chicana feminist theories (CFT). My goal is to offer a thoughtful and deliberate epistemological perspective and methodology, not an alternative or replacement for one or the other. I begin by first describing the relationship between epistemology, methodology and muxerista portraiture. I then describe why I use the term *muxerista*. I conclude by outlining the five elements of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997)—context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole—in a way that demonstrates how they can be informed by CFT.

Epistemology and methodology are inextricably related. Epistemology can be understood as the nature, status, and production of knowledge—it is our system of knowing (Delgado Bernal 1998). Put simply, methodology is the intersection where method and theory meet. While method includes the techniques and tools we use to collect our data, methodology encompasses that as well as the theory that grounds our research process. It can include the

way we frame our questions, how we collect and analyze the data, and how we negotiate the ethics and politics of our research. Our epistemology therefore informs our methodology, how we read and understand the world prompts the questions we ask and how we ask them.

Muxerista Portraiture is couched in a Chicana feminist epistemology; it is grounded in the lives of Chicanas and acknowledges that our lived experiences are legitimate sources of knowledge. Saavedra and Salazar Pérez (2014) point out that “for Chicana/Latina researchers, methodologies become more than tools for obtaining data; methodologies are extensions of ways of knowing and being, thus are central to the way we embody and perform research” (78).

Therefore, a Muxerista Portraiture methodology is grounded in theory and embraces the union of body, mind, and spirit in the research process (Lara 2002). It does not attempt to disconnect body from mind or spirit (as often Western methodologies do) but instead allows us to “. . . confront the research process with our total selves—our grief, our fears, our desires and our love” (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, and Vélez 2012, 534). It is a spiritual and political practice that consciously nurtures the whole self.

I draw on Anita Tijerina Revilla’s (2004) muxerista pedagogy to explain why I pair the word muxerista with portraiture. Tijerina Revilla’s study of Raza Womyn de UCLA, a student organization of Chicana/Latina activists, revealed the importance of redefining, reclaiming, and/or reconstructing terminology used for self-identification. One of the identities the members quickly embraced was muxerista, an alteration of the word *mujerista* which literally translates into womanist, a term coined by Alice Walker (1983). “A muxerista is a woman-identified Chicana/Latina who considers herself a feminist or womanist” (Tijerina Reviall, 2004, 91). The “x” is representative

of México's and Latina America's ancestry and languages. To claim this identity is to embrace Chicana/Latina feminisms. This identity goes beyond traditional white notions of feminism by centering a connection to community, culture, language and the struggle for social justice.

The union of the words "muxerista" and "portraiture," does not signify the merging of CFT and portraiture but instead represents a partnership between the two. It is a qualitative research methodology created through an alliance between portraiture and CFT and based on the realities and lived experiences of Chicanas. The goal of Muxerista Portraiture is to paint portraits that are committed to social justice and to challenging all forms of subordination through a Chicana feminist inquiry. It encompasses the five elements of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997)—context, voice, relationships, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole—but with a Chicana feminist sensibility. It incorporates the portraitist's cultural intuition in the co-construction of the portraits. It is a dynamic and ongoing interchange between process and product, dedicated to searching for the goodness in the lives of Chicanas. Thus, Muxerista Portraiture is a *mestizaje* theory that blends theoretical and methodological boundaries—it provides us with a new approach to paint rich portraits of Chicanas, a form of Chicana Feminist narrative inquiry; below I outline the five tenets of Muxerista Portraiture.

The Borderlands as Context

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), context refers to the setting: physical, geographical, metaphorical, historical, and cultural. When using a Muxerista Portraiture framework, context must examine the different markers of discrimination that Chicanas experience, such as race, immigration status, religious affiliation, sexuality, and language. This means that the Muxerista Portraitist acknowledges the systems of oppression that affect the

everyday lives of Chicanas and also accounts for the ways they have resisted and constructed third spaces (Pérez 1999), where they re-imagine possibilities and opportunities. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) ask that we consider context “. . . as a dynamic framework—changing and evolving, shaping and being shaped by the actors” (59). As such, we must account for ourselves in the setting—how the setting shapes us and how we shape the setting.

