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## **Towards A New Cholx Consciousness: The Visual Rhetorics Of Cholx Artistas As A Method For Social Justice Movements**

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TOWARDS A NEW CHOLX CONSCIOUSNESS: THE VISUAL RHETORICS OF CHOLX  
ARTISTAS AS A METHOD FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

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Dean of the Graduate School

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## **Dedication**

To my husband Ronnie Dukes and my golden retriever Ody Dukes for their constant love, support, and inspiration. To the Cholos, Cholas, and Cholx throughout my life for always being there. To my parents and grandparents, tíos y tías, primas y primos, my siblings, especially my little brothers, and nieces and nephews – I love you all.

TOWARDS A NEW CHOLX CONSCIOUSNESS: THE VISUAL RHETORICS OF CHOLX  
ARTISTAS AS A METHOD FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

by

ELVIRA CARRIZAL-DUKES, M.F.A.

DISSERTATION

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## **Abstract**

My dissertation study examines the Cholx subculture through the artwork of Chola artistas Paola Rascón and Vicko Alvarez Vega. Growing up, I interacted easily with Cholos and Cholas, but I also knew that in society there was an overall negative idea of Cholos and Cholas. My research advances Cholx consciousness as a method for social movements through the examination of the visual and written rhetorics by Chola artistas. For my dissertation study, I have drawn on theoretical frameworks from Chicana Feminism, Latino Critical Theory, and Social Justice Rhetorics as discussed by Dolores Delgado Bernal, Kendall Leon, Tara Yosso, Daniel Solórzano, Victor Villanueva, Asao Inoue, and Gloria Anzaldúa.

My research is qualitative, combining video interviews and participant observation research. I also examine art and writing produced by my research participants as cultural artifacts that provide evidence of the key themes they explore and present in their artforms. I also reflect on my own autoethnographic experiences as a Xicana scholar and author of comic books, plays, and films. I'm from a small colonia outside of El Paso, Texas, called Chaparral. I grew up in Cholo and Chola communities. I'm first-generation college in my large blended family. My mom emigrated from Chihuahua and my dad grew up in El Paso. As a scholar, I want to examine my own community to better understand my lived experiences.

My research connects with the growing global interest of Cholx identity, arts, and culture. My goal is to put forth Cholx counter-storytelling as a method for Social Justice Rhetorics. I want to make salient the images and stories of the Cholx subculture in order to disrupt the oppressive systems and ideologies that have kept them racially and economically disadvantaged.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction – Becoming Cholx

The term El Pachuco may be traced back to El Paso, Texas, where the pachuquismo (being Pachuco) subculture developed and spread to other Chicano<sup>1</sup> communities in the United States during the Great Depression and World War II (Reyes, 1988). It was during this time that almost two million Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were deported as xenophobia toward people of Mexican descent grew, a contradictory response after being invited as braceros (farmworkers) for cheap labor. El Pachuco has a double-meaning in Caló, the language of the Pachuco (González, 1967). Alvarez (1967) also recognized Caló as the other Spanish language invented by the Mexican-American. Abbreviated as El Chuco, it was the special name given to the city of El Paso, which also meant a fellow from El Paso (Barker, 1950). Pachucos have historically been written about as being the lower class, criminal, and unsuccessful. Braddy (1960) described Pachucos as an anti-social group saying their “uniform (zoot suit) constitutes their dark armor of the street” (p. 259). Historically, the Pachuco may be considered the first-generation Mexican-American as a result of a contentious border wall on the U.S.-Mexico southwestern boundary. It is this highly-militarized margin that makes the technical difference between a Mexican and a Mexican-American.

Linguistically, Mexicans are known for speaking Spanish since at least 1519, after the Spanish colonization of Indigenous Mexico. Conversely, Mexican-Americans are known for speaking English or Spanglish (mixing English and Spanish) since the U.S. colonized northern Mexico after the Mexican–American War ended in 1848. As a result of Anglo-European

<sup>1</sup> Barker (1950) defined Chicano as Mexican. Acuña (1981) makes the distinction that Chicano is used to distinguish Mexicanos living north of the border from those residing in Mexico. Melantzon (1989) defined Chicano as a Mexican living in the U.S. Martinez (1972) defined Chicana as being oppressed by the forces of racism, imperialism, and sexism, which connects her struggle to all non-white women in the United States. She argued that La Chicana’s “oppression by the forces of racism and imperialism is similar to that endured by our men. Oppression by sexism, however, is hers alone” (p. 32). New terms ending in “x” mentioned throughout this study, such as Chicanox, Cholx, Xicanox, represent both male and female, as well as the revolutionary spirit of “X” in connection to Black Power activism.



colonization driven by Manifest Destiny, Mexico lost and the U.S. gained the territories of New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, Texas, and western Colorado. The treaty that ended this conflict included a promise stating that Mexicans in this newly-annexed U.S. territory would be given the same rights as Americans (Griswold del Castillo, 1990). Not even one hundred years later, it became apparent that this Mexican and Mexican-American population was no longer welcomed in the U.S. The children of this Mexican generation torn apart by racist ideology did not take too well to being targeted by police, white people, and the government who did everything in their power to expel their parents and family members, therefore, they rebelled. It is this resistance to discrimination and racism that evolved the Mexican and Mexican-American identity to El Pachuco, which originated in the El Paso-Juárez border region, the second largest metropolis in this transnational space.

Not too long after the criminalization of zoot suit fashion, which resulted in the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, did we start seeing the comedic zoot-suited singing and dancing character in popular Mexican and American media. Most notably in the 1950s, entertainment performers such as Tin Tan and Cab Calloway began to erase the memory of the violence inflicted on a generation of young Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who adopted the Pachuco style as a form of resistance against being racially and economically oppressed. Their fashion-resistance was met with violence, a history in stark contrast to the dancing, smiling zoot-suited Pachuco seen on television and at popular nightclubs in the 1950s and 60s. Shortly after, the next generation of Mexican and Mexican-Americans became known as the Tirilones, an economically disadvantaged community that made up about thirty thousand people in El Paso as well-documented by Anne E. Hughes (Coltharp, 1965). She witnessed extreme poverty, child neglect, and adolescents in gangs. At the same time, this community in need was racially discriminated

against. Tirilones became a new label for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, which meant teenagers that are the rough kind as defined by Coltharp (p. 270).

Knowing the legacy of the Pachuco is critical to understanding the transnational and now global Cholo and Chola subculture that came after the Tirilones. Understanding the Cholo and Chola subculture from a Cholx<sup>2</sup> perspective is what I argue for in this study. Early research on this subject depicts a strong contrast to what will be presented in this project, as this work aims to center the strengths of Cholx. Brady (1960) provided a definition of cholo with a lower-case “c” as a scornful term for one of mixed blood, dark-skinned Mexican (p. 263). The capitalization of Cholo and Chola is a form of reclaiming an ethnic slur. In addition to being targeted for their aesthetic practices, Cholx identity was also criminalized for the culture’s language practices. Reyes (1988) argued that studies on Chicano Caló consistently characterized its speakers as ‘criminals’ or otherwise deviant and anti-social (citing Barker, Braddy, Alvarez, Coltharp, Griffith, Maurer, and Paz, p. 85). Knowing this and being from the Cholx generation that grew up in a Cholx community in a colonia on the El Paso-Juárez border, my research aims to contribute to critical race and social justice discourse through the examination of the visual rhetorics and counterstory<sup>3</sup> methods of Chola artists.

The visual and written work of the Chola artists in this study center the stories of Cholos and Cholas. Their visual art contrasts the negative portrayals that are either demeaning and comedic or criminal and violent. Depictions of the Cholx subculture in mainstream American

<sup>2</sup> Bixler-Márquez (2020) commented that the word Cholo came from California where it was probably introduced by South Americas and Central Americans, eventually displacing labels like Pachuco by new generations and spreading throughout the southwest. For James Diego Vigil, Professor Emeritus of Criminology, Law & Society, and Social Ecology at UCLA, Cholo comes from the Spanish word "solo" (alone, abandoned) as a reflection of their marginal identity (2018). Vigil also argues “All gang members are Cholos, but not all Cholos are gang members” (2019). The “x” in Cholx also represents resistance to racial and economic oppression.

<sup>3</sup> The method of counter-storytelling as defined by Solórzano and Yosso is “telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)” (p. 32).

media many times are not written, produced, directed, and/or performed by real-life Cholas and Cholas or those raised in Cholx communities. Instead, negative depictions of Cholx by non-Cholx shapes the racist and sexist ideology of people outside the culture. While there may be some memorable cinematic experiences that respect Cholas, such as *Mi Vida Loca (1993)*, there are simply too few that depict Cholas as positive symbols of strength, femininity and masculinity, and creativity.

Throughout this study, I insert my own autoethnographic experience as a filmmaker, comic book author, published playwright, and Cholx scholar-activist. I argue that Cholx narratives made by, for, and about Cholx are underrepresented in American mainstream comics, fine art, the film industry, and in academia. Therefore, I'm putting forward Cholx consciousness as a social justice method for countering the negative beliefs of this racially and economically disadvantaged community around the world. I'm able to articulate Cholx consciousness through the data coding process of Cholx interviews digitally recorded for this study. This dissertation project will also discuss the research in the Rhetoric and Composition field that recognizes the need for more representation from People of Color (POC). Cholx consciousness may be used as a tool by artists, educators, and future generations engaging in social justice work.

After completing my doctoral coursework and becoming aware of the limited, but growing number of women, People of Color, and queer academics, I'm inspired to join these ranks and contribute my epistemological perspective as a Xicana<sup>4</sup> social justice advocate to help bring more visibility and value to creative contributions by People of Color who produce and share knowledge. Rhetoric and Composition scholars such as Barbara Biesecker (1992), Cheryl

<sup>4</sup> A term used by the author to identify herself is Xicana with the "x" at the beginning, which refers to the Nahuatl Indigenous language with the "x" sounding as "Ch." Alternately, it's pronounced "Sh" as in Xolo, which may also be pronounced "Ch" as in Cholo.

Glenn (1994), Jacqueline Jones Royster (1996, 2003), and Tara J. Yosso (2006) resist the Eurocentric male-dominated landscape of knowledge that defines how and what we communicate and have helped to revision our field. As a scholar of Color, I'm answering this call to resistance in my disciplinary field and I'm inserting a Xicana perspective that is often left out or misrepresented in dominant narratives. I will do this by drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría (2015) and having a research focus on border arte, which Anzaldúa defines as visual narratives that are community – and academically – based. My field research and data include observing and examining the rhetoric and methods of Chola artists living across the United States from the Southwest to the Midwest working in paintings and comics and including my own creative work in film. Specifically, I examine artists who depict Cholos, Cholas, or Cholx as subjects in their work. I picked the Cholx subculture because of my personal experience with the culture growing up in my hometown, which I discuss more in this project.

