



Toward an epistemology of a brown body

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In its current emphasis on all that is analytic and cognitive, the absence and elusiveness of the body in educational research defines and delineates any consideration of how new identities, particularly the emerging identities of Latina/o lesbian and gay youth, are being invented within a contestation of dominant discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In a reevaluation of the writings of Chicana theorists Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, this paper locates the brown body as central in an ongoing practice of negotiation in which multiple, often opposing, ideas and ways of being are addressed, appropriated, and negotiated. The brown body, with its multiple and often oppositional intersections of sociopolitical locations, must be acknowledged in its centrality in creating new knowledges. For the educational researcher, understanding the brown body and the regulation of its movements is fundamental in the reclamation of narrative and the development of radical projects of transformation and liberation.

Preface

I have always thought that among my endless number of relatives I had the only queer story to tell. No matter about the one in 10 statistic for lesbians and gay men (homosexuals make up at least 10% of the population), I could not even imagine there was another *lesbiana* in our family until the day of my grandmother's funeral.

It was at the funeral at the Mission San Gabriel where I began to think about the women who have inspired me to continue with my education: my mother, grandmothers, aunts, and girl-cousins who have supported me through school, many of whom have lived their lives around and for other women. It was at this funeral where I first heard the stories of my great-aunts and great-grandmothers who wore men's clothing and fought in the revolution, only to come home to fight my great-grandfathers. Our family story begins with a rape, a simple story. "Your great-great-grandmother went to the river, and the soldiers came and took her," says my great-aunt Mary, whose daughter Tina, my *prima*, looks at me intensely, eyeing my outlandishness, my shiny men's shoes and carefully tailored trousers, butch clothes and walk. My *prima* Tina knows, I think to myself, but I know about her too. Will she tell me about her desires so much like my own? In the unbearable heat of the midday sun, I bow my head in prayer and my body betrays me in my grief.

Transgressions and trespassers, our grandmother rode across the border at midnight, a sleepy patroller waving her through Deming, New Mexico. She told me once that she remembered the patroller and how easy it was to cross the border. "You just had to sign in and pay eight dollars," my grandmother told me, "and I wasn't sure if I should give him my real name. What for? There was nothing left for me in Durango; I was never going to go back."

I remembered this conversation with my grandmother as I watched them lower the casket into the familiar ground. And looking at my relatives standing in the tree-shade at this 250-year-old cemetery, I saw women who were visible as lesbians, coat-and-tie, hand-in-hand *mujeres* whose desire was defined through other *mujeres*, young dykes in boots and colored hair. I saw generations of queers. I walked in the procession of my grandmother's body with the women of my family and saw my mother intimate with her childhood friend – a lesbian image. I saw women holding women, supporting them, and I realized there have always been others like me – we have always existed. Our family has always made its commitment to its outlaws and to its queers. It is this commitment to women that Barbara Smith (1980) calls “inherently lesbian.” Our research is also a commitment to women, inherently “queer,” a compiling of their lesbian stories.

Sitting in that auditorium chair was the first time I had realized to the core that for years I had disowned the language that I knew best – ignored the words and the rhythms that were the closest to me. The sounds of my mother and aunts gossiping – half in English, half in Spanish – while drinking *cerveza* in the kitchen. And the hands – I had cut off the hands in my poems. But not in conversation; still the hands could not be kept down. Still they insisted on moving. (Moraga, 1983, p. 56)

Reclamation, for the Chicana social agent, is not only a strategy to make visible Chicana voices and histories, but is also the struggle to develop a critical practice that can propel the brown body from a neocolonial past and into the embodiments of radical subjectivities. When writer Cherríe Moraga presents the image of a body without hands, a symbol of her struggle for a language and an authenticity that can encompass the complexity of a Chicana lesbian experience, she finds her rationale for knowledge dismembering the women in her poems. Just as Chicana and other border tongues are de-legitimized, so is the embodiment of that discourse. But it is the author's body that is the constant reminder that knowledge “fully saturated with history and social life” (Harding, 1991) is a possibility, a knowledge that refuses to be “kept down.” In this sense, the Chicana social agent insists on moving forward with ways of knowing that will not only legitimize the narratives of the women in our families, but is also a movement toward standpoints that will challenge the censure of the brown body.

