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# On the Trope of Identity

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# On the Trope of Identity



Elizabeth Contreras-Garibay

Senior Capstone

Concentration: Creative Writing & Social Action

A Creative Project

Professor: Qun Wang

Division of Humanities and Communication

Fall 2016

### *Dedication*

To my father Raul and mother Eva I'm thankful for all their love and support. To my sisters and brother for always motivating me and keeping me accountable to reach my goals.

### *Acknowledgments*

Thank you Professor Diana Garcia, Professor Melissa Sipin, and Professor Kyle Livie for always encouraging me to grow as a writer.

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## *Senior Project Proposal*

### **1. Provide your name and identify your area of concentration**

Elizabeth Contreras-Garibay- Concentration in Creative Writing & Social Action

### **2. Capstone Title**

On the Trope of Identity- Creative Project

### **3. Project Description**

I intend for my project to comprise of different literary genres from poetry and a creative nonfiction pieces. My project will focus on the struggle of searching for one's own identity, and the acceptance of bracing one's own individuality. I will be discussing on issues such as: gender norms, assimilation, and cultural identity.

### **4. Alignment with Common Theme**

The course descriptions is Border Crossing, Cultural Negotiations & the search for Identity, as first generation Mexican American, and as a woman these identities have played a key role on how I interpret my environment.

### **5. Expectations**

I expect to define what identity means to me, and how I interpret to my environment.

### **6. Specific Skills Required**

The skills that I have obtained as a Human Communication major with a Creative Writer and Social Action concentration has provided a set of skills and confidence to follow through with this creative project. Some of the courses that I have taken in the past have provided the practice and knowledge to complete this project successfully.

### **7. Next Steps**

Upon the approval of my proposal, I will research various identities, but I will only focus on a few, while doing character development. I will also create a character that correlates with my own search for identity, and it representation with my own journey.

### **8. Timeline**

The timeline that I have assign for myself is to work on my creative project five to eight hours a week, until completion.

## *Into The Night*

I tossed and turned, as the night lay heavy on me. I could hear everything from my husband snoring to the cat scratching the back door trying to come in. I always lie in bed in silence... waiting to hear something, but it's always the same noise: the cat scratching the door, my husband snoring, and the house making noises in the middle of the night. It's always the same, just never what I want to hear. Last week was another example of all the meaningless conversations we have.

“Did you pick up the kids,” Josue asked. He barely had set foot inside our bedroom door and he already started with his stupid remarks. He did even bother to look inside their bedrooms.

!No! I let them walk home alone! Of course, I did! What kind of question is that!?

“Geezz...it was just a question, calm down,” Josue said.

Josue, is what I do every day... I ran around fixing and taking care of everything, and everyone.

Their was a short moment after that where we both stood across the bed and just by his deer in headlights grin, I knew he didn't know what to say, he just stood there in silence, hoping I would say something, but I didn't. We stared at each for a while, until little Jose our youngest

child, swung the door open and jumped on top of the bed and then onto Josue arms. I wiped my eyes.

Joselito, come we're gonna go make some grilled cheese sandwiches... Quieres?

My first instinct was to take Joselito out of Josue arms. We both has sucked the oxygen out of the room, the glaring look he gave me, I knew it wasn't over, it was just the beginning.

That was last week, and this week I'm dragging my fingers on the wall back and forth touching the small pumps of the stucco. As I continue to drag my fingers back and forth in a slow motion, I start to imagine little old wrinkly faces in the small clouds of stucco. I imagined the little old man stuck on the walls trying to get out, I almost feel sorry for them. I often wonder if they feel sorry for me too. The little old men take me back to yesterday, when I took Isabelita and Joselito to the park. I had grabbed a few snacks and water bottles , and stuffed them all inside my pursue. That's when Josue walked into the kitchen.

"Where are you going?" he asked

I'm taking the kids to the park. Where you going, dressed like that? He was wearing his nice clothes, he smiled with his annoying grin.

"I'm just going to go have some beers with Hector," he said

Oh, that's nice, I said. I know he could hear the cracking of my voice.



He kisses my cheek, and says “I’ll be back soon.” The fake grin, is starting to hurt my face. I closed the door behind him, and wave goodbye. I slammed the door, and walk towards the bedroom, and I place the a pillow over my face and scream... And out of nowhere, I hear my Isabelita’s voice.

Isabel is that you?

Isabelita answers, “Ama, is everything okay?”

Yes, mija! Es que... I fell... But get your brother ready, I’ll be out soon.