Even though Mexicans and Chicanx make up the largest ethnic minority in the United States, self-representation in mainstream mass media continues to be a struggle. Because we are often left out of mainstream industries with very little economic support compared to what a Hollywood feature film budget receives on average for example, the rasquache methods or make do approach (Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, 1991) of Chicanx and Latinx artists especially during the post-Civil Rights era are being recovered. This project demonstrates that combining the underdog aesthetic with Cholx philosophy is a transgressive act in order to resist being racially and economically oppressed and criminalized. By centering Cholx subjects as agents of social change, I'm disrupting the often bigoted and racist images that we often see of Cholx in mainstream medias. As a Xicana writer, my work emphasizes the work of women, Chicanx and frontera Mexicana artistas who demonstrate embodied rhetorics and unique methods in

composing visual narratives of Cholx, a racially and economically disadvantaged people. This project postulates the epistemological knowledge of Cholx artistas as seen through their creative cultural productions. My research is informed by Critical Race, LatCrit and TribalCrit theories, and uses a mix of Counterstory, Rasquachando con la Comunidad, and Social Justice Rhetoric methodologies. Because Cholx culture has now spread throughout the world to places such as Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam, my work also contributes to global rhetoric. Anzaldúa's *autohistorias-teoría* (2007) argued that our stories are no longer confined to liminal spaces. Modern technological medias have made it possible for border arte to travel far beyond borders across oceans and is shaping people and society of diverse cultures such as in Japan where Cholx sensibilities are being studied and practiced.

Although there have been Cholo artists who have captured the Cholo and Chola subject in paintings, such as Gaspar Enriquez and Gabriel Gaytan, my homies from El Chuco (this is a shout-out), my work examines art by Chola artistas. As put forth by Blea (1992), "The study of La Chicana has also taught that culture will sustain itself in spite of oppression; that it plays a role in political resistance" (p. 146). Cholas are Chicanas and it is this perspective that I sought to capture in my research data. In the field of rhetoric and composition, notable feminist scholar Barbara Biesecker criticizes the lack of representation of women. In her research, she takes up the project of rewriting the history of Rhetoric by calling for a gender-sensitive history of Rhetoric (1992). She disrupts our traditionally taught Eurocentric male-driven knowledge by making salient the historical practice of prohibiting women from speaking as reinforced by the white male rhetoricians who advanced themselves as the authorities in our field. Biesecker cautions us to be critically conscious of the few cameo appearances by women in the field as a move to demonstrate diversity. A few success stories are not enough to revolutionize the canon

of Rhetoric. Ultimately, we are being called on to continue to challenge the prevailing agenda that advances certain bodies and certain discourses in order to recover historically silenced voices.

Cheryl Glenn (1994) demonstrates this move by bringing back into existence female rhetors, such as Aspasia of Miletus, a fifth-century BC privileged woman and active member of the most famous intellectual circle in Athens, which included Socrates and Plato. Evidence shows that Aspasia was an influential rhetorician and philosopher during a time when women were not allowed to speak or be seen in public. Although she was a highly respected rhetor even by Plato, she was not allowed to author her own words as Glenn's work shows. Linked to the great statesman Pericles, there is evidence that Aspasia was the true author of Pericles' work. Other rhetoricians such as Socrates and Quintilian, who discuss Aspasia as an influential colleague, have argued that Pericles' work was not his but likely hers. Because so few women participated in the intellectual life of ancient Greece, Aspasia's contribution shows that one had to be an assertive and confident woman to disrupt patriarchal territory. Her privilege and being a free woman gave her agency, but it also serves as a reminder that less fortunate women were excluded and have been forgotten. These archeological findings of women's work challenge the history of rhetoric as we know it. Instead, an exclusionary rhetoric has been revealed re-mapping what we know and calling for our professional consciousness moving forward.

Resisting habitual systems is necessary to avoid complacency and normalization. Landscaping, as a metaphor used by Royster (2003), acknowledges that we interpret what we see through the lens of our own values, preferences, and beliefs. This is how we see the world and it's what we know. We are selective when we choose what to look at and what topics to make

salient. Knowing this, we must critically examine the missing perspectives in our scholarship. In order to do this, Royster (2003) argues that future landscaping will require shifting from where we see the world and from whose perspective and allow that to frame how we conduct our work. An example she gives is how the focus on the recovery of women rhetors led to learning the history of Enheduanna, a high priestess of Sumeria around 2300—2225 B.C.E. in Mesopotamia (p. 152). She was granted authority and a pathway to power as the daughter of the ruler of Sumer and Akkad. Recovered texts show that Enheduanna was a poet and wrote herself into history, documenting her own experience. “These poems demonstrate that Enheduanna was indeed an astute rhetorical decision-maker and a persuasive cultural leader” (p. 153). Praising those more powerful than her and God of Heaven, Enheduanna also praised herself highly in her authored work. She is believed to be the first literary author because the material of her writings proves its ancestral time period. Other scholars discussed by Royster have shown that not all influential women lived in western territories. Therefore, these recovery projects bring visibility to hidden rhetors in an unconsidered way. This inclusivity changes the landscape of our field as previously documented. This is a transformative task that we are being asked to engage in order to develop new ways of knowing and understanding.

Royster and other feminist rhetorical scholars have done important work related to African American women and recent work by Martinez (2020) provides a critical race examination of counterstory. As transforming as this feminist scholarship is, the perspectives of People of Color and other marginalized people such as GLBTQ communities have not been given their full due. Yosso (2006) uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a methodology for challenging whiteness through her alternative concept called community cultural wealth, which is an empowering theory that marginalized and POC may use to transform social structures,

practices and discourses. Traditionally, in the classroom and in the field of Rhetoric and Composition Studies, standard beliefs and dominant Eurocentric ideologies have kept multilingual students and POC as outsiders by not valuing their funds of knowledge, language, and perspectives. In order to resist whiteness, Yosso citing Anzaldúa asserts, “By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform the theorizing space” (p. 69). In other words, POC and whites alike, may begin to dismantle whiteness by exposing it, examining its ideology, and defending POC cultural capital and knowledge.

Yosso values the community cultural wealth of marginalized communities and POC. Instead of seeing POC positionality as a deficit, she positions it as being valuable. While whiteness may treat POC as subordinate, Yosso argues that a CRT lens acknowledges the assets of students of color. Additionally, Yosso reminds us that there are other forms of subordination besides skin color, such as language and culture, which she centers as cultural wealth. By examining the ideology of racism and other forms of oppression, students may “become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves” (2005, p. 75). Yosso argues that adversity in the face of struggle is a valuable skill learned by POC.

Historically, white scholars in the field set the standards and values and specific norms of knowledge. This did this by solely occupying the theorizing space and excluding People of Color and women. Because of this, CRT centers the experiences of People of Color. Yosso asks, “Are there forms of cultural capital that marginalized groups bring to the table that traditional cultural capital theory does not recognize or value?” (p. 77). In answering this question, Yosso provides six tenets that demonstrate community cultural wealth. Aspirational capital refers to resilience in



the face of struggle and oppression (p. 77). Linguistic capital values multilingual speakers, which also includes visual and aural literacy (p. 78). Familial capital emphasizes the importance of healthy relationships and connections to the community (p. 79). Similarly, social capital highlights the strength of networks and access to community resources (p. 79). Navigational capital refers to being able to succeed in institutions designed by and for the dominant culture (p. 80). The final tenet is resistant capital, which is the understanding of inequality and being empowered to resist oppression (p. 80). These tenets designed for marginalized communities and POC are meant to challenge the current status quo of academia and our society. Ultimately, the question Yosso raises is who determines what is considered capital? She gives the example of the Chicana student who learns valuable skills, such as technical vocabulary, two languages, running errands, and translating correspondence, as a result of helping mom who works in the garment industry (p. 76). A CRT lens then, may in fact reveal what whiteness fails to recognize as knowledge and cultural wealth. Yosso argues that this may also be a tool for creating change.

Yosso's six tenets connect to Anzaldúa's nepantlera theory (2015) in that it serves as a guide for POC for navigating systemic racism and a society that is oppressive to POC. While Yosso provides tools for dealing with a Euro-centric dominant culture, Anzaldúa calls for nepantleras to create a new reality arguing "Knowledge is relative, and reality is a composition. You reconstruct yourself and, to a lesser extent, your culture, society, and world by the decisions you make" (p. 43). Nepantlera, as coined by Anzaldúa is used to describe threshold people, those who move within and among multiple worlds and use their movement in the service of transformation (p. 56). Stemming from the word nepantla, it is "the Nahuatl word for an in-between state, nepantla is that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another...when traveling from the present identity into a new identity" (p. 56). As Yosso points

out, the decisions you make may be impacted by your community cultural wealth. Anzaldúa calls for bringing our community cultural wealth to our fixed identities and positions within systems of power urging “The task of remaking ourselves and our cultures is in our own hands; the task of las nepantleras is to point the way” (p. 81). Anzaldúa addresses the experiences of Chicanas and queer communities as living in-between cultures, nations, languages, and identities and it is this reality that makes their experience ideal for teaching us a new way of being and living. It is this work that I’m interested in expanding on.

Throughout this research process, I found myself moving in-between three primary performative roles – doctoral student, community member, and artist. For me, many times the identity or role depends on my location or who I’m with. On campus, I’m the doctoral student. When I’m visiting my childhood home, I’m a community member. When I’m making art, such as filming on location or attending a comic convention as a comic book author, I’m an artist. Because I am Cholx as well, I identify intimately with my subject. My own personal Cholx experience is the common theme in these three primary roles and links my work as an academic, as an artist, and as an activist. Because of this, as a researcher, I was able to connect easily with subjects for this project. Additionally, as a nepantlera, my academic work helps to inform my creative work, which is an artistic tool or weapon for social justice activism. In all three roles my purpose as a nepantlera stays the same, which is to advocate for positive Cholx representation, to help fill a void in research about Cholx communities, and to produce Cholx productions in academia and the arts. Nepantleras, then, according to Anzaldúa “model the transitions our cultures will go through, carry visions for our cultures, preparing them for solutions to conflicts and the healing of wounds” (p. 83). In my own scholarly work, I hope to contribute ideas for a more inclusive society. These ideas are then illustrated in my creative works, such as comics,

plays, and short films, providing the visions of ethical and moral behavior we hope to mimic. My academic and creative work serve as social justice advocacy tools that I use in my role as an activist. And the cycle keeps repeating. At any given moment, I'm in nepantla (in-between) status. The purpose is the same in any of these roles, which is to help lift the Cholx community. Therefore, my nepantlera positionality is at the heart of this Cholx counterstory research project – by, with, and for Cholx. The Cholx counterstory is especially needed in academia, art, and in the community to insert our voices, our philosophy, and our ideas. This illustration titled *Nepantlera Positionality* was illustrated by my creative partner Ronnie Dukes. I used this image to illustrate my nepantlera positionality for an academic presentation on a panel at a Conference on College Composition and Communication in Pittsburgh, PA, in 2019.