How does a brown body know? Like Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) assertion that the negation of African-American women's efforts in traditional genres of knowledge has forced women to create and develop alternative spaces and methodologies for the study of their communities, Chicana educational researchers and cultural workers have also constructed spaces for the production of knowledges specific to our own. In this way, the brown body must be made central in any consideration of an epistemology of women of color; it is essential that an epistemology of Chicana critical thought must be grounded in the histories of the Third World women's movement that produced the backbone of women's presses and created the foundational texts of *This bridge called my back* (1981) and *Hacienda caras* (1990). For this paper, I am suggesting that 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. The most profound and liberating politics come from the interrogations of our own social locations, a narrative that works outward from our specific corporealities. “For silence to transform into speech, sounds and words, it must first

traverse through our female bodies,” writes Gloria Anzaldúa (1990, p. xxii). It is, in my opinion, the contemplation of the body that is essential in the development and evaluation of an epistemology of Chicana thought and culture.

Reason and the body

If the body is an un- or inadequately acknowledged condition of knowledges, then the sexual specificity of bodies must be a relevant factor in the evaluation of these knowledges. (Grosz, 1995, p. 26)

The absence of the specific physicality of the body in feminist theory reminds us that even when feminists have consistently contested the argument that the functions and the activities of the mind are somehow more fit than those of the body, we as educational researchers find ourselves entrenched in the Cartesian dichotomy of public/private and theory/experience. Never mind our rallying cry that the personal is political, the sets of sanctioned attitudes and behaviors in the social sciences that emphasize the mind over the body, such as the values of the rational, autonomous, independent, isolated researcher, somehow dismiss corporeal approaches that validate the lived experience of the body (Bordo, 1993; Jagger, 1983; Mohanram, 1999; Pillow, 1997; Tong, 1998). Texts that are “messy,” where experience is performed not explained, texts about betrayal, desire, and shame, are narratives that are often dismissed, unread, and untheorized (Denzin, 1997). I can remember a particular incident in an ethnic studies faculty seminar discussing *This bridge called my back* (1983) when a prominent male scholar held the book up in his hands and asked, where is the theory in this text?

What does being a thinking subject, an intellectual, mean for a woman of color from working class origins? It means not fulfilling our parents’ expectations, it means often going against their expectations by exceeding them. It means being in alien territory and suspicious of the laws and walls. It means being concerned about the ways knowledges are invented. It means continually challenging institutionalized discourses. It means being suspicious of the dominant culture’s interpretations of “our” experience, of the way they “read” us. It means being what Judy Baca terms “internal exiles.” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv)

In this case, theory becomes a bodiless entity, a concept and a framework whose interests lie outside our social environments and that is unaffected by the workings of our everyday material realities. Under the postulation of a logico-scientific inquiry, the boundaries between the personal and the political are demarcated not only in an evaluation of their validity as a narrative of truth or as a historical document, but also in their potential to erode the foundations on which the society of cultural knowledge depends. In this sense, the scholar in possession of a brown and lesbian body, or in this case, the body inscribed as “messy text,” is not only disruptive to the canon, but is also excessive in its disorderly movements and conduct. Nothing provokes the custodians of normality and objectivity more than the excessiveness of a body.

For the Chicana educational researcher, our research and narratives become the “messy” texts of research and writing. Based on the standards of positivist inquiry, the narratives of women of color are considered too corporeal, too colored, and sometimes too queer to be considered publishable. When Cherríe Moraga states that the source

of her political commitment is her sexuality – “el amor, el deseo” – academic boundaries and its regulation become political borders that leave these narratives (if they are included at all) in the last weeks of a syllabus and marginalized as the occasional special offerings in the university course catalogue. This forces scholars who “read” these texts to comment on and produce theory in non-traditional spaces (Saldívar-Hull, 2000). The messy text of the body is made a political liability in our movement toward a standpoint of Chicana critical practice.

Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. Thus people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes. Such is the case with the *india* and the *mestiza*. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 37)

Recognizing the multiple perspectives of truth and ways of knowing that acknowledge the racialized and gendered histories of conquest and colonization of indigenous peoples, *mestizaje* is the embodiment of the multiple, often oppositional, subject positions of Chicana/Latina lesbians. The notion of a mestiza consciousness, based on a construction of mixed race histories and multiple cultural and political positions that derive from the collision between colonial and indigenous oppositions, positions the new mestiza as nothing less than “a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (p. 78). It is a recognition that the brown body, in its migrations between First and Third Worlds, acts and is acted upon by the political and economic forces of globalization. In this sense, the brown body becomes agent, witness, and provocateur. As Emma Pérez (1999) rightly suggests, Aztlán as the mythical homeland of Chicana/os is no longer the imaginary space of poets but is flesh, skin, and bones. The mestiza body that is Aztlán is both material and imaginary, manifesting itself in the notion that a body does to the land what the land does to a body. It is a place scarred by history and struggle, yet engaged in building new cultures and new ways of being. It is in this way that *mestizaje* becomes one strategy toward an epistemology of the borderlands.