When we arrived to the park the first thing the kids wanted to do was swing on the swing set. I saw how Isabelle would swing from the swing set with a graceful kick to give her the right momentum. Her foot was pointed towards the sky, it almost looked like she was trying to touch the clouds with her foot. Every few minutes she would turn her tiny little head to make sure, I was paying attention to her. She kept giving me those shimmery eyes, as she waited for some kind of approval from me. I’d smile, and say she was doing a great job. My little Isabel has long legs for a seven year old, she also has beautiful long wavy hair, and the cutest freckles on her nose. She definitely has her father’s face.

As I sit there watching my babies enjoy themselves. The leaves in the trees start to blow back and forth. I can feel the cold wind roar towards me. As it touches me I can feel the weight of it all, overflowing my lungs. Then, suddenly I hear a woman sobbing uncontrollably. I wasn’t

sure where she was, because I couldn't see anybody from where I was sitting. That's when I felt water coming from my eyes. At that moment I realized, I was the sobbing woman and I felt like I was never going to stop. Like tightness in my chest was never going to ease away. Like this was it. But I had to stop it. My babies were going to see me...

*I want to cry every time I think about the park now. I can't remember the last time i had a moment by myself without the kids or Josue. I guess, I don't have that luxury, like other people. My sisters always make it look so simple, but not for me. I turned to my side, I got tired of facing the sealing, and now I have a clear view of Josue back of the head. He's balding just like his father, what a lucky girl I' am. I just...use to love his hair so much, that's the only reason I said yes to him when he asked me out on a date. But now I'm lying here trying to picture the wrinkly men that are stuck inside the stucco, jump out and dance around the little moon he has on the back of his head.*

Without thinking, I got out of bed, I didn't even have my shoes on... I left! I left my babies and my husband. I just left... I don't why I did it. I just had too.

And, now I don't know how to go back...

## *Beneath the Stream of Consciousness*

In my blood flows the blood of the oppressor and the oppressed.  
My body carries the weight of history.  
I'm the symbol of colonization.

Colors cry from beneath my skin.  
Cortes claims triumph over puddles of blood.  
Can you hear the screams? Of my ancestors'.  
Tears shake the ground beneath us.

The color of my skin is made up of different pigments.  
The rainbow illuminates my skin.  
As light as a rose petal,  
a chocolate brown, like Montezuma brown skin  
and as beautiful as the Saharan desert.

My DNA forms a chain of enslavement.  
I am the byproduct of rape, and I' am the rapist.

My indigenous roots are crying to merge from my pores.  
I've denied them repeatedly.

I have silenced my tongue  
I'm the lost child of Aztlan, seeking a home.  
I'm losing my language for the second time,

My grandmother turns in her grave.

*Wonder, Who Are You?*

Wonder finds logic  
Ignites with the ugly truth  
Which does not exist

The mind blurs the truth  
Beating heart lost in a sea  
Collecting puzzles

Smell the building blocks  
They're not what they appear  
Empty sentences

Money runs the world  
Greed is the spark plug, I see  
Can you smell the smoke?

The womb is bleeding  
Logic and fear is not met  
The innocent bleeds

I cried wolf, no one...  
Hope was lost in the darkness  
I followed the trail

Mother Earth is sad  
God is laughing, can you see?  
He is the elite

Wonder knows nothing.  
Knowing does not prevent the truth  
Just slips the veil off

## *About Me*

I like my coffee to be sweet and bitter

I like my tea bitter

I like the smell of paper

I like ink stains in my fingers tips

I like wearing no makeup

I like wearing makeup

I like being one of the boys

I like being one of the girls

I like beer

I prefer vodka

I like the smell of cigarette smoke

I'm not a smoker,

I can be a social smoker

I'm not a smoker

I like different hair styles

I have messy hair,

I don't like my untamable hair

I'm grateful to have hair

I love staring at the ocean

I'm not strong swimmer

I love the smell of pumpkin empanadas

I miss my mother cooking

I miss my niece toothless smile

I miss my Luna, meow

I miss my old room

I like breathless sceneries

I love sublime blissfulness

I like people

I don't like people

I'm scared of others thoughts

I'm more scared of my own

I like Sailor Moon

I like music videos  
I like to daydream, a lot  
I love house music  
I love Mana  
I miss my mother village, blissful silence  
I like high heels  
I hate high heels  
I love jewelry  
I don't like wearing too much jewelry  
I like to smile  
I pretend to be happy sometimes  
I love coffee shops  
I love the aroma of coffee  
I wonder why people look smarter in coffee shops  
I like to pretend I'm smart  
I don't like to think about the past  
I'm excited for an imaginary life  
I love dancing, my hips don't lie  
I like to surprise people,  
I don't like surprises  
I'm not so ordinary, mostly complicated  
I'm full of sorrows, and optimism  
I love learning,  
I'm scared of my student loans  
I love being in love  
I hate letting love hurt me  
I'm strong  
I'm weak  
I'm mentally strong  
I'm mentally weak  
I wish, I could control my thoughts  
I like being me

*The Moon and the Sun*

I'm the moon and the sun  
I am the combination of both  
I' am the seed they created with tender love  
I' am the hope for a new future  
I' am their version of beauty and grace  
I' am none of those things

A new tongue,  
A new flag  
A new home  
They said, "a new opportunity"

A child was born in a new world  
Far from grace, she came into the world  
She learned her prayers  
Behaved like a good Catholic girl  
She followed instructions  
They never really saw the scars,  
They never asked.