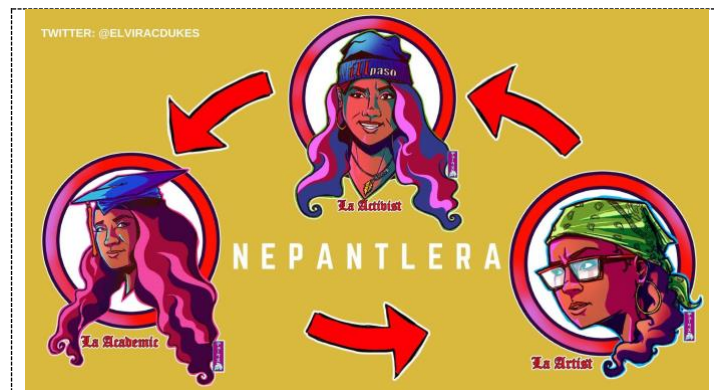


Illustration 1.1: Nepantlera Positionality

## POSITIONALITY

I was born in El Paso, Texas, a.k.a. El Chuco known for the original Pachuco as discussed in the previous section. I was raised in a colonia neighboring El Paso called Chaparral, New Mexico. I'm a filmmaker, comic book author, playwright, educator, social justice-advocate, and digital scholar. Digital scholarship is defined by Rumsey (2011) as the use of digital evidence, methods of inquiry, research, publication and preservation to achieve scholarly and research goals. My data research methods are mostly based on visual ethnography as discussed

by O'Reilly (2009) who argues that there has been a hegemonic preference for text in all ethnographic research rather than on images (p. 221). I'm a digital scholar because my research analysis includes original video and audio recordings of in-person interviews that I collected, as well as still photos and the writing of Chola artists and digital testimonios from Cholx in their barrios (neighborhoods).

My mom was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, and my dad was born in El Paso, Texas. I'm a first-generation college graduate. This research project was also an opportunity for me to learn from my experience growing up in Chaparral, New Mexico. I come from a Cholx community. My experience was positive. Therefore, because Cholx are outcast or seen as a threat or inferior by most mainstream cultures I was inspired to make Cholx my subject. In practicing Cholx activism, I'm becoming part of a growing Cholx discourse community. Having Cholx consciousness as a scholar means centering Cholx lives, art, and testimonios in the research process. I'm foregrounding the lives of Cholx.

I'm aligning myself with Chicana education scholars who use Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) to theorize about our own bodies. The Cholx testimonios throughout this project are used to construct a Cholx philosophy to raise consciousness that will allow young Cholx to resist demeaning rhetoric that exists to relegate them to a low-class subaltern status. The Cholx who participated in this multi-sited and mobile ethnographics research project represent a transnational perspective with locations in Mexico and in the U.S. from the Southwest to the Midwest. Their stories illustrate the multiple Cholx identities from Chicagoan to Chihuahuensa, to Chuco, and Chicana, female, male, gender-neutral. My research questions

<sup>5</sup> Multi-sited and mobile ethnography is defined by O'Reilly (2009) "in the context of increased global interconnectivity, and mobility of people, objects and ideas," as ethnographers taking their methodology to multiple and mobile places and spaces (p. 144).

ask how do Cholx artists and arts create a unified new consciousness that is global and connects Cholx communities around the world. Additionally, I ask how do Cholx artists serve as models for being unruly and disruptive in order to create a new reality that is inclusive, safe, and centered on their subculture.

As a scholar researching and writing about Cholx, I'm making a contribution to my disciplinary field by helping to re-envision how we write and talk about people who are racially and economically disadvantaged. I'm an activist artista, educator, and scholar who researches and produces work about Chicax resistance. For this project, I'm inserting the Cholx identity into discourse conversations in my disciplinary field regarding race, ethnicity, sex, gender, and the arts. My research approach is qualitative, with data from participant observations, cultural artifacts, and my research participants' own writing. I also reflect on my own autoethnographic experiences working in the arts. My work examines Cholx identity in the arts and culture in general, and how these images represent a people who are often targets of violence and oppression from dominant cultures, especially in American media. Instead, my work will make salient the Cholx philosophy, which stems from resisting oppression and reimagining new ways of living. Therefore, while I reveal Cholx vulnerabilities, I mostly focus on Cholx strengths.

As a Chicana scholar and educator, I represent a small minority working in academia and may sometimes feel like an outsider working in mainstream institutions. In addition, as a Cholx scholar I disrupt hegemonic categories of analysis by using decolonizing methodologies (Calderón et al., 2012). I do this by employing insider ethnography<sup>6</sup> (O'Reilly, p.109) to provide an insider perspective of Chola culture. I acknowledge the need to reflect upon my positionality

<sup>6</sup> As discussed by O'Reilly (2009), criticisms of and problems with insider ethnography may include accusations of over-involvement and bias. However, advantages of being an insider is the ethnographer being a key informant (p. 109).

as I have conducted this research, following Zavella's (1993) advice that researchers must "self-consciously reflect upon their status within the field site, how they are situated within social and power relations, and place their own work within the changing tides of academic discourse" (p. 57). In thinking reflexively<sup>7</sup> about early scholarship that villainized Pachucos, I'm consciously centering the lives of the subaltern as sources of knowledge and philosophy. I went to Cholx barrios for my research, I invited Cholx to choose how they wanted to be interviewed, single or in a group, beer or no beer. The method of the ethnographic interview and conversation is also discussed by O'Reilly as "an in-depth conversation that takes place within the context of reciprocal relationships, established over time, based on familiarity and trust" (p. 125). I met them on their terms and created a space for in-depth conversation. With this project, I will revisit Anzaldúa's (1999) mestiza consciousness work and extend it to Cholx consciousness. I will discuss how Cholx activist artistas have taken up Chicana Feminism in their art and writing and what it means to use autohistoria-teoría (border visual narratives) in activist art. By doing this, I'm privileging the life experiences and knowledge of Cholx. Calderón et al. citing Delgado Bernal (1998) puts forth CFE in education as a "means to resist epistemological racism" (Calderón et al., p. 515). My work on Cholx consciousness provides tenets for resisting epistemological racism, which is the foundation of Chicana Feminist Epistemology.

Additionally, Cholxing is a new term I'm putting forth with this project, which is a term I will use to refer to a Cholx demonstrating Cholx activism, which can be presented in many different visual and written rhetorics. I'm Cholxing by infusing my Cholx insider experience into my research and writing. Cholxing is most obvious when we see Cholx pose their philosophy

<sup>7</sup> "Reflexivity means thinking reflexively about who has conducted and written ethnographic research, how, and under what conditions, and what impact these might have on the value of the ethnography produced" (O'Reilly, p. 187).

and their artistic acts proudly as demonstrations of love, culture, respect, and resistance. Therefore, I argue that Cholxing as a form of writing or visual may be used as a tool for social justice movements and may assist scholars, artists, and Cholx to challenge oppressive dominant ideologies. Through this work, Cholx consciousness will be valued as a source of knowledge and pride.

During the research process I came across the Chola Dynasty first through library research and then through a social media post of my high school peer, Dulcinea Lara, who is now a Professor with a doctorate degree in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The Chola Dynasty was a Tamil dynasty of southern India, one of the longest-ruling dynasties in the world's history, since the 300s BCE (Chola Dynasty, 2020). The Chola kings were master builders of strong economic centers. The Chola school of art influenced the architecture and art of Southeast Asia. The Cholas' system of government was monarchical with a robust military. They used swords and other steel weapons for war. Chola admirals commanded much respect and prestige. Farmers occupied one of the highest positions in Chola society. Land revenue and trade tax were the main source of income and cotton textiles were one of the main exports. This is a picture of one of the Chola Dynasty sculptures at The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston.



Figure 1.1: India's Chola Dynasty (c. 860-1279) at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Photo courtesy of Dulcinea Lara (2019).

As a Cholx, I'm immediately drawn to the sculptures of powerful looking women with curves and hands making gestures and posing looking strong and dominant. I'm drawing a connection to Cholx today. Cholx are creative and imaginative. They influence art movements, fashion, and make-up, but on a deeper level they carry on a Cholx philosophy, which was revealed during the thematic analysis process of all the Cholx interviews. Cholx believe in defending their neighborhoods, community, and family similar to the Cholx Dynasty. Separation of families goes against Cholx beliefs and acts. Cholx believe in having cultural pride and expressing that pride through art such as lowriders, bikes, clothing, murals, tattoos, make-up, and jewelry. The Cholx Dynasty also had a major influence on art and architecture. And ultimately, Cholx want and give respect. The Chola military leaders also fought for respect. As previously discussed, the origin of the word Cholo was used to describe Mexican immigrants in the U.S. working as farm workers. In contrast, the Chola Dynasty highly valued the farmers.



I wasn't sure what to do with this information when I ran across it. Do I use it as a metaphor? Is there a greater connection that goes beyond the coincidence of a name? In Aztec mythology, there is a similar connection with Xolotl (pronounced "Sho-lo-till"), which sounds like Cholo. Xolotl was an Aztec god of lightning and death, known as a shape-shifting trickster, and often associated with dogs. It is a mostly hairless dog similar to the Chihuahua dog. Xolotl is depicted in Aztec art as a sinister god of monstrosities who wears the spirally-twisted wind jewel and the ear ornaments of Quetzalcoatl. His job was to protect the sun from the dangers of the underworld. In my research, I learned about these ancient associations involving the word Cholo referred to people who concerned themselves with protection, security, and the arts. I find this especially interesting as this project centers Cholx with similar cultural values and philosophy.

In discussing my own positionality (Kaplan-Weinger & Ullman, 2015, p. 46), I acknowledge my privilege as a college-educated assistant professor at UTEP, a major university in my own city along the U.S. and Mexico border. I'm also Ivy-league educated having earned a master of fine arts in film from Columbia University in the City of New York and a bachelor's degree from a Big Ten university in the Midwest – The University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. In contrast, I graduated from an economically poor and dilapidated Gadsden High School, which is across the Rio Grande on Gadsden Purchase territory in Anthony, New Mexico. During my years growing up in Chaparral, there was no high school or junior high. Students from my Chaparral community in the 90s rode the school bus crossing the Franklin Mountains every day to and from school an hour of driving each way. Students from other surrounding colonias near Gadsden territory also went to my school, including Anthony, Chamberino, Berino, La Mesa, La Union, Mesquite, and San Miguel. This once-Mexican land was acquired by the United States in 1853 known as the Gadsden Purchase, over 45,000 square miles from New Mexico to Arizona

and a territory rich with copper and Mexican and Indian inhabitants (Estrada et al., 1981, p. 105). “To make matters worse, the social and economic displacement of Mexicans and their reduction to the status of a colonized group proceeded rapidly, in clear violation of the civil and property rights guaranteed both by treaty and protocol” (Estrada et al., p. 105). The Gadsden territory today is mostly farmland, people are racially and economically disadvantaged, there are high rates of high school dropouts, teenage pregnancies, and drug use. In May of 2000, the Gadsden School District was considered one of the lowest achieving school districts in the state of New Mexico according to the New Mexico State University College of Education Research and Outreach office. When I was a student at Gadsden High School, I did not consider going to college until my guidance counselor Maria Dominguez called me into her office one day and encouraged me to apply to college. She guided me throughout the entire process.