For Anzaldúa, the struggle for territorial control over the US/Mexico border that becomes inscribed on the brown body, the “1,950 mile long open wound/dividing a pueblo, a culture/running down the length of my body,” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 2) is a material reality, not only reconfiguring radical subjectivities, but also comprising the impetus for the mitigation of racialized, classed, and queered intersections in the production of new forms of agency and being. Aztlán becomes the very real point of departure for the imaginary, although I will argue that this voyage is not toward the West as Terry Eagleton (2000) suggests, but to a very different epistemological destination.

The brown and lesbian body that traverses the First to Third World landscape is, as Chéla Sandoval (1995) so aptly describes, “the activity of the trickster who practices subjectivity-as-masquerade, the oppositional agent who accesses differing identity, ideological, aesthetic, and political positions” (p. 221). In this way, the migration of the mestiza body is dialectical, negotiating the transcultural space of our post-Fordist communities and equipped with the tactics and worldviews that are forced to ever change and develop. “Stretch or die,” writes poet Donna Kate Rushin in the foreword of *This bridge called my back*, emphasizing the urgency of embodying change in the everyday realities of Chicanas and other women of color.

This project of *mestizaje* is not the production of a new binary or the displacement of one meta-narrative for another. Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness is a movement

toward divergent thinking – an inclusive, plural, constantly shifting, suturing synthesis of an epistemology that signals the rupture in the subject–object duality that grounds Enlightenment epistemologies. In this sense, *mestizaje* consciousness is not only asking for improved rigor and care in using the logico-scientific methods of inquiry but is also an episteme of hybridity that allows a reading of liminal (or third) spaces and of the methodology of those who occupy such spaces. However, care must be taken to insure that we do not lock into a duel of oppressor and oppressed, but to learn to move beyond the counterstance. “The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react,” writes Anzaldúa (p. 79).

The gaping mouth slit heart from mind. Between the two eyes in her head, the tongueless magical eye and the loquacious rational eye, was *la rajadura*, the abyss that no bridge could span. Separated, they could not visit each other and each was too far away to hear what the other was saying. Silence rose like a river and could not be held back, it flooded and drowned everything. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 45)

Reason, and the methodologies of research that result from an uncritical and unmediated use of it, fragment the brown body. Anzaldúa’s magical eye is speechless and without language while the rational eye is verbose – the separation of the mind from a mute and silenced body. For that reason, I will argue that the writer is challenging the postmodern notions that are embedded in issues of contingency and the fragmentation of identity. The issue is not one of fragmentation for Anzaldúa but a resistance to the mutilation of the *mestiza* body. This is a deliberate search for the possibilities of narrative and theory mending and suturing a body complete. In this sense, the visceral and corporeal representation of the *mestiza* body in Anzaldúa’s narrative problematizes the core of the “transparent neutrality of ways of knowing to the objects known” (Grosz, 1995, p. 27). The image of *la rajadura*, or opening, is more than a call for an unmediated objectivity or a challenge to reason itself, but also a critique of the select ways that universal, (post)modernist narratives have been employed to privilege certain groups over others.

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradiction, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture; to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality. She operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she survive contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79)

Brian Fay (1996) suggests that a multicultural philosophy of social science is an ongoing practice of negotiation in which multiple, often opposing, ideas and ways of being are addressed, appropriated, and negotiated. Unlike the dualistic thinking of mind/body and subject/object, Anzaldúa’s notion of the *mestizaje* is not only an engagement in the methodology of social sciences that explores the way subjects “positively respond to knowledge of, and interaction with, those who are different” (Fay, 1996, p. 239), but is also a “mode of learning and a conception of knowledge that may enhance the possibility of collectively constituted thought and action which seeks to transform the relations of power that constrict people’s lives” (Simon and Giroux, 1989, p. 196). Ultimately, I am suggesting that Anzaldúa’s notion of the *mestizaje* advances epistemological possibilities based on the narratives of racially

gendered positionalities and collisions that posit the brown body against the grain of (post)modernist ways of knowing. In this way, Anzaldúa offers the education researcher an alternative direction for the re-negotiation of dichotomies of dominant systems of rationalization and positivism in new directions that could posit a convergence of the mind with the body.