Muxerista Portraiture uses Anzaldúa’s concept of the borderlands to understand the context for Chicanas. Anzaldúa refers to the borderlands in the geographical sense by indicating the U.S.-Mexican border as “. . . *una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (1987, 25). Yet, she also describes the borderlands as metaphorical, encompassing psychic, sexual, and spiritual borders that often lead to painful experiences but can also be transformative spaces where opposites converge, conflict, and transform (Keating 2009). Villenas (2006) provides examples of the ways Anzaldúa’s idea of the borderlands can be used to understand mother-daughter pedagogies. She explains that the borderlands are pedagogical spaces where Latina mothers and daughters teach and learn through words and the body. The borderlands are a relevant context for studying Chicana/Latina mother-daughter pedagogies to understand how dilemmas are negotiated, how possibilities for creativity and self-love flow, and where third spaces are nurtured. It provides us the lens to understand the intersecting forms of oppression that shape this form of teaching and learning. Using the borderlands as context in Muxerista Portraiture creates an avenue to explore mother’s lessons beyond good or bad, and instead draws us to focus on the gray spaces where dualities can coexist.

The borderlands offer us the ability to look beyond dualistic thinking in a static oppositional stand and captures the complex way Chicanas negotiate their multiple and contradictory positions (Elenes 2006). For Chicanas, the physical

context is also colonized land, land that was once Mexican and Indian. Chicana queer feminist Pendleton Jiménez (2006) reminds us that we are standing on colonized land, land that “. . . has been covered in blood for hundreds of years, often spilled as a result of racist ideologies” (225). Therefore, the borderlands is a useful tool to understand context through Muxerista Portraiture because it centers the experiences of Chicanas in a way that accounts for their physical, geographical, metaphorical, historical, and cultural setting.

Translating Voice

Portraiture recognizes that the voice of the researcher is everywhere: “. . . in the assumptions, preoccupations, and frameworks she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997, 85). For this reason, the final portrait tells as much about the portraitist as it does about the subject. In Muxerista Portraiture, cultural intuition is central to the voice of the researcher. Cultural intuition argues that Chicanas bring a particular perspective to the research process through their personal experience, the existing literature, their professional experience and the analytic research process; it also includes community memory, collective experience, and as Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, and Vélez (2012) point out, place, relationships, spirituality, and the brown body. However, the Muxerista Portraitist must recognize the hegemony of the English language and how that affects her voice, as well as that of her collaborator(s).

Unique to the muxerista portraitist is the conflicting process of translation, both literally from the Spanish to the English language (and vice versa) but also figuratively in the process of translating community voices for academic spaces. Flores Carmona (2014) refers to this as the “Malintzin researcher” because of the relationship we share to Malintzin¹⁴ (also known as La

Malinche). Malintzin is often characterized as a traitor to her people, but to Chicana feminists she has come to represent “. . . a woman who had agency in deciding her own future and in deciding how much she shared when she translated her people—she was a survivor” (114).

Flores Carmona offers the metaphor of Malintzin because of the difficult process Chicana/Latina researchers must engage in when we translate voices in our research. She urges us to be critical of the process of translating and editing the voices of our participants in educational research. She explains,

As mujeres Chicanas or Latinas, we also participate in our communities playing contradicting roles as educational researchers coming from the academy and as translators and interpreters for our communities. We play the role of writing our people into academia—of translating them from everyday language to academic discourses. (115)

Like Malintzin, as Chicana/Latina academics we are also translators and interpreters of many cultures; however, we must also use our agency in deciding how much we choose to interpret our communities for academia. We must remember the colonial history of research and be vigilant of our stories. Most important, the Muxerista Portraitist has to write with the needs of our communities first and those of academia, second.

As Muxerista Portraitists, we need to negotiate and reflect on how to translate voice, keeping in mind how some things may not be translatable, and that participants may not want certain aspects translated or disclosed. As Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona (2012) prompt us, “One must be cautious to translate conceptually rather than literally because in translating particular terms, nuances get lost, and we run the risk of reproducing language

marginalization” (365). There are some words in Spanish that do not easily translate to English; for example, the word *educación* does not accurately translate to *education*. It goes beyond what we traditionally think of education to include the imparting of morals and ethics. Words like this one require the Muxerista Portraitist to use her cultural intuition to translate conceptually rather than literally (Villenas and Moreno 2001).