My first semester as an undergraduate I struggled as I experienced an entirely new environment living in the Midwest winters compared to living in the Sun City, my desert hometown. For the first time in my life as a seventeen-year-old, I also experienced being a racial and ethnic minority. I quickly learned the politics and history of my existence. I enrolled in Chicana/o studies courses and was mentored by my Chicana/o professors. They encouraged me to seek higher education and in fact, they encouraged me to seek a doctorate degree during my first year in college. Upon earning my bachelor’s degree, I followed their advice and was accepted to Columbia University in the City of New York to study film in the School of the Arts. I earned my Master of Fine Arts degree. I was the only person of Mexican heritage in my cohort of about seventy students with a total of no more than ten Latinx students. Through my doctoral training, I’ve learned to examine where knowledge comes from and how one is a producer of knowledge, therefore the knowledge I advance in this project comes directly from Cholx. I

invited Cholx to be a major part of my research process as collaborators in a collective theorizing process to define a Cholx philosophy. As a Cholx scholar, I examine Cholx artistas to theorize about Cholx as agents of social change. The El Paso Museum of Art in El Paso, Texas, hosted the *Cholo at the Border: Works of Paola Rascón* exhibition in 2018. This exhibit greatly influenced my decision to focus on the Cholo, Chola, and Cholx subculture.



Figure 2.1: *Cholo at the Border: Works of Paola Rascón* at El Paso Museum of Art (2018).

## CHOLAS AND CHOLOS

Through my observations of Cholx in various cities, I saw Cholos and Cholas embracing their identity, culture, and arts unapologetically. I observed Cholos and Cholas who will not allow themselves to be taken advantage of, like their farmworker ancestors, or beaten to the ground, like their Zoot Suit predecessors. I also observed how they display and illustrate their pride. Through various art forms, such as lowriders, graffiti, murals, tattoos, fashion, makeup, and language, they say it loud and proud. Cholx identity, arts, and culture shines so bright, it is more global than ever. It is found in racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world. The Chicana and frontera Mexicana artists that I examine transgress the

normative practices in their artistic fields by centering the lives of Cholos and Cholas. Despite the negativity toward Cholos and Cholas in American mainstream media, these Cholx artists are conscious of the impact that the Cholo and Chola aesthetic and philosophy has had on racially and economically disadvantaged communities. Therefore, they are willing to be unruly and disruptive in order to put forward a new vision that is inclusive and centered on the subaltern.

The export of American media informs our global community. It travels beyond U.S. borders and creates imagined worlds. In fact, a Chicano subculture thriving in Tokyo, Japan, has been present for over a century. Japanese youth calling themselves “Los Japoneros” wear the fashion often depicted by Cholos and Cholas in movies, especially Chicano Cinema, and the lowrider car culture has also been embraced. Appadurai (1990) in “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” discusses the cultural transactions that occur in our global interactive system. These intercultural exchanges, especially amongst racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world, mixed with a broader and more inclusive definition of what it means to be Chicax or Cholx, is creating a new reality that Anzaldúa’s work calls for. Leaders in both the Latin American art and Chicax worlds have already begun to re-envision what it means to be Chicax and Cholx. For Cheech Marin (2018), who owns the largest collection of Chicax art, being Chicano is any person, community, and aesthetic marginalized by dominant society. I will build on these ideas as I examine the rhetoric and composition methods of two artists. After Paola Rascón painted this first portrait of a Cholo she knew she had to paint more. In this first Cholo portrait of hers, we see her experimentation with angel wings and writings mixed with oil painted and darkly-lit portraits of brown and tattooed young men in a white tank top with a real and unemotional expression.



Figure 3.1: Original painting by Paola Rascón.

## CHOLX IN HOLLYWOOD

Paola commented that her work has helped to spread knowledge of Cholos. The Cholos said they were happy with how Paola painted them just as they are and not just as violent criminals like what they see in Hollywood films. However, they do recognize that there are all kinds of Cholos. Some are more violent, but many they say are docile. It's the violent images that get advanced the most in American mainstream media. One example of a negative image of Cholx can be seen in the animated television series *American Dad* Season: 6, Episode: 14 called *School Lies*, the teenage son Steve joins a girl gang called the Chicas Freakas. The episode first aired in 2011. The Chicas Freakas are categorized as villains. In the episode, Steve is ditching school and is hanging out at the arcade. We first see the Chicas Freakas inside the arcade jumping a girl into the gang by beating her. The leader of the gang has brown skin, black hair, a red bandana, and an upside-down cross tattoo on her neck. The other girls also sport various Chola fashion with big hoops, flannel shirts, sunglasses even though they're indoors, suspenders, sneakers, bandanas and baseball caps. The leader sees Steve demonstrating shooting skills on an

arcade game and compliments him by saying “You know how to handle a gun.” She then grabs Steve’s crotch saying, “You’re more girl than boy,” so she invites him to join their girl gang. Steve says yes because he says he has nothing else to do because everyone’s at school. They initiate him by beating him to the ground and then have fake eyebrows tattooed on his forehead. This is a screenshot of the episode when his father Stan later says to him “Your face is freaking me out. You look like that cashier at CVS.” We see Steve now wears a red bandana and a tattoo on his bare stomach that reads *Loca*. His father Stan is a white man who works for the C.I.A. This dialogue signifies Stan’s fear of Cholas and he makes the connection to them as working class people.



Figure 4.1: American Dad Season: 6, Episode: 14 *School Lies*, 2011.

Cholos and Cholas are often depicted as being loco or loca, which in Spanish means crazy. In a Key & Peele episode from Season 4, Episode 11 from 2014 called *Loco Gangsters*, Key’s Cholo character is initiating another Cholo named Carlito into the gang by placing a blue bandana on his forehead. Peele’s Cholo character Eduardo enters and it’s clear he’s jealous that this Cholo is being initiated. Eduardo asks in hood vernacular “Why? Who he? What he did?” Key’s character responds “He’s crazy man. We were thinking that the gang needs a crazy guy.” To demonstrate how crazy he is, Carlito smashes a beer bottle onto his head, shattering it into

pieces. Eduardo then begins to demonstrate why he's crazier starting with silly antics like putting a book in his mouth and pretending to be a duck. The Cholos disapprove saying that it's not crazy. Eventually, Eduardo takes a gun and shoots Carlito, but Carlito catches the bullet between his teeth. Eduardo picks up the gun and shoots again, and the episode ends. This is a screenshot that shows Eduardo, the new recruit, standing in the middle of the Cholos being crazy by clenching his teeth and furrowing his brow. Key points at him and says "That's muy loco," while a Cholo behind him wearing a fedora looks on.



Figure 5.1: Key & Peele Season 4, Episode 11, *Loco Gangsters*, Comedy Central 2014.

Another comedic depiction of Cholos where we are meant to laugh at the Cholos, not with them, is in the film *Next Friday* (2000), directed by a white man Steve Carr and written by a Black man, Ice Cube. In this scene we are introduced to three Cholos called Joker, Lil Joker, and Baby Joker. We see them from the street coming out of their house through the garage where we see two lowriders. Joker is the shortest one and Baby Joker is the tallest and biggest. Joker wears a beanie so low it covers his eyes. Joker carries a laundry basket as he walks in front of the guys and says "I told you, Ay. Whites in the hot. Colors in the cold, ese. You're gonna' ruin my Dickies." He gets distracted when he sees his gorgeous Latina sister talking to Ice Cube's character on the sidewalk. Joker sends his vicious dog Chico out to attack him. The scene ends

with Ice Cube and another character standing on top of a car to avoid getting bit by the dog. This is an image of Joker, Lil Joker, and Baby Joker.



Figure 6.1: Scene from *Next Friday* (2000) depicting Cholos.

The vilification of immigrants and People of Color in the media fosters negative attitudes toward Cholos and Cholas. When we are not laughing at them, we fear them. *Sin Nombre* (2009) is a notable dramatic film that may fuel the rhetoric of Mexicans, Mexican immigrants, a.k.a. Cholos and Cholas, as being rapists and criminals as asserted by Donald Trump in 2015. The film is directed by a mixed white man Cary Joji Fukunaga. Cary's father was Japanese-American, his maternal grandfather was of Swedish descent, and his maternal grandmother's ancestry is English and German. Cary received several award nominations and some wins for this film. *Sin Nombre* in Spanish means without a name. The film features actual members of the Mara Salvatrucha gang who are known for tattoos on their faces that read MS-13. Ultimately, the story is about a Honduran young girl who gets help from one of the Mexican gangsters who is trying to leave the gang in a journey across the U.S. border. The movie was filmed in Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico. The production illustrates the poverty and lack of resources for racially and economically disadvantaged communities in Latin America. Young people in the film resort to joining this violent criminal gang for protection and support. MS-13 represents the violent Cholo



gangster. It's important to note that the MS-13 gang originated in Los Angeles, California, in the 1970s and 1980s. Their initial purpose was to protect Salvadoran immigrants from other gangs in the Los Angeles area. The gang has grown into an international criminal organization. As I learned from the Cholos and Cholas I interviewed, they learned to be Cholos from the Cholos in Los Angeles. The MS-13 gang is an American export. In this initiation scene from the film, we meet Lil Mago, the leader of the gang in this barrio. He stands in front of a 12-year-old boy who wears a white tank top under a white-collar button-down shirt that is open. There are no visible tattoos on his body. He looks pure and innocent as he's about to get beaten up by the gang for thirteen long seconds. Lil Mago has the MS-13 tattoo on his face signifying his gang affiliation, a bare chest full of tattoos such as skulls, and he wears a Catholic rosary around his neck. Behind him are other tattooed, shirtless gang members also wearing rosaries. There is also a young woman holding a yellow umbrella on this bright sunny day. After the beating, the young boy manages to smile through pain, blood, and tears, so his name becomes Smiley. Although this may be a truthful depiction of this violent gang, the problem is that this criminal and violent image is what dominates discourse about Cholos and Cholas and may instill fear and xenophobia toward Cholx communities.



Figure 7.1: Still images from *Sin Nombre* (2009) depicting a gang initiation.

## DECOLONIZING STEREOTYPES

The devaluation of Cholx in general is connected to racist and demeaning portrayals of Cholx in Hollywood and mainstream media. The oppression of POC and Cholx in Hollywood films shapes the views of an already racist and bigoted dominant ideology embedded in systems that impact our daily lives. As a result, this Cholx research project disrupts racist and bigoted narratives and beliefs of Cholx people. As an assistant professor teaching Chicana/o Cinema, I discuss the depiction of Cholx in Hollywood films, which is in contrast to the Cholx Artists interviews and Cholx testimonios I gathered during my research process. I look at Hollywood's ignorant rhetoric and demeaning portrayal of Cholos and Cholas as one-note characters in film. In particular, I draw on Aldama's (2002) discussion of penalizing Chicano/a bodies as "normalization narratives used by conquistador/colonizer to justify the anal, oral, and vaginal penetrating of the New World subject-as-perversely-genitalized-object" (p. 83).