The fragmented body

To be a mouth – the cost is too high – her whole life enslaved to that devouring mouth. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 74)

The project of reclamation for the Chicana education researcher is twofold: first, reclamation must be asserted through a politics of difference that emphasizes the local and multiple subjectivities of communities that are recognized as participating in a larger movement of participatory democracies. Second, a project of reclaiming histories and narratives must be committed to exposing how systems of power have privileged certain kinds of narratives that serve to undermine and invalidate others. In Moraga's case, storying the brown body becomes problematic when our training as writers, researchers, and cultural critics is complicit with the systems of power that threaten to invalidate certain kinds of knowledges. Our struggle to legitimize the stories of our theoretical mothers and grandmothers collide with our academic "groomings." How do we make compatible what has been unrepresented using the forms of positivism? How do we reconfigure ourselves as witnesses when our observations of poverty and oppression include the communities of our families?

I would grow despairing if I believed, as Rosario Morales refutes, we were unilaterally defined by color and class. Lesbianism is then a hoax, a fraud. I have no business with it. Lesbianism is supposed to be about connection. What drew me to politics was my love of women, the agony I felt in observing the straightjackets of poverty and repression I saw people in my own family in. (Moraga, 1983, p. xiv)

Emma Pérez (1999), in an answer to Gayatri Spivak's (1988) "Can the subaltern speak?" suggests, "if the subaltern could speak, would not desire be the subject of that discourse?" (p. 157). Certainly for Moraga, the interrogation of her identity as lesbian lends itself to the possibilities of solidarity with women whose positions differ drastically from her own. Only through a mediation upon the bodies of women does Moraga identify the nature of her own oppression – and her privilege as a light-skinned woman – and begin the much larger understanding of the brown body and its exchange/use as a worker and cultural agent. It is desire, and the discourses that define that desire, that leads Moraga to women – and women's bodies – where she is subjected to and made cognizant of the social pressures that define the allowable use of her own body. Here is skin "darkened by desire" (1983, p. 69), a body that not only does what Yvonne Yabro-Bejarano (1991) argues "displays the constructiveness of race" (p. 152), but is also a recognition that lesbianism directs Moraga toward a greater understanding of sociopolitical oppression and, thus, solidarity.

Sometimes when I write, I feel I am drawing from the most silent place in myself – a place without image, word, shape, sound – to create a portrait of *la mechinca* before the "Fall," before shame, before betrayal, before Eve, Malinche,

and Guadalupe; before the occupation of Aztlan, la llegada de los españoles, the Aztecs' War of Flowers. I don't know what this woman looks like exactly, but I know she is more than the bent back in the fields, more than the assembly-line fingers and the rigid body beneath him in bed, more than the veiled face above the rosary beads. She is more than the sum of all these fragmented parts. (Moraga, 1993, p. 72)

For Cherrié Moraga, reclamation begins with the body that houses multiple identities. Each component of the brown body has its own story to tell – the lesbian mouth, the bent back in the fields, the dismembered daughter – and its deconstruction is a necessary process of reclaiming and re-imagining the histories and forms of agencies of women who are unrepresented and unheard. Unlike the deconstructive need to explode a text in order to engage it, Moraga is not seeking a nonform or a destruction of form, but is remaking a new form of identity/body – a body that is ground in the interrogation of its positionality, a specificity of history and location. In an example from the poem “For the color of my mother” (1983, pp. 59–60), the author displays her mother's body postsurgery to reveal the constructiveness of a body:

Finally stitched shut from hip to breastbone
 an inverted V
Vera
Elvira

“Bodies do not only pass meaning along, or pass it along in their uniquely responsive way,” writes Susan Leigh Foster (1996, p. xi). “They develop choreographies of signs through which they discourse. . . . They narrate their own fate.” In this case, the sign of the inverted “V” of surgery on the body of Moraga's mother is a narrative inscribed in the form of staples and sutures, a story of a woman, like many other Chicanas and Latinas who are exploited for their labor, who has literally been worked to death. The “V” for “Vera/Elvira” on the body is Moraga's attempt at naming the life of her mother, linking the narrative of Moraga's burgeoning political consciousness within the body of her mother. Only through the body's discourse does Moraga rename and reconstruct the broken figure of the mother. Stitched shut and made whole, Moraga remakes and redefines the object-woman from mother/wife/worker to that of subject-Vera/Elvira. The brown body of the mother is not only a critical reading of the representation of fragmentation for Moraga's postmodern text. Unlike other representations of fragmentation that disclose the uneasiness of plurality and diversity, Moraga's use of the broken or dismembered body confronts this fear of “miscegenation.”