In CFT, the body is also its own voice and text. Cindy Cruz’s (2001) epistemology of the brown body refers to how “the body is a pedagogical device, a location of recentering and recontextualizing the self and the stories that emanate from that self” (668). In Muxerista Portraiture, we must attend to how the body also speaks, how it prompts memory and situates types of knowledge. For example, Pendleton Jiménez (2013) writes about how her mother taught her to embrace her body as a Chicana butch. She describes how her body falls outside acceptable gender norms, in terms of weight, ability, and ethnicity, yet it was in witnessing her mother embrace gender non-conforming ways of being through her actions that helped her see the beauty in her own body. Chicana mothers regularly teach through the body; therefore, Muxerista Portraiture must centralize the body as a form of voice. The Chicana/Latina body is also often a messy text to understand (Villenas 2006). The incongruent and silent practices of our Chicana mothers often lead to difficult contradictions to understand. But it is often in doing and perhaps not speaking that we learn powerful lessons from our mothers, especially when experiences are too painful to disclose.

Relationships and Spirituality

Authentic portraits are constructed and shaped through the nurturing of relationships. In portraiture, “. . . portraitists hope to build trust and rapport—first, through the search for goodness; second, through empathetic

regard; and third, through the development of symmetry, reciprocity, and boundary negotiation with the actors” (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1997, 141).

In *Muxerista Portraiture*, spirituality is central to the development of relationships. I draw on Sendejo’s (2014) methodologies of spirit to account “. . . for moments of connection and understanding between the researcher and those with whom she works as vital sites of knowledge” (850). Sendejo explains that methodologies of the spirit allow us as researcher to account for the knowledge production that occurs when “. . . researcher and participant intersect and overlap and where the researcher’s own spiritual development, experiences, and trajectory help to inform the research being conducted” (84–85). Through a framework of spirituality, I am able to recognize the experiences of the women I am working with as windows into my own history and self (Sendejo 2014).

As a *Muxerista Portraitist*, I can acknowledge the interrelatedness and connections with the Chicana mothers and daughters I am collaborating with, and honor and centralize this in the research process. I am less concerned about the “authenticity” of their memories and more interested to hear how their own understanding of their memories have shaped their experiences. I use Anzaldúa’s concept of spiritual activism to consider spirituality as a call to action, not just as a relationship between a god or a creator. Keating (2006) defines spiritual activism as “. . . spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and [using] these commonalities as catalysts for transformation” (12). If we think about relationships as rooted in an ethic of interconnectedness, this recognition can transform us and motivate us to work actively for social change. This inclusivity can increase dialogue and consciousness, again it is Anzaldúa’s concept of new tribalism—to create bridges between each other means to loosen our borders and build community. As a *Muxerista Portraitist*,

you must risk being open, vulnerable, personal and intimate all at the same time. This is how authentic relationships are created.

To use a Muxerista Portraiture methodology is to understand relationships as guided by the Mayan moral concept of “In Lak’ech, tú eres mi otro yo (you are my other me)”. This means identifying the commonalities between researcher and collaborator(s). By using spirituality as a guide to nurture relationships we can challenge the traditional research canon that splits the mind from the body and spirit, and instead use a body-mind-spirit approach that humanizes research relationships. One example of how I understand relationships through a Muxerista Portraitist methodology is Judith Flores Carmona’s (2010) study that focused on the everyday pedagogies of Latina mothers. Flores Carmona approached her research with the focus on building relationships and honoring those relationships with the mothers first, placing the research secondary. She says, “This research was not so much about pushing a theory forward; of course, it is research, but it was much more about building relationships and mutual respect with la comunidad” (209–210). We must challenge the false split that keeps us from each other as “researcher” and “subject,” and instead build together with our hearts first, not academia.

Related to spirituality is the importance of developing *confianza* in relationships. *Confianza* encompasses a level of vulnerability and accountability, meaning whatever I ask my collaborator(s), I am also willing to share. By accountability, I am not referring to the idea that I am required to do something in return for the person—although that can be part of it—but rather a more spiritual approach; I am accountable to you because I am you and you are me (following the concept of In Lak’ech). Above all, *confianza* is being selfless, putting your collaborator(s) well-being before your research needs, much as Flores Carmona (2010) did in her research. In an effort to

build meaningful relationships rooted in *confianza*, the Muxerista Portraitist also engages the collaborator(s) in the analysis of the data. They guide the selection of themes and points of focus, and the presentation of the story. They help create the portrait as much as the Muxerista Portraitist.