She was the moon and the sun  
She was light in the darkness,  
She was not what they hoped she would be.  
She would pray every night  
They never asked what she would pray for.

The mirror was against her  
Her hips were too wide  
Her hair was too messy  
Not the version of beauty  
But she was hope.

She wrote,

To my beautiful mother  
I'm the fruit of your insides  
Your moon and your sun  
I'm truly sorry  
I'm not beauty or grace

I fell from the heavens, while you weren't looking

And now,

This is what I'm am  
I'm not the moon, or the sun  
I'm of a different tongue  
I'm from a different world

A world where the scars lay heavy on my soul,

This what I have never said to you...



## *Reflective Essay*

### *Aesthetics*

The aesthetics that I used for my creative writing anthology were focus to portray a story line in which I used imagery, tone, and dialog to connect the theme. The short story and poetry were focus on various themes that connect with issues of identity. I discussed issues of assimilation, gender norms, and cultural identity by portraying rich tones to shine a light on some of the brought issues that I have seen from my own experiences and other's experiences. Some of the aesthetics that I used in my creative pieces were focused on character building for example, "Into the Night" my character was laying in her bed and hallucinating the stucco on the wall coming into live, while she went through a chain of flashbacks of her life with her kids and her husband. I didn't want the reader to feel lost while trying to understand where my character was trying to express. In my poem "The Moon and the Sun" there is a column where the character takes over and sends a message to the mother. Dialogue that was used in my pieces were used to portray emotion, time, setting, and hopefully an identity awakening.

### *Audience/ purpose*

When I first heard about the class topic “In Search for Identity” it influence me to self-reflect on what identity means to me, and what is my identity. The word identity has always been a representation of what others see from the outside, which is I’m Mexican American and I’m a woman. I have never wanted to focus on these two identities because I didn’t want to feel like I had a barrier from achieving my goals, or simply living my life the way I wanted to. I felt if I focus on the stereotypes, or gender norms that I inherited because of my identity that would somehow deflect from people seeing me as person. During my time here at *California State University, Monterey Bay* I took Chicano courses that discusses Chicanismo in which brought to light various identities that I have never been exposed to prior attending school. These experiences have allowed me to reach an educational awakening, and also educating me on my own identity. During my two years in *CSU Monterey Bay* I have learned a lot about myself, professors and classmates, which I’m thankful for. These experiences have persuaded me to write about topics of gender norms to Chicano history, or to what assimilation means to me. I have never planned on writing for anyone other than for me. I have always felt like my writing wasn’t good enough, because I didn’t speak good English or my grammar isn’t always the best. Spanish being my first language has provoked me to feel like I have a permanent roadblock

to the English language. For example the way I communicate or express myself I have been made fun of because couldn't pronounce something correctly or I said funny. If I'd focuses on this alone it would drive me crazy, but what I did was write how I felt about it all. I think writing helped clear some of the webs in my head, and also express some of the frustrations I have felt before. I wrote a short story about a woman who has two children and a husband who isn't proactive in their marriage or in their children. Her frustration with keeping the family going is what lead to abandon her children. When I was little my mother left our family, and less than year she was back. At the time I wasn't able to understand that my mother was exhausted with dealing with a drunk, and the responsibilities of being a mother was too overwhelming for her. She stayed in the picture for that whole year, but she wasn't there every night, or every morning. I didn't let that affect me to much that's what I kept telling myself and others, until I realized one day that I had issues that were caused because I was abandoned and it all stemmed from my mother. I included this piece because I was trying to understand her, and why she did what she did. I don't hate my mother, I love her, but I was trying to understand where she was coming from. There are many people who have been abandoned by their parents or a family member, and this short story is for them. And it also for my mother, I'm trying to understand how and why those set events needed to happen.

In the poem "Stream of Consciousness" I wrote about assimilation and Chicano history of assimilation, and what that entailed in my life. I feel like this poem has a censored audience, but hopefully others with a different identity can resonate with it as well. My purpose was to inspired and ease some of my burdens that I have had over the years. My creative writing journey has definitely been a search for identity.