Huitzilopotchli is not my god. And although I revere his mother Coatlicue, Diosa de la Muerte y La Vida, I do not pray to her. I pray to the daughter, La Hija Rebelde. She who has been banished, the mutilated sister who transforms herself into the moon. She is la fuerza femenina, our attempt to pick up the fragments of our dismembered womanhood and reconstitute ourselves. She is the Chicana writer's words, the Chicana painter's canvas, the Chicana dancer's steps. She is motherhood reclaimed and sisterhood honored. (p. 74)

Coyolxauhqui, the daughter of the Aztec mother of creation, is the sister dismembered by the misogynist brother. “Breast splits from chest splits from hip splits from thigh splits from knee from arm and foot,” writes Moraga (p. 73). Splitting the body – a

body already fragmented by multiple identities and subjectivities – serves the purpose of not only reinventing identities, but also deconstructing the discourses inscribed upon the brown body – the image of the bent back in the fields is inscribed with the racialized discourses of capitalism, the lesbian mouth is marked as sexual and transgressive – *muchachitas bien criadas*, good girls don't talk back. In this way, the deconstruction of the body may offer the possibility of revealing how identities are discursively created and how the brown body is constructed through the narratives and the social mores of our communities. Not only does Moraga's narrative establish a way of knowing that begins with the carnality of the brown body, but it also begins deconstructing the prevailing ideologies that mediate how race, class, gender, and sexuality constitute Chicana identities.

Towards a Chicana critical practice of education

Passion is another story. It is to be written *about* but not with: for the essence of all academic work on 'desire' is to stay *cool*. (Williamson, 1986, p. 12)

One of our objectives in educational thought is the incorporation of the brown body in the discussions about representation, social control, and the constructions of normality. The conspicuous absence and elusiveness of the body in educational research in its "current fixation . . . on the rational and the cognitive" (Shapiro, 1994, p. 61), defines and delineates any consideration of how new identities, particularly the emerging identities of Latina/o lesbian and gay youth, are being invented within a contestation of dominant discourses of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The articulation of new subjectivities amongst youth is an issue that can be restated as an issue of the containment of the body. Subsequently, we must ask how the brown body is regulated and governed in schools and other social institutions. How does a regime of a given society become inscribed onto the bodies of our youth? How do Chicana lesbian students discursively make the Chicana lesbian body? As Peter McLaren (1993) justly states, "only in this way can liberating pedagogies be developed that will enable students to construct meanings that are lived in the body, felt in the bones, and situated within the larger body politic in the form of public meta-narratives (as distinct from master narratives) aimed at increasing social justice and emancipation" (p. 277). Understanding the brown body and the regulation of its movements is fundamental in reclaiming narrative and developing radical projects of transformation.

The data I have collected are part of a larger ethnographic project on the construction of the queer body. My exploration of the brown body comes from my experiences as a teacher and an HIV educator at alternative high schools and youth centers in California. In this work with the mostly Latina/o lesbian, gay, and transgender students, my interactions with young people not only come from workshops and seminars about queer voice and autobiography but also my interactions off-site, where many of our social circles overlap past the school gates. I also keep a teaching journal that helps me reevaluate community-building and writing activities that document the issues which develop when "storying the self" (Goodson, 1998, p. 16), and records my own observations of the day-to-day activities of urban queer youth spaces.