The career of Latina actress Lupe Ontiveros includes playing a maid in at least 150 films or plays. She narrated a documentary, *Maid in America* in 2005. Lupe was born in El Paso,

Texas. Because there is a lack of roles for Latinas and Latinos in Hollywood, Latinx actors such as Noel and Lupe are confronted with playing a stereotype or turn down a role and risk not getting paid or even called back for more work. Although Noel often plays gangsters, his IMDB.com profile page mentions that he speaks at schools to tell children not to get involved with gangs. Lupe said this about her career on her IMDB.com profile page “I've made chicken salad out of chicken manure. I'm proud to represent those hands that labor in this country, I've given every maid I've portrayed soul and heart.”

The actor Noel Gugliemi often portrays a Cholo in Hollywood films. Pronounced "Gool-ye-el-mee," Noel was raised in Los Angeles. He was born in 1970. Noel landed a Taco Bell commercial at the age of 15. He is of Italian and Mexican descent. He has been cast in 150 large and small-screen credits over a 25-year career. His net worth is \$750 thousand dollars. Noel plays cholo, gangster, and criminal characters. His trademark is a bald head. He appears in major Hollywood films such as Training Day in 2001. Denzel Washington won an Academy Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role for Training Day. Noel appears in a scene with the leader of a crew. The leader points a shotgun in the bloody face of a cop who is lying in the bathtub. About fourteen years later, Noel appears in Fast & Furious 7 in 2015. He plays a gangster named Hector with a bald head. Noel has played a character named Hector eight times. Other Latina actors in Hollywood have been similarly type-cast. To illustrate an example of the demeaning roles that Noel has played while representing a Cholo in Hollywood is in the film Bruce Almighty (2003). In this film, Hollywood actor Jim Carrey plays a character who inherits God's powers. In one scene, he bumps into a gang of Cholos hanging around in an alley apparently doing nothing. The Cholos immediately want to fight him. Instead, Carrey uses his powers to make a monkey suddenly appear inside the body of Noel Gugliemi, one of the Cholos. We see

his face in pain as the monkey squeezes its way out of his buttocks. In this way, Cholos are mocked and depicted as loiterers, but also anally-raped before our eyes in a major Hollywood motion production considered a comedy.



Figure 8.1: Image from *Bruce Almighty* (2003). Jim Carrey's character inherits God's powers. He makes a monkey squeeze its way out of a Cholo's buttocks.

## THE PROBLEM

Growing up in Chaparral, New Mexico, I can attest that not all Cholos are in gangs. Being considered a gang member because you are Cholo is a misconception. The portrayal of Cholos in popular culture are seen as mostly violent and criminal. For some like me, the Cholo "Homies" toys that were available for quarters from vending machines at grocery stores in the hood, were reflections of community, friends, and family. The Cholo-looking characters were created by David Gonzalez and based on a comic strip that he created. According to a *Mitú* article from 2018, "Homies became so popular the Los Angeles Police Department complained that the toys were promoting 'gang life'." One of my favorite vending machine scores is the Homies Bride and Groom, similar to a cake topper. There is no gang affiliation represented in that image, just your typical white wedding gown and black tuxedo on two brown characters wearing dark shades. Then again, we see Cholos represented as violent criminals in the popular video game *Grand Theft Auto*. Furthermore, real-life Homies or people who practice the

aesthetics of Cholos, Cholas, and Cholx are seen around the world in Vietnam, Japan, and Thailand.

## **THE SOLUTION**

People who experience feeling like an outcast in dominant society and an outsider in your own culture can relate to the Cholx experience and even mimic (Bhabha, 1984) Cholx culture. Japanese Cholas connect to the “style of resistance...of women empowering themselves... finding liberation in freedom in other cultures” said Dr. Denise Sandoval, Professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies at CSU Northridge. Cholx consciousness may liberate others by teaching the history of oppression and resistance, as well as the culture’s resilient methods for keeping the subculture alive, a subculture based on pride, love, family, respect, and visual rhetoric. This growing collective consciousness is what Delgado Bernal may describe as working within a space of *convivencia* (coexistence) meaning “working together with communities in a collective struggle for liberation” (2020, p. 160).

This image is of young Japanese people with bandanas, eyeliner, big earrings, Old English text on their hat and shirt, the Spanish words *Los Japoneros* and *Ese*, black sunglasses, and the black jelly bracelets. At first glance, one sees Cholos and Cholas, but then you realize they are Japanese youth as Cholos and Cholas. We see that Cholx identity has found its way across the ocean. With these strong aesthetics are a certain attitude and level of respect that is inherent in the image. A goal of this project, then, is to make salient the Cholx philosophy that also defines the aesthetics. By examining the visual art and rhetoric of Paola Rascón and Vicko Alvarez, we may learn how Cholx consciousness is transferred along with the Cholx aesthetics.

Their work in this research project serve as a model for creating a new reality for Cholx and advancing Cholx consciousness.



Figure 9.1: Image from ikimasho! x dazed: *Chicano in Japan* article (Jan. 2017).

## FEATURED CHOLA ARTISTAS

My dissertation will address these critical questions through qualitative research based on interviews with two professional Chola artistas in their creative environments, video interviews with some of the subjects featured in their work or who participated in productions of their work and Cholx in their neighborhoods. They are Vicko Alvarez Vega and Paola Rascón. In addition, I interviewed Jadira Gurulé, the curator of the 2019 *Qué Chola* exhibit at The National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to gain her insider perspective on the content and methods of exhibiting Cholx exhibits at a mainstream institution and the museum's current efforts to make these spaces more inclusive and representative of communities locally and around the world.

Both Vicko and Paola are professional working artists who also engage in community-building activism. Vicko Alvarez Vega is a Chicana artist working in comics and art as activism.

She is the creator and illustrator of the **ScholaR** Comics web and zine series. Vicko's work represents tough Latinas who belong to a Mexican-American urban subculture dealing with anger issues, being undocumented, and being mixed race. Paola Rascón is a Mexican artist working in the city of Chihuahua, the state capital of the Mexican state of Chihuahua, which is about 4.5 hours south of El Paso, Texas. Paola is working on a collection featuring Cholas. I had the opportunity to interview some of the Cholos she painted. Paola uses oils and acrylics on life size canvases. Throughout this research project I also weave my autoethnographic experience as a Chicana, a filmmaker, a comic book author, and growing up in a racially and economically disadvantaged Mexican community to connect to the cultural, political, and social issues I examine. In this image you can see me in a light blue jacket and brown skin standing in a lineup of black and white life-size cutouts of Cholos and Cholas standing against a wall. This interactive art piece by Gaspar Enriquez was featured at the *Qué Chola* exhibit in Albuquerque. As one may see, I fit into the landscape that my research is examining.



Figure 10.1: Image from *Qué Chola* exhibit at The National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, NM. (March 2019)

## THE STUDY

The methods that are common amongst the two artists and myself that I will discuss in this research project are rasquachismo (Ybarra-Frausto, 1965) and counter-storytelling (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Rasquachismo is a term advanced by Chicano scholar Dr. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (1965) to describe a “resilience and resourcefulness [that] spring from making do with what’s at hand (*hacer render las cosas*)” (p. 5). An example of rasquachismo from my childhood was my dad using an abandoned bathtub for a flowerbed in the front yard, in other words saving every scrap and using every resource available to “make do.” Ybarra-Frausto describes rasquachismo as a Chicano sensibility, explaining that it is “an understanding of a particular aesthetic code in any particular community and it comes out of the experience of living in that community.” The inventiveness of rasquachismo stems mostly from having a lack of financial resources that pushes communities to invent new ways of being and to innovate new uses for tools and technologies. Based on Ybarra-Frausto’s work and with his blessing having asked him in person at a recent Latino Arts Now! conference in Houston, I will introduce and put forth what I call rasquachando, which I define as making do with your community. The artists I’m examining in my research demonstrate rasquachando con sus comunidades (making do with their communities). Vicko’s nerdy chola comic book character is based on her own experience growing up in Texas and her rough experiences with her mom and resisting gender conforming roles. She uses her experience to empower young people in working class communities in Chicago’s tough neighborhoods. Paola went to her local church in Chihuahua and started asking the Cholos in the congregation if they would pose for her. She’s shared how impressed the Cholos were when they attended the art opening featuring their portraits in oil in Chihuahua city.



These artists working with low budgets are making do with their communities and as a result their stories feel authentic and relatable to a Chicana reader such as myself.

The counterstories of Cholx in oil paintings, nerdy rebellious women in comic books, and Xicanas in film may be used to analyze and question deep-rooted narratives and characterizations of people from the border and margins of society, specifically those from Mexico and Latin America. Cholas/os are often seen as negative stereotypes in mainstream media. The artists I'm examining demonstrate a different perspective in their work that counters the stories being told in mainstream American media. My goal with this research project is to highlight the rhetoric and composition methods of Mex-Chicanx artists that make them stand out in white male-dominated industries and institutions that are especially oppressive to women of Color. As discussed by Cruz (2019) in her artist statement *Painting as a Self-Care Ritual* argues that "Women of color are universally marginalized or rejected in all types of settings including mainstream media. This lack of visual representation takes a toll on young brown girls and our development" (p. 12). While some work that sheds a positive light on Cholas has been done, Mendoza-Denton (2008), argues that much focus on them has been in regard to Chicana gang culture citing Vigil and Moore who argued "Because of this residential segregation, lack of city investment in barrio infrastructure, continuing immigration and growing population density, there were structural barriers to employment opportunity that created general scarcity and overcrowding" (p. 86). Such living conditions as a result of racism led to the early development of Chicanx gangs, however, focus of the Cholx subculture is often on the violence and criminalization to justify them being discriminated against and targets of racist policing.

Therefore, this project aims to answer the following research questions: 1) How is Cholx art creating a new Cholx Consciousness that is global and connects racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world?; 2) How do Chicana and frontera Mexicana artists transgress the normative practices in their artistic fields?; and 3) How can these artists serve as models for being unruly and disruptive in order to create a new reality that is inclusive and centered on the subaltern?

#### **A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY – CHOLO, CHOLA, CHOLX**

Through the process of this project, I became a Cholx Scholar. In a way, I tapped into my upbringing and because of what I've learned in my doctoral program I'm now able to make some sense of my personal experience growing up in a mostly Mexican barrio on the U.S. Mexico Border surrounded by a majority of Spanish-speaking low-income gente. I've come into being a Chicana scholar who draws from a Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE), in which Anzaldúa (Calderón et al. at citing Anzaldúa, 1987) asserts is an anti-oppressive social justice approach to doing decolonization work as researchers and scholars. In addition to the roles we play in academia, we are also members of Latinx communities. The nepantlera teoría (Anzaldúa, 2015) calls on us to reconstruct our culture, society, and world to lift our communities. CFE scholars in Educational Research draw on their epistemological knowledge to disrupt hegemonic systems and ideologies. I, too, aim to do that with this project through the examination of the visual rhetorics of two Cholx Artistas geographically separate and working in different, but similar artistic modes. I propose a Cholx consciousness that will challenge oppressive and dominant belief systems that demean Cholx and their communities. This is meant to be an extension of Anzaldúa's (1999) mestiza consciousness, a consciousness of the Borderlands. Cholx consciousness is a consciousness of

Cholx located anywhere in the world. There is an aesthetic to being Cholo or Chola, most notably the baggy khaki Dickies, white tank tops, flannel shirts, and for the girls, heavy black eyeliner. In fact, Cholx remix (Banks, 2011) farmworker aesthetics and at the same time exploit American capitalism by wearing baggy clothes with excess amounts of material. They pull their white socks up past their calves as in “pulling one’s self up by the bootstraps” (Villanueva, 1993, p. 121).