Cultural Intuition in Emergent Themes

In portraiture, emergent themes refer to “. . . a disciplined, empirical process—of descriptions, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis—and an aesthetic process of narrative development” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997, 185). During this process of emergent themes, the Muxerista Portraitist uses her cultural intuition to guide her. She recognizes the strength it plays in how she gathers and analyzes the data, and how she will paint the portraits of her participants. Cultural intuition must be critically cultivated (it is not static) through “. . . a deep examination and confrontation of our own privileges, suppositions of common experiences and perspectives, identities as border crossers and the histories of imperialism and exploitation characterizing U.S.-México relations. . . .” (Cervantes-Soon 2014, 109).

Therefore, to use Muxerista Portraiture requires us to nurture our cultural intuition throughout the entire research journey, especially during the process of identifying emergent themes in order to tease out intellectual, ideological and personal themes that will shape how we tell the story. As Muxerista Portraitists, we must acknowledge the guiding research questions we have set out to answer, but must also be flexible in adapting them to fit the realities of our collaborator(s). In the field, the Muxerista Portraitist participates in an ongoing dialogue between data gathering and reflection. She must listen and observe, accounting for what is familiar and what is surprising. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggest the iterative practice of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. They suggest identifying themes in the following manner: 1) looking for repetitive refrains, 2) listening for resonant metaphors,

poetic and symbolic expressions, 3) paying attention to cultural and institutional rituals that seem important, 4) using triangulation to weave data together, and 5) considering what she calls “deviant voices,” perspectives that are often experienced as contradictory and dissonant.

In Muxerista Portraiture, the same approach of identifying emergent themes is taken; however, the portraitist uses a Chicana feminist lens. She must consider the repetitive refrains in Spanish, English, and Spanglish. When listening for metaphors, poetic and symbolic expressions, she must consider things that are often particular to the Chicana experience like *dichos* (sayings or proverbs), *corridos* (ballads), and religious/spiritual symbols. She must account for community memory and collective history, and have an understanding of cultural rituals that are commonly central to the experiences of Chicanas; these could include the creation of altars at home, the act of *persinar* (to give the blessing), or yearly family road trips to México.

For instance, Michelle Telléz (2011) talks about memories that invoke her mother such as Saturday morning house cleaning with Mariachi records blasting, yearly summer trips to her mother’s hometown in Jalisco, and learning to dance the *zapateado*. These memories could be categorized as a theme of cultural or familial traditions that help Chicanas embrace our *mujerstorias* or our relationships with our mothers. Another example are the ways Gaspar De Alba (2014) and Elenes (2011) have reclaimed and reimaged La Llorona, Sor Juana, Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Coyolxauhqui¹⁵ as feminist figures to understand the experiences of Chicanas. These icons are important to consider, specifically in Muxerista Portraiture. These examples show how a Chicana sensibility is important in the process of emergent themes.

Aesthetic Whole: Piecing Together Coyolxauhqui

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) use the metaphor of weaving a tapestry to discuss the process of creating an aesthetic whole—the final portrait. They explain that “. . . the image allows for various configurations of color, texture, and design, as well as a clear structure of overlapping threads” (247). In portraiture, the portraitist constructs the aesthetic whole by considering four dimensions: the conception, which refers to the development of the overarching story; the structure, which refers to the sequencing and layering of emergent themes that form the story’s scaffold; the form, which refers to the organization of the narrative; and the cohesion, which refers to unity and integrity of the piece (247). These four dimensions guide your creation of the final portrait or a collage of portraits (Curammeng 2017). In my research on Chicana mother-daughter pedagogies, I use a collage approach by presenting mother-daughter portraits instead of individual portraits, as it is traditionally done in portraiture.