Brian Turner (1984), in his introduction to the text *The body and society*, writes that the parallels between the idea of a regime or government of a body and the regime of a

given society are illustrated best using Foucault's (1981) notion of the body "disorder." "Disorders," in this case, are the "cultural indicators of the problem of control" (Turner, 1984, p. 2), particularly within communities of color, women, and queers. One example of "disorder" is the American Psychiatric Association's 1973 removal of homosexuality as a pathology from the *Diagnostic and statistical manual*. In turn, homosexuality as a pathology was subsequently replaced by a new "disorder" – Gender Identity Disorder of Children – that gave parents and social workers the right to hospitalize and institutionalize young people whose bodies did not adhere to the conventions of traditional masculinity or femininity (Sedgwick, 1993). Interestingly enough, when reading the Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick article, "How to bring your kids up gay," one lesbian student in my classroom "remembered" visits and a brief period of institutionalization at a local research hospital as a 7-year-old child.

I remember being taken by my parents to a hospital and I knew it was because there was something wrong with me, there was something wrong about being this boy-girl that I was and I remember asking where's my ma, what did I do? (Personal correspondence, 11/20/99)

Turner (1984) argues that the regulation of the body is closely bound with the control of female sexuality and socialization (p. 3). In this case, the feminine body of the then 7-year-old student was judged in "disorder" according to the standards set by her doctor and her parents. Although Foucault's notion of the body disorder seems to affect female students disproportionately, young lesbians and gay men who create their own style of race and gender performance continue to defy those discourses that maintain the social order. In another example at an alternative high school for queer youth, students often receive conflicting messages from school officials when volatile behavior seems to draw different and unequal treatments from school staff and administration for the gay male student as opposed to the lesbian student.

"Josie" – a big girl, strong, butch, Latina – publicly challenged another male student today, she shook her fists at him, she pushed chairs over to get to him, it was an awesome display of power. The lead teacher quickly suspended her from school. I've noticed that other male students who exhibit the same damn behaviors are given two or three chances and are rarely expelled from school. Double standard for the lesbians. (Journal entry 10/30/95)

Instances of disruptive behavior by female (lesbian) students were much more regulated by the male administrators than those disruptive instances by (gay) male students. In a blur of movement, "Josie's" body "disordered" the classroom space. No longer docile, the butch body's "disorderly conduct" destabilizes the order of the classroom, forcing the teachers to contain and reestablish control in their class space. The lesbian body threatened the authority of the administration, and the teaching staff made much of her bodily strength and her hands and fists. In the eyes of the school's administration, the student "Josie" embodied irrationality and is reduced to "hands and fists" that turn into dangerous weapons as she threatens another student who had been taunting her about her masculine body. The body, even in a space created for lesbian and gay youth, is still contained within the parameters of its (future) use, whether as worker, citizen, or its complicity with a racially gendered social order. The punishments are thorough and swift for girls who stray outside of the roles relegated for female bodies. Not only are the consequences harsh for the young

woman of color but, in this instance when the social authority of the classroom breaks down, it is the female body that becomes inscribed as hysterical, irrational, and monstrous.

I walk in a sea of perfection
 I am flawed
 Not brown enough
 Not white enough
 Not thin enough

Chicana poet Christine Soto's (2000a) "250 Pounds" begins with a body that does not "fit" into the categories that define "normality." Queer amidst Chicanos, Chicana surrounded by largely white lesbian and gay communities, and big in a society that values thinness as beauty, Soto's excerpt positions the brown body in opposition to the bodies of "las Güeras," not only as a position against the white standards of beauty, but also against becoming silenced. In this way, Soto is transitioning into accommodating her multiple shifting subject positions occupied by her body and is also defying the unspoken rules against speaking out about abuse:

How did I get here?
 250 pounds of shame
 Hiding from that which I would rather forget
 Feeling disgust
 Swallowing words with a side of fries and a Big Mac
 This is what I was taught,
 Mama told me it was something I shouldn't speak of
 So I don't.

Even as she was instructed by the mother not to talk about her history of abuse, Soto rejects the cultural constraints placed upon her to stay silent. In reconstructing the memory of the trauma, Soto reconstitutes the experience, making sense of her own history as a survivor, and begins the process of transformation. On one level, Soto's poem can be read as a struggle against the unrealistic standards of beauty and body image for young females in this society. On another level, the poem can be read as a narrative of the body, where the language of the self is as substantial as flesh, a body that confronts the inscriptions of shame:

I eat and eat and eat
 When the food goes down so does it

 That is what las Güeras can't see
 That 250 pounds keeps it from coming out.

Majorie Orellana (1999) argues that narratives provide space where social identities can be constructed. For Soto, not only is her poetry a critique of the racially gendered discourses of dominant culture, but her writing is also a celebration of ambiguity and of *mestizaje*. In her refusal to accept the dichotomy of genders and her acknowledgement of the collision of cultures between brown and white bodies, Soto begins the creation of narrative that informs her struggle in situating her identity as butch and as Chicana.