### *Process*

The development of my portfolio was interesting because I felt like each of my pieces were so different and had a mind of their own. As a writer I feel like I never have control of what I am writing. I feel like my characters have a mind of their own, and I'm just directing them where they want to be. I am inspired by my own personal experiences, and from what I have seen while working in the medical field. Each of poems and short story took a long time to develop, except for my poem "The Moon and the Sun" I felt like it didn't take as long as the others. My short story "Into the Night" took the longest, because in the beginning I didn't know what character I was developing, but I kept writing until I got to know her, and later the piece blossom the way it was supposed to. My creative process has a mind of its own sometimes I can create something that was sparked by an idea or a word and

then there are different occasions where I have no idea what I'm going to write about. This creative journey took hold of me somehow, and this is what happened.

### *Thematic and social historical context*

The class theme is "Border crossing, Cultural Negotiation, and Search for identity" in which my creative topic correlates with search for identity. In the poem "Stream of Consciousness" I discuss themes like assimilation, colonization, and race identity. These topics respond with identity, and in which my poem response with accepting a long history of assimilation and colonization that occurred to the Mechica people of Mexico, and later to Mexican American in the United States to assimilate to their environment. The idea of being more American, including many physical aspects that most Chicano's did not fit into a category. I wanted to develop a poem that expressed how I felt about not being able to speak perfect Spanish, and English. This idea that I have to pick one over the other, because my environment is more accepting of it. In the poem "The Moon and the Sun" discusses on the pressure of being first generation Mexican American to immigrant parents, and the communication barrier because they're not able to understand the cultural differences, and I also included conflicting issues of body image. I think another

aspect of identity is body image in the way one sees themselves and compares to the physical world. In the poem "Wonder, Who Are you" is a combination of haiku's in a poem. I wanted the reader to go into my consciousness of what I have questioned about the world around me, and in my poem "About Me" was an "I like poem." I shared this poem to describe who I' am as a person versus what my identity has to say about me. In my short story "Into the Night" the identity of my character fit the roles of a motherhood and a housewife. My character struggle was mainly influenced by gender norms that are emphasized in Mexican homes. Gender norms are very apparent in Mexican homes, and I wanted to expose some of those experiences.

### *Artistic Tradition and History*

My creative pieces have been inspired from taking courses like Latina/ Chicana Experiences, Autobiografias, and Chicano history in *California State University, Monterey Bay*. This was first time I have ever learned about Chicano identity, because I was never exposed to my Chicana identity. My parents were both born in Mexico and can relate to the Chicano identity because they have strong roots in Mexico, they only see themselves as Mexicans.

## *Final Synthesis Essay*

My capstone experience was very insightful and interesting because of the class dynamic that was upheld during this fall semester. This section opened my eyes to various forms of identity, and creativity. Everyone had their own personal story they wanted to tell and the process of it all was very different than mine. Some of the class discussion in Dr. Wang's class correlated with some of the issues I was either concern with or felt confident I could accomplish, while working on my capstone. Capstone required a lot of attention and work, which required a lot of alone time reflecting on myself. I have always felt comfortable working independently, but I can also adapt well with working in a group environment. This experience was a combination of both with a class setting, and working on my creative project on my own time. I have learned that in order to learn more about yourself and the world around, one must be alone. What does that mean? Well, it means to be alone in your mind. Not physical alone, but mentally alone to really get to see things as clear, as day.

The class theme "Border Crossing, Cultural Negotiations, and the Search for identity" was a broad theme, but I resonated more with the theme "search for identity" because I felt I had been searching for my own identity. These last two years at *CSU Monterey Bay* have been an educational awakening in regards to how I

perceive myself and the word identity. It has given me more confidence in expressing how I view myself, and discussing on topics of assimilation, body image, gender norms, and more. My capstone topic was "On Trope of Identity" because I myself feel like I was I'm still searching to understand what that means to me, and if it really defines me as a person. I know my identity, but by acknowledging that I have it makes feel like that is what people only should think of when think of me. This internal struggle that I have felt has been somewhat conflicted. I don't want it to be confusing I' am very proud of my identity, but because of it I have had my own personal afflictions with adding more labels. I'm still currently learning about myself, and that will never stop, but the only difference now is that I have a higher appreciation for my identity and others.

In my creative process I wanted to expose topics of assimilation and gender norms, which are directly linked to the class theme in search for identity. The idea that one is searching for themselves is somewhat a cliché, but it's also a never ending journey. I believe no one is ever really done learning about themselves or the world around them. This capstone journey has allowed me to not only study about the topic of identity, but to really think about how my identity is a reflection of some of my personal struggles with cultural identity, and gender norms.



My capstone project has been a very emotional process, but I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to have chosen my class theme and have had the time to invest in learning more about myself. I felt like I unfolded several layers of affliction I have had over the years in regards to how I see myself. Overall I have enjoyed Dr. Wang course and I appreciate all his time and investment towards my future in the class.