The new term Cholx is meant to be gender-neutral. The "x" replaces the gendered endings/elements a and o. The “x” in Cholx may also represent the revolutionary spirit that challenges the establishment that dictates mainstream norms and practices. But not all Cholos and Cholas identify as Cholx, so when gender-neutral is an asserted identity I use Cholx. Many times I also use Cholx when talking about everyone in the Cholo and Chola diaspora. I use Chola when only talking about the women. I use Cholo when only talking about the men. Cholo and Chola is also Chicana/o/x and Mexican and Mexican-American. Cholx are born in the U.S., they are also immigrants or living in Mesoamerica, and now in Asia, Vietnam, Thailand, and beyond, and multigenerational.

## **NEW CONSCIOUSNESS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS**

In this section I will discuss how a new Cholx consciousness may incite a social movement that unites racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world. Anzaldúa’s coyolxauhqui framework (2015) teaches us that Border artists are essential in doing social justice work through “transposing the former self into a new one—the death of the old self and the old ways, breaking down former notions of who you are” (p. 62). By merging our past with our present, Anzaldúa argues we create new inclusive identities that may lead to a broader social justice movement. The role of Border artists, then, is to have knowledge of the traditions

and cultures of their community in order to document our own experiences. The merging of all the identities in a given space is what Anzaldúa calls experiencing *Nepantla*, where one is aware of different perspectives and experiences. Similarly, *Cholx* artistas may bring people together because they understand both sides of the culture – Mexican and American. They are the intellectuals that will be able to preserve the history of the Cholo and Chola and its evolving culture and identity. In African culture, griots were the traveling poets, storytellers, and musicians who were the living oral history of their country (Banks, 2010). Banks is interested in the rhetorical possibilities that emerge from the culture that produced the storyteller and preacher as studied griotic figures. Specifically, he discusses the role of the DJ subculture as having a solid foundation built around oral and folklore traditions which are not obvious. Banks offers that DJs demonstrate: the technological skills and abilities to produce in multiple modalities; the ability to employ those skills for the purposes of building community and/or serving communities with which he or she is aligned; awareness of the layered ethical commitments and questions involved in serving any community; and the ability to use those traditions and practices and technologies for the purposes of persuading their audience. Similar to griots, *Cholx* artistas are the intellectuals who use artistic and counter-storytelling methods to build knowledge and make arguments through the telling of stories of Cholos and Cholas. Additionally, Banks argues that the griot must be able to offer personal narrative to the story, to invest and be identified as belonging. Therefore, an insider perspective of Cholo and Chola subculture may guide the work of *Cholx* artistas whose commitment is to social transformation and a relationship with history and memory.

## **SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS**

Each chapter of my dissertation will highlight the specificity of Mex-Chicanx artistas focusing on artistic fields that link gendered resilient bodies with sequential art, fine or “high” art, and cinematic expression on the silver or “bronze” screen (Fregoso, 1993). I will put them in conversation with each other as I focus on themes related to our field of rhetoric and composition.

### **Chapter 1: Introduction – Becoming Cholx**

Chapter one will provide the overview of the issue I am studying: Cholx Artistas’ Methods and Rhetorics. While there has been research on visual rhetoric and composition in our field, the impact of artists from racially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, specifically in Chicana communities, has not received significant attention. In this chapter, I will also describe the rationale for choosing the subject of study, state the problem, and explain study objectives.

### **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review – Paving the way for the Rhetoric of Chicana Feminism**

Chapter two will present a literature review that examines the main conversations in the areas of feminist and critical race rhetcomp. It will also describe the implications of my study of Cholx artistas in the context of existing literature and how it builds on research centered on Chicana Feminism and Rhetorics.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology – Auto-historias and Counterstory**

Chapter three will present the methodology and findings for research question 1: How is Cholx art creating a new Cholx Consciousness that is global and connects racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world?

#### **Chapter 4: Results and Analysis – Rasquachando con la comunidad**

Chapter four will present the methodology and findings for research question 2: How do Chicana and frontera Mexicana artists transgress the normative practices in their artistic fields? How is it similar to or different from mainstream industries and institutions? As well as research question 3: How can these artists serve as models for being unruly and disruptive in order to create a new reality that is inclusive and centered on the subaltern?

#### **Chapter 5: Towards a New Cholx Consciousness – Being Cholx**

This final chapter will conclude the study findings and describe its implications by providing suggestions for future research in the area of Cholx Rhetoric.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The intersection of today's Cholx arts and beliefs and knowledge is at the center of this project. I use Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) as a social standpoint epistemology<sup>8</sup> strategy to research and make salient the Cholx experience, which is also my own experience. Authority and power have been reclaimed by feminists as discussed by Sprague (2016) who argues that the feminist researcher has more control over the research process and her role in it, how the data gets interpreted and presented, and third, it's important to note that researchers often have more social power than those whom they study (p. 64). I also borrow strategies from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and LatCrit. Yosso (2006) uses CRT as a methodology for challenging whiteness through her alternative concept called community cultural wealth, which is an empowering theory that Cholx may use to transform social structures, practices and discourses. Standard beliefs and dominant Eurocentric ideologies have positioned Cholx as outsiders by not valuing their knowledge, language, and perspectives. In order to resist whiteness, Yosso citing Anzaldúa asserts, "By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform the theorizing space" (p. 69). In other words, Cholx may begin to dismantle whiteness by exposing it, examining its ideology, and defending Cholx cultural capital and knowledge.

I'm aligning myself with Chicana education scholars who use CFE to theorize about our own bodies. The Cholx testimonios throughout this project will provide a Cholx philosophy that will allow young Cholx to resist demeaning rhetoric that exists to relegate them to a low-class subaltern status. The Cholx who participated in this research project represent a transnational perspective with locations in Mexico and in the U.S. from the Southwest to the Midwest. Their

<sup>8</sup> Sprague (2016) defines social standpoint epistemology as "knowledge [that] is grounded in specific social and historical contexts" (p.79).

stories illustrate the multiple Cholx identities from Chicagoan to Chihuahuensa to Juarenses and Tejanos. My research questions ask how do Cholx artists and arts create a new Cholx consciousness that is global and connects racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world. Additionally, I discuss how Cholx artists serve as models for being positively unruly and disruptive in order to create a new reality that is inclusive, safe, and centered on their subculture.

I draw from an interdisciplinary framework that consists of Anzaldúa's (1999) new mestiza consciousness ideology and nepantlera (2015) theoretical framework, Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) counter-storytelling methods, as well as Yosso's (2005) tenets of community cultural wealth to examine Cholx artists' rhetoric and methods and my own autoethnographic experience as a Xicana and border artista. I interweave, *puro trenzas y mestizaje* style (Calderón et al. citing González, 2012), testimonials of Cholx living in the artist's barrios and I also pull from my own experience observing Cholx in Japan. This examination of Cholx is not so much about their colonial interactions, but more about who they are, what they believe, and what they do as we learn through the art of Paola Rascón and Vicko Alvarez. Cholx bodies have been demeaned by the white dominant oppressive and systematically racist ideology and practices of American Hollywood Cinema. This project aims to counter ignorant rhetoric.

The word Cholo comes from historically derogatory meanings. It was a racist slur that was used to describe Mexican immigrants working as farm workers in the early 1900s in the U.S. (Mitú, 2018). It refers to being an abandoned dog as described by Paola Rascón and Cholx in Chicago. But like an abandoned dog, Cholx, too, will get angry at the oppressive, systematically racist culture that does not offer support or consideration for their existence. This project is a study on how Cholx navigate their nepantlera (Anzaldúa, 2015) existence and use their



community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to illustrate their own experiences both as subject and agent. The artists themselves are Cholx depicting subculture voices, giving voice to the subaltern (Spivak, 1983). Gramsci (1971) reminds us to resist dominant hegemonic ideologies by valuing our own epistemological knowledge. My attempt at a nueva teoría is Cholx rasquachando, which is when Cholx make do with their community (Ybarra-Frausto, 1987), which includes their culture, their epistemological knowledge, and experience resisting dominant oppressive ideologies. Hegemonic culture is perpetuated through systems that impact Cholx social, economic, and educational status. Cholx resist hegemony by portraying their own identity, beliefs, and culture through their own body. We see their visual rhetoric through their tattoos and arts. In doing so, they demonstrate decolonizing methodologies for navigating oppression and their subaltern experience.

## **BORDERLANDS AND BORDER ARTISTAS**

The artists I examine in this project are nepantleras remaking Cholx identity, arts, and culture. In Anzaldúa's nepantlera theory "Knowledge is relative, and reality is a composition. You reconstruct yourself and, to a lesser extent, your culture, society, and world by the decisions you make" (p. 43) and "The task of las nepantleras is to point the way." (p. 81). Anzaldúa addresses the experiences of Chicanas and queer communities as living in-between cultures, nations, languages, and identities and it is this reality that makes their experience ideal for teaching us a new way of being and living. I'm interested in building on this work and applying it to Cholx identity, arts, and culture. Cholx testimonios in my project reveal how Cholx mix cultures and identities in their art leading to a new way of Cholx being and living. Cholx have definitely evolved from being the mistreated Mexican immigrant farmworkers in the U.S. to

today having a global social network that is unapologetically fierce. In Chihuahua City, I met Cholos and Cholas in their barrio, which is racially and economically disadvantaged. We met in the evening after sunset because it was a weekday and we met after they got home from work and had dinner with their families. These testimonies from Chihuahua demonstrate how being Cholo and Chola is no longer just about your block or the parameters of your neighborhood, but it's something bigger and more universal. The Cholos in Chihuahua refer to it as a *Movimiento Hermandad* (brotherhood movement) and the purpose is to protect each other and the culture by looking out for one another and producing art that shows the pride of the culture and history. The Cholos and Cholas in Chihuahua were from different neighborhoods, in another time they would be warring against each other. They are united in supporting one another and the community. On Sundays they hold fundraisers at the park to raise money for families in need.



Figure 11.1: Elvira interviewing members of *Movimiento Hermandad* in Chihuahua City, Mexico. (December 2019)

## CHICANA FEMINISM

As a Chicana Feminist Scholar, I advance the stories of Chola artistas in an effort to insert Xicanx voices. According to Zepeda (2016), “Third Space Chicana Feminism contributes to the larger theoretical and methodological platforms of Third World Feminism with the works of Chicana scholars such as Chela Sandoval, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Emma

Pérez” (Zepeda, p. 138). In aligning myself with Third World Feminist scholars, I seek to engage in Third Space scholarship as it relates to Cholx and the continuous Southwest borderland conflict. The featured artists in this study examine the impact of historical trauma of Mexican and Mexican-American people and Cholx subcultures as seen through their visual and written representations. Cholx consciousness is based on testimonios gathered throughout this ethnographic qualitative research project. “As a pedagogy, it reflects on the interrupted hegemonic discourse of the academy and invites the marginalized to participate in the study and rewriting of their fragmented histories” (Zepeda, p. 138). As a Chicana feminist project, this study provides a counterstory that values and centers the lived experiences of Cholx in regard to their race, culture, nation, class, sexual orientation, and gender.