If you only knew what lies beneath
 These slacks and dress shirt

A woman no longer afraid of what feels good
 A woman no longer ashamed of her skin color
 And slanted Mexican eyes
 Once thought to be Chinese

A woman who no longer needs to wear
 Fruit of the Loom boxer shorts to prove her butchness
 A woman who has peeled layers of pain in silence
 A woman who doesn't have to march in the dyke parade
 To prove her pride

A woman, tired of assumptions and rejections
 A woman who doesn't need to attend every Chicano Meeting
 To validate her loyalty to la Raza

What lies beneath is,
 Simplemente una Mujer en traje de hombre con chi-chis y Orgullo.

Soto's (2000b) poem "If you only knew what lies beneath," is a celebration of reinventing an identity that has successfully negotiated the ambiguity of a body that is neither male nor female, and its refusal to adhere to the cultural binaries of gender and race. In this poem, the narrator has created the space where the body is at ease – the integration of the multiple subjectivities of racial identity and the performance of gender outside of the boundaries of femininity. Soto is not refusing the specificity of her body, but instead recenters and reframes the body as Chicana and as queer. Where these identities once functioned as boundaries not to be crossed, Soto has rejected the fragmentation that comes with the uneasiness that plurality and hybridity make among dominant culture. In this sense, the body refuses the fragmentation that comes from the boundaries of identities and is able to reorder the space around the self.

When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart – a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 73)

For Soto, the affirmation of her body as "Simplemente una Mujer en traje de hombre con chi-chis y/ Orgullo" begins the process of "resubjectification" (Tanaka, 2000), a fashioning of new ways of being in the world that reconfigures and reconstructs the body as whole. The mestiza narrative occupies multiple subject positions and multiple voices. Not only is the creation of the mestiza narrative (or a critical story) only one strategy used by young writers such as Soto, it is a methodology situated in the tension of Reason and the body. For young Chicana writers like Christine Soto, writing is not only a means of crafting the self. For the Chicana writer, it is narrative that makes the word flesh.

A queer conclusion

Picking out images from my soul's eye, fishing for the right words to recreate the images. Words are blades of grass pushing past the obstacles, sprouting on the page; the spirit of the words moving in the body is as concrete as flesh and as

palpable; the hunger to create is as substantial as fingers and hands. (Anzaldúa, p. 71)

I believe in the power of narratives. My seminars begin with critical stories about the body. The body prompts memory and language, builds community and coalition. The body is a pedagogical devise, a location of recentering and recontextualizing the self and the stories that emanate from that self. The discourse of the Radical Right has done such an excellent job of decontextualizing a narrative. "South-Central L.A. teen mom gets accepted to MIT," says the *Los Angeles Times*, reinscribing the myth of the American Dream onto the body of a 17-year-old single mother. For these reasons, educational researchers must learn to recognize "the centrality of the body in reproduction and transformation of culture" (Jaggar & Bordo, 1989, p. 4).

For the educational researcher, the inclusion of the body holds the beginnings of charting new territories in epistemic approaches, where we can begin to develop strategies to rethink our work in education to reflect the multiplicities of language and history in less partial and less distorted ways. The body reminds us that it is critical to acknowledge the self and its locations. How do these locations impact the directions of critical inquiry? For this argument, this paper is about the acknowledgement of our theoretical mothers and grandmothers, of the recognition of the lived experience of women and their histories. Too often theory is left without a body, without an acknowledgement of its origins. For the Chicana educational researcher, the body is a critical component of the study of agency and empowerment.

Writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Christine Soto work strategically from peripheral locations that are both inside and beyond the boundaries of present-day theory. By virtue of their position can the poet and the researcher challenge existing frameworks that are invested in maintaining the academic boundaries between disciplines and knowledges? The mestiza scholar attends to her research with the tools of multiple sources and multiple ways of knowing. Mestizaje informs our choices as researchers and we garner our knowledges through an interrogation of the lived conditions of our communities. What Moraga and Anzaldúa do best is reflect the multitude of strategies, methodologies, and approaches to different ways of knowing. Situating knowledge in the brown body begins the validation of the narratives of survival, transformation, and emancipation of our respective communities, reclaiming histories and identities. And in these ways, we embody our theory.

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