In the same way Lawrence-Lightfoot uses a metaphor to describe the aesthetic whole in Muxerista Portraiture, I suggest the image of piecing together Coyolxauhqui. More specifically, the Muxerista Portraitist draws on what Anzaldúa describes as the Coyolxauhqui imperative to create the aesthetic whole. In Aztec mythology, Coyolxauhqui tried to kill her mother Coatlicue in order to kill patriarchy and war, but in the process, she was killed by her brother Huitzilpochtli and torn into more than a thousand pieces. Gaspar De Alba (2014) describes Coyolxauhqui as “the first sacrificial victim’ of the Aztec patriarchal military state” (132). She is the first femicide victim in México and serves as a burning reminder of the continual dismembering and torturing of female bodies in the US-México border.

Drawing on this narrative, Anzaldúa describes a Coyolxauhqui imperative as “. . . a self-healing process, an inner compulsion or desire to move from

fragmentation to complex wholeness” (Keating 2009, 320). Anzaldúa often associated this concept with the writing process and it can be connected to the way portraiture “pieces the story together,” or the aesthetic whole. Coyolxauhqui then becomes a symbol (also in the tradition of portraiture) for the Muxerista Portraitist of “. . . reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way . . . an ongoing process of making and unmaking” (Keating 2009, 312). To create whole portraits, the Muxerista Portraitist must put together the fragments of identities and spirits that have been dispersed through the data analysis process. In doing so, I also reconstruct myself from the fragmentation I experience as a meXicana researcher in the peripheries of academia.

A Coyolxauhqui imperative adds this significant layer of healing and spirituality in the process of creating the aesthetic whole. Coyolxauhqui is la fuerza femenina that helps reconstitute and heal Chicanas oppressive herstories (Moraga 1983). Anzaldúa explains the importance of Coyolxauhqui:

I think the reason this image is so important to me is that when you take a person and divide her up, you disempower her. She’s no longer a threat. My whole struggle in writing, in this anticolonial struggle, has been to put us back together again. To connect up the body with the soul and the mind with the spirit. That’s why for me there’s such a link between the text and the body, between textuality and sexuality, between the body and the spirit (Anzaldúa, in Keating 2000, 220).

As when one weaves a tapestry to create an aesthetic whole, the Muxerista Portraitist metaphorically pieces Coyolxauhqui back together. She uses her Coyolxauhqui imperative to guide her from fragmentation—the process of dissecting the data to select themes, to wholeness—the process of creating an aesthetic whole or the complete portrait. This practice of splitting up narratives

(or data) for the purpose of analysis and reconnecting them for the final portrait is similar to the way Coyolxauhqui was mutilated by her brother but has been put back together through the writings of Chicana feminist scholars.

This process disrupts what Luis Urrieta (2003) talks about as dismembering human bodies—disconnecting human emotions and human lives through the research process. The Muxerista Portraitist acknowledges the troubling tension of “dividing” and “selecting” themes to weave stories together, and shifts this tension to focus on a process of healing, of putting Coyolxauhqui back together by creating stories of “wholeness” and “goodness.” In Muxerista Portraiture we must recognize “. . . the responsibility of questioning and realizing that identities are about human beings and not just about what can be told on paper” (Urrieta 2003 165). As a Muxerista Portraitist, I write not disconnecting the emotion, spirituality, and healing that can come from writing. In this way, I work to “put us back together again,” and by doing so disrupt the dismembering that can often result from unethical research practices done on Women of Color.

Conclusion

I look into my mother’s eyes and see my own reflections—not mirror images but refracted, varied (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1988, 311).

In the special issue of the *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies* on Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies, Patricia Sánchez and Lucila Ek (2013) outline future directions for Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies. One of the areas they highlight is on mothering: “. . . we must continue to document and make visible the teaching and learning that our *madres/mamis/mamás* engage in and how such practices are rooted in a diversity of cultures, languages, and epistemologies” (183). Muxerista Portraiture is in part a response to this; it is a tool that can contribute to our efforts to document Chicana/Latina mother-daughter

pedagogies and other Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies. As a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology, Muxerista Portraiture illustrates how research can be a path towards social change, by providing us with the tools to paint portraits that celebrate the strength, beauty, and struggle in our communities. It challenges deficit research methods that erase the humanity of Chicanas/Latinas. Considering that Muxerista Portraiture is still in its early conception, there are ways to continue expanding on it. For one, we must consider the pedagogical practices that it can offer, how can we use this in classrooms? How might a teacher use Muxerista Portraiture to understand her students? Another critical consideration is the self-care of the Muxerista Portraitist. Research that requires our whole selves, like Muxerista Portraiture, can burn us out quickly if we do not care for ourselves. We must find a way to genuinely care for our collaborator(s) without losing sight of our own well-being in the process.