In the field of rhetoric and composition, Barbara Biesecker takes up the project of rewriting the history of Rhetoric by calling for a gender-sensitive history of Rhetoric (1992). She disrupts our traditionally taught Eurocentric male-driven knowledge by making salient the historical practice of prohibiting women from speaking as reinforced by the white male rhetoricians who advanced themselves as the authorities in our field. Biesecker cautions us to be critically conscious of the few cameo appearances by women in the field as a move to demonstrate diversity. A few success stories are not enough to revolutionize the canon of Rhetoric. Ultimately, we are being called on to continue to challenge the prevailing agenda that advances certain bodies and certain discourses in order to recover historically silenced voices. Leon (2010) discusses the way marginalized rhetorics are conceived in the field of Rhetoric and Composition studies. She presents revisionist historiography as a method for building a more inclusive rhetorical practice (Leon citing Jarratt and Ong; Johnson; Royster, p. 5). Traditionally, a Cholx perspective would be deemed as “special interests, or relevant only to other like-minded

scholars” (p. 7). However, this work is contributing to Border Rhetorics, an already developed sub-field, and is instrumental to the rhetorical work of Chola artistas. I examine the rhetoric and methods of Cholx artistas and use testimonios of Cholx in their barrios to understand what they signify. The “x” in Cholx represents an outsider culture, alone, on their own, resistant, resilient, and revolutionary. These topoi define the “x” in my project, which centers Border, *mestiza*, *frontera arte*, and Cholx identity, arts, and culture. Similar to Chicana rhetoric as examined by Leon (p. 17). Cholx are a source of knowledge about the world. This contradistinction as defined by Leon is a form of counter-storytelling (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002) in the way that it operates in “strategic tension with historical constructions of Mexican American and/or Latina” (p. 18). Cholx rhetorics can also be a critical site for analysis of social justice acts and movements and reciprocal relationships and community-based scholarship. Just like calling oneself a Chicana “enacts an intentional chain of ideological and material signification” (p. 19), Cholx also operate rhetorically in the world through the arts and in their own barrios. As a Cholx Scholar, then, I’m also contributing to Rhetoric, Interrupted (Baca, 2010). Cholx are a pictographic culture, as well as alphabetic. Cholx identity is a decolonial figure similar to Baca’s analysis of Malinche. Cholx Rhetorics necessarily serve as decolonial interruptions. My interest is to present a Cholx narrative in a different perspective than the dominant demeaning ways that the Cholx identity has been largely created by colonizing narratives. By reenvisioning the Cholx identity, this work aims to disrupt racist and ignorant rhetorics about Cholx.

## **LATINO CRITICAL THEORY**

Yosso (2005) values the community cultural wealth of marginalized communities and People of Color (POC). While whiteness may treat Cholx as subordinate, a CRT lens

acknowledges the assets of Cholx. Additionally, Yosso reminds us that there are other forms of subordination besides skin color, such as language and culture, which she centers as cultural wealth. By examining the ideology of racism and other forms of oppression, Cholx may “become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves” (p. 75). Yosso argues that adversity in the face of struggle is a valuable skill and a goal of this project is that young Cholx will learn it.

As mentioned in previous sections, a major goal of this project is to center the strengths of the Cholx subculture. Yosso asks, “Are there forms of cultural capital that marginalized groups bring to the table that traditional cultural capital theory does not recognize or value?” (p. 77). In answering this question, Yosso provides six tenets that demonstrate community cultural wealth. Aspirational capital refers to resilience in the face of struggle and oppression (p. 77). Linguistic capital values multilingual speakers, which also includes visual and aural literacy (p. 78). Familial capital emphasizes the importance of healthy relationships and connections to the community (p. 79). Similarly, social capital highlights the strength of networks and access to community resources (p. 79). Navigational capital refers to being able to succeed in institutions designed by and for the dominant culture (p. 80). The final tenet is resistant capital, which is the understanding of inequality and being empowered to resist oppression (p. 80). These tenets may apply to Cholx and can be used to challenge the current status quo of academia and our society. Ultimately, the question Yosso raises is who determines what is considered capital? She gives the example of the Chicana student who learns valuable skills, such as technical vocabulary, two languages, running errands, and translating correspondence, as a result of helping mom who works in the garment industry (p. 76). A CRT lens, then, may in fact reveal what whiteness fails

to recognize as knowledge and cultural wealth. Yosso argues that this may also be a tool for creating change.

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE RHETORIC**

Building on Yosso, Pennell (2016) puts forth a Queer cultural capital perspective adding an additional tenet she calls transgressive. As a result of living on the margins of every dominant society around the world, the transgressive cultural capital of queer communities stems from their inherent status of always having to navigate oppressive spaces where they are unwelcomed. Therefore, rather than waiting for something to resist, Pennell argues that you act expressively now to challenge and move beyond boundaries in order to create a new welcomed reality (p. 329). Queer communities in many ways live without boundaries. They are intersectional because queer communities are made up of different ethnicities and race, diverse linguistic ranges, and they have a broad definition of family as they often choose their family due to the fact that sometimes the family they are raised with outcasts them. Pennell argues, then, that queer communities create the social construct that benefits them not the dominant oppressive structures. The author encourages more connections between all marginalized groups to fight against oppression. This leads to direct action because it moves them beyond the struggle to fit in and instead they create their own spaces. The Cholx global community is especially connected today through social media such as Instagram and YouTube where Cholx around the world are posting videos and photos of themselves embodying and celebrating Cholx identity, arts, and culture.

The epistemic violence of racism throughout history has led to the global power of whiteness that we see today. According to Leonardo “whiteness is a racial discourse” (2002, p.

31) that examines the close relationship between economic exploitation and racial oppression but does not necessarily implicate only and all white people. However, white culture is connected to whiteness because of its historical violent oppressive past of People of Color (POC). For Mexican Americans in particular because they are considered racially white, whiteness in the early 1900s was used as a “political and legal strategy” according to Gross (2013, p. 157). However, the problem with being considered white is that Mexican Americans were not treated as white. Instead they were discriminated against “on the basis of their customs, skills, and language ability rather than their race” (p. 155). This challenges the Black/White binary discussions on race and racism that often times emphasizes skin color and leaves out other forms of subordination, such as language and culture.

The notion that appearing to be white may lead to equality is a false perception. Gross’ discussion of Mexican Americans in the twentieth century southwest shows that discriminatory practices prevailed even though Mexican Americans were racially categorized as white as a result of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. However, Mexican Americans were still seen as other because of language and cultural differences. Even though Mexican Americans suppressed their Mexican identity in order to identify and align themselves with whiteness, when they pursued their rights they were met with rejection. In this case, a marker of whiteness is skin color. Hispanics with white skin may be able to pass as white, but those who resembled dark skin were treated as Black. By the 1930s, the promises of the treaty that guaranteed full citizenship rights were conveniently forgotten. Evidently, Gross points out that segregation is a social construct and a result of whiteness meaning that at any time race may be defined and as history demonstrates race is defined by dominant ideology.

Arguably, Mexican Americans understood that to mimic white meant being treated like whites, such as being given respect immediately and assumed to have a good reputation and certain privileges afforded to you, such as voting and owning land. To be closer to being white, they did this in many ways such as through marriage with a white person, associating with whites, and claiming their Spanish roots, while rejecting their mestizo identity. In other words, being white means being equal to whites' social status. It's not that POC don't value their culture or language, but the fact that it's what prevented them from being treated fairly and with dignity, resembling white was the safe and best choice. The question then is what does it mean to be white? Aside from skin color, what defines being white? What defines being American? Vigil (2012) argued that "Southern and eastern Europeans in the past underwent a type of 'structural ideological' oppression when they migrated to the United States. Their different 'white' racial stock and cultural background barred them from wider opportunities. They also developed strategies similar to those used by Chicanos – cultural pluralism, assimilation, separatism, and direct action – to achieve social equality" (p. 314). Most importantly, who gets to decide the meanings and consequences of these identities?

Leonardo discusses how whiteness equals privilege and the privileged are the global bourgeoisie. Specifically, he argues that whiteness is evident through the ownership and appropriation of land and culture globally, which leads to economic power (p. 37). Whiteness then is a concept that we may use to identify and resist the epistemic violence of hegemonic institutions that perpetuate the marginalization of POC. People who assert whiteness claim to know what the best practices should be for others, such as the global privileging of English as the standard language. For example, when immigrants speak their native language, people who assert whiteness see this as a form of resistance and immigrants are told to go back to their



country. Leonardo points out that consideration is not given to the difficulty of learning a new language.

In order to advance whiteness discourse, a strategy used is to continue to stratify our society creating the racial divide because whiteness is dependent on racism in order to maintain white power. This has major implications for educational institutions. Therefore, Leonardo calls for dialectical forms of pedagogy to provide students with resistance discourse in order to challenge “transnational white polity” (citing Mills, p. 33). In order for educators to become critical of whiteness they have to be willing to speak about whiteness. In RWS, historically, the privileging of scholarship by white males silences the voices and contributions of marginalized communities and POC. Additionally, Leonardo argues that racial progress will only happen when white racial consciousness happens. If white people fail to participate in discourse about whiteness, then the white hegemonic oppression will continue. Leonardo suggests that a critical analysis of whiteness is necessary in order to avoid creating the binary of them and us. Consequently, white people who do speak against this socially constructed belief may be seen as traitors to their own race. Instead, Leonardo argues that proponents of whiteness choose to distance themselves from the violent past of colonization without considering how they benefited from their ancestors’ privilege and social status. Similarly, some marginalized people and POC may choose to resemble whiteness in order to attain social capital. In other words, whiteness equals capital equals the American Dream.

In thinking about where knowledge of Chox comes from, I draw on the work of three scholars discussing rhetoric and literacy in the African American community who provide various responses to this question according to their perspectives on the Black rhetorical education. Their research shows three views on how African Americans receive knowledge

ranging from experiences with oral language practices, the Black press, and women and teachers of color specifically. While the modes may vary, all equally influence the rhetoric and composition practices of African Americans. Gates' (1988) epistemology centers the Signifying Monkey as the "rhetorical principle in Afro-American vernacular discourse" (p. 44). Wilson Logan (2008) is a proponent of the Black press with emphasis on newspapers under control of Blacks. Enoch (2008) argues for rhetorical education that addresses civic engagement by highlighting the work of female and of color teachers who resisted dominant educational discourses to better serve their students. African American knowledge-making in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the development of the rhetorical education is traced through these theorists. In this project, I will look at the relationship between Cholx experiences, methods, and the production of knowledge in Cholx communities.