In this article, I have presented Muxerista Portraiture, a qualitative research methodology rooted in Chicana feminist theories and portraiture. This is the methodology I use in my research on Chicana mother-daughter pedagogies. I want to thank la madrina Gloria Anzaldúa, who guides much of my thinking and allows me to have the *ganas* to create *teoría* that is based on our own herstories and experiences as Chicanas. The inclusion of my mother's story shows how ". . . our production of knowledge begins in the bodies of our mothers and grandmothers, in the acknowledgement of the critical practices of Women of Color before us" (Cruz 2001, 658). My mother has crossed many borders and has instilled in me the strength to do so as well. Muxerista Portraiture comes from my experiences of always being "in between" borders and my efforts to heal the divide between the personal and academic borders that often disempower us as Chicana scholars. I hope this article inspires other Chicana scholars to continue creating *mestizaje* theories that are committed to social change.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Dr. Dolores Delgado Bernal, Dr. Socorro Morales, and Tanya Gaxiola Serrano who reviewed earlier drafts and provided thoughtful insight.

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Notes

¹ I use Chicana to refer to women of Mexican descent living in the United States. When I use Chicana/Latina, I refer to not only women of Mexican descent, but also to women from other Latin American countries that live in the United States. As such, when I use Chicana feminist theories I refer to the body of literature by self-identified Chicana scholars; when I use Chicana/Latina feminist theories, I include not just work by Chicanas, but also Latina scholars.

² Rosa Linda Fregoso (2003) uses the term "meXicana" as a metaphor for cultural and national mobility; it is a way to draw attention to the process of transculturation, hybridity, and cultural exchanges. She quotes Chavela Vargas' song, "Ni de aquí ni de allá" to draw attention to those that inhabit the borderlands between México and the U.S. I identify as a meXicana because of my immigrant, transcultural, political, and muxerista sensibility. I do not use meXicana, Chicana, and Latina interchangeably, as they all mean something different in this article.

³ Like Pérez Huber, L., Huidor, O., Malagón, M., Sánchez, G., and Solórzano, D. G. (2006), I strategically capitalize Woman/Women of Color, People of Color, and Communities of Color as a means to challenge the marginalization of these groups.

⁴ In my mother's pueblo, the United States is often referred to as El Norte.

⁵ My grandfather's name is Carlos Bernal, but his grandchildren know him as Bolo or Bolito.

⁶ Patricia Hill Collins (2009) refers to othermothers as "women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities" (192).

⁷ Mujerstoria or herstory is a way to challenge how language is so male centered; instead of writing history I recreate it to mujerstoria or herstory (Revilla 2004).

⁸ Delgado Bernal (2001) defines pedagogies of the home as "the communication, practices and learning that occur in the home and community" (624).

⁹ Juan F. Carrillo used portraiture in his dissertation (2010), "So far from home: Portraits of Mexican-origin scholarship boys."

¹⁰ Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) often refers to the researcher as the "portraitist" in reference to the metaphor of art in the research process. I use portraitist and researcher throughout the article; they both mean the same thing.

¹¹ Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) refers to her research participants as “collaborators” to recognize their significant role in the research process; inspired by her, I do so as well.

¹² I list Catholicism with the awareness that while a majority of Chicanas are Catholic, not all of them are. The same is understood for the other markers.

¹³ For dissertation examples see Flores Carmona 2010, Reyes McGovern 2013, and Valdés 2008.

¹⁴ Malintzin was a Nahuatl woman who served as an interpreter and advisor to Hernán Cortés during the Spanish conquest.

¹⁵ La Llorona, Sor Juana, Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Coyolxauhqui are all historically situated women that Elenes and Gaspar de Alba have written about to show how they refused to comply with the problematic framing of “good women” versus “bad women.” La Llorona is portrayed as a bad mother, Sor Juana as rebellious for her defiance of church and convent traditions, the Malinche as a traitor to her people for working with Cortés, the Virgin of Guadalupe as a false construction of a “good woman,” and Coyolxauhqui as the “bad daughter.”