How knowledge gets translated to the community, according to Gates (1988), starts and ends with hermeneutics (p. 44). This Professor and Director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University, shows how the language and discourse of African Americans is structured. It combines Afro-American culture and white American culture, which have "everything to do with each other and, then again, absolutely nothing" (p. 45). Being able to participate in and understand the Black concept of Signifyin(g) requires an intimate experience passed down through generations as many African American adults use it to teach lessons to younger generations. A former co-worker of mine when I lived in Harlem, New York City, for several years, used to "school" me all the time. Darryl T. Downing was an older and very respected Harlem native. I would come into the office where we worked, a Black-owned theatre, and he would berate me about any given topic. Once, when I came back the next day after thinking about his criticism, I told him I thought about what I wanted to say and I was

going to say it. He stopped me immediately saying “You don’t get to go home and think about what you wanna’ say. You need to learn to say it the moment when it happens.” I realized then that he was deliberately teaching me to interpret these lessons and apply them to the real white world where I may have to deal with racism and discrimination. As an African American adult in Harlem, he took it upon himself to teach the young people around him how to deal with the real world because we don’t always have the opportunity to go home and think about a comeback. Darryl T. Downing was teaching me to defend myself verbally on the spot when necessary. His conscious rhetorical strategy was a “talking shit” (p. 77) way of conveying a message. It served as rhetorical education for teaching young People of Color how to survive the real world outside their neighborhoods where the dominant language may serve to marginalize communities of color. Therefore, this kind of oral language specialization and rhetorical education, while also used for fun and humor, is a strategy for survival and it’s what makes the Black community a distinctive speech community. It’s a language that gets passed down orally. Cholx also employ a similar strategy mixing English and Spanish, speaking Cholx slang or as previously researched and discussed Caló.

In contrast, Wilson Logan (2008) highlights print knowledge that comes from Black operated newspapers, which were more accessible to African Americans because they were less expensive than buying books. The Black press provided a more formal education than street language through the publication of current information across many subjects and served as a connection to the outside world. Specifically, the Black press run by African Americans provided educational opportunities for its readers as well as workers of the press, as many editors were former slaves. “These were individuals motivated by a desire to reach a wider audience” (p. 99) during a time of slavery and mob violence. Wilson Logan discusses the work of Frederick

Douglass and Ida B. Wells and argues that they both understood their editorial roles as an engagement with rhetorical education (p. 101). Their own exigency as African Americans drove them to journalism and both noted that their work in the press provided them with the best rhetorical education possible. Because of their personal interest in wanting to improve social conditions for African Americans, the Black press participated in civic engagement through their coverage of public meetings and political speeches, as well as their printing of articles that taught rhetorical skills such as vocal and breathing exercises.

In support of newspaper readership, the Frederick Douglass' newspaper reprinted an article from the *Ogdensburg (N.Y.) Sentinel* "listing the benefits to children of having access to newspapers in the home," which included better reading, writing, and debate skills. Black editors also expressed working with each other to improve each other's literacy. Because the Black press centered the Black audience, non-Blacks may not relate to all the content, such as the self-improvement articles. However, Black women were still marginalized in the Black press. Wilson Logan uncovers articles that debated whether or not women should participate in public discourse. On the other hand, there were also women journalists who wrote specifically for women and those wanting to pursue journalism. They made arguments for women writers to expand our history and as a vital function in community-building (p. 117). Wilson Logan also examines articles that address preaching as a rhetorical skill. Printed sermons by white preachers demonstrated how preaching was used to keep Blacks in subjugated positions arguing for the need to concentrate on "laboring to supply the needs of the superior white race" (p. 121). As a result, the Black press' coverage of political topics served to advance critical consciousness. Wilson Logan also points out that elocution was a popular topic in the Black press, which was equated with high class and good taste and also a way to refine the language of the working

class. While there were no formal Black elocutionists, Wilson Logan argues that the Black journalists who wrote about elocutionists were elocutionists for their retelling of it. Furthermore, she notes that whether you attended oratorical performances or not didn't matter because you could receive the rhetorical education by reading about it in the newspaper. As a result, the various methods of the Black press led to the production of knowledge in African American communities through their preservation of histories and activities, but also because of their deep personal investment in the community. While the Black press was aiming to improve the lives of African Americans, they were also working to improve each other as professional journalists representing the Black community. Cholo communities also employ a type of press through their graffiti, tags, murals, tattoos on their bodies, and the visuals and words on their lowriders that many times represent Aztec and indigenous cultural history, as well as the clothes that they wear on their bodies. The Cholo aesthetic is universally symbolic.

This acknowledgement of bodies and the impact they have on each other is the idea expressed by Enoch (2008). She examines embodied education through a group of marginalized women and of color teaching disenfranchised students. These female teachers made a choice to challenge dominant educational norms because they themselves experienced a subjugated role in society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were women, of color, and teachers, a profession reserved for women because of their nurturing abilities, and were expected to shape good citizens. They were teaching students how to participate fully in civic discussions, when they themselves weren't allowed to participate fully because their voices were not acknowledged or valued in mainstream society. Therefore, women and teachers of color called for a different type of teaching and learning to address the needs of the marginalized students in their classrooms. They

themselves experienced marginalization, so they had a deeper personal connection that drove them to refigure rhetorical education for marginalized students.

Rhetorical education for these teachers, then, was for preparing their students to engage in and change society. This pedagogy conflicts with dominant educational norms that focus on producing laborers for the superior white and male race. Enoch provides an alternative discourse that highlights how women speak from subjugated positions. These rhetors were fighting for their students' futures, much like the Black press did for their readers, and the Signifyin Monkey does for young People of Color from poor and rough neighborhoods. Even further, Enoch argues that teachers who are not marginalized must also reflect on their own positionality in order to understand their students' experience and social status. Specifically, when working with African American students, Enoch argues that we must revise the ways we see and understand African American language and cultural practices. In a similar fashion, I want to build on Chicana Feminist Epistemology, but with a critical lens on Chicana Visual Rhetoric and Composition art works.

In considering knowledge formation in African American communities, I'm contributing to Chohx scholarship, which should influence how we teach Chohx rhetoric to Chohx students. As Gates teaches us, we must value the various modes in which African Americans gain knowledge, such as through orality and the Signifyin Monkey methods. Wilson Logan reminds us of the Black press as a resource for printed knowledge that was especially prevalent during times of slavery and lynch mobs. Her discussion of important contributions by Black journalists may also reinvigorate the profession amongst African American students. Enoch provides us with an important reminder that who teaches our students is just as important as what we teach them. Women and teachers of color should use their own experience to resist the dominant educational

norms and non-marginalized teachers should be aware of their own privilege in contrast to their students.

The significance of examining African American knowledge formation is that it demonstrates how Cholx too have a rhetorical education that comes from a combination of oral practices in the barrio, written and public literacies specifically produced for a Cholx audience, and resistant educators active in civic engagement. The implication being that knowledge is constructed through the intersectionality of various social realities, ideologies, and politics. By thinking critically, we are able to perceive the beliefs and values being communicated toward us. This awareness may assist us in distinguishing what Cholx value and may influence Cholx thinking about knowledge formation. It may also help us to re-evaluate where Cholx knowledge comes from. This one-page comic was made by Vicko Alvarez. It features a young girl wearing her ScholaR beanie, and holding the book “House on Mango Street,” the award-winning coming-of-age story of a young Latina growing up in a racially and economically disadvantaged community. This young Latina growing up in the hood is learning from Latina literature.



Figure 12.1: ScholaR Comics by Vicko Alvarez Vega.

## VISUAL RHETORIC

In discussing writing, Raúl Sánchez in 2016 citing Damián Baca and Victor Villanueva (2008) argues that thanks to their work “in non-Western rhetorics and literacies, composition studies subject now has at its disposal a theoretically and empirically expansive concept of writing – one that sees as provincial so many of the concepts and assumptions about writing that previously had been considered universal” (Sánchez, p. 79). Cholx culture is strongly visual historically and presently. The work on the Pachuco has been majority focused on alphabetic language. My study concentrates on the visual language of Cholx as seen through the works of Paola and Vicko – specifically how Cholx consciousness is translated. The work of Back and Villanueva laid some foundation to build upon. A method for doing this, the counterstory, is discussed in the next section.



## COUNTER-STORYTELLING

The hegemon has had thousands of years to create their power structure, so it's difficult to challenge because the genocide, marginalization, and discriminatory social practices that have been constantly in place have worked successfully to break up subaltern communities so much so that it's difficult to bring them together and awaken their consciousness. The method of counter-storytelling as defined by Solórzano and Yosso is "telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)" (p. 32). The counter-stories of Cholx in oil paintings, nerdy rebellious women in comic books, and Xicanas in film may be used to analyze and question deep-rooted narratives and characterizations of people from the border and racially and economically disadvantaged communities. Cholx are often seen as negative stereotypes in mainstream visual media in industries dominated by the hegemon. As a result, my project aims to make a cross realization of genres. I examine Visual Counter-Storytelling from a Rhetoric and Composition disciplinary lens through a Critical Race theoretical perspective. I argue that linguistic justice must also include visuals that speak or represent justice. Visual rhetoric, such as Protest Art is part of the linguistic movement, a poetic justice as seen through a mix of alphabetic and visual languages and genres.

In Asao B. Inoue's #4C19 keynote address, he reminds teachers of writing and scholars of Color that it's not just English we're oppressed by, there is a larger systematically racist market we're all a part of, which he refers to as a cage of racism. "Who has been allowed to name people, places, things, the processes of writing and revision, theories of rhetoric?" (p. 5, 2019). Inoue argues that these decisions are biases based on the standards advanced by white bodies that perpetuate historical racial injustices (p. 15). Furthermore, white languaging is used to judge, and therefore oppress, racially and economically disadvantaged people in academia and as I argue, in mainstream media. White language messaging about Cholas/os/x implants a negative image in people's minds because the purpose of white languaging is to demean people who don't look, act, or talk like the hegemonic dominant culture. Instead, Inoue asserts that "we have to understand others without trying to control or change them" (p. 17). Inoue calls on us to check our own judgements that are perpetuated by white supremacy.

Chicana/Latina feminist theories and methodological approaches include *testimoniando* as a pedagogical tool to engage students' embodied literacies and to explore other ways of knowing. My project aims to put forth Cholx Visual Counter-Storytelling to resist white language supremacy and to insert Cholx' own knowledge about themselves. The gatekeepers with the power to judge, make or control standards in all major industries. Historically, it's been a white Male perspective that has worked against POC. Racially and economically disadvantaged communities need the power to share their own knowledge to counter the negative representations being said and shown about them by people outside their community. Inoue argues that violence, discord, and killing starts when people don't understand the languaging of others. This project aims to contribute to the Knowledge of Cholx Languaging.

## **DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS**

Cholx are American by origin. Maxwell (2019) discusses their long history in the United States and argues that Cholos are “unmistakably American like Apple Pie.” They are American yet seen and treated as Un-American. DuBois (1903) discussed this double-consciousness as feeling “two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (p. 4). The Cholx double-consciousness means always looking at one’s self through the eyes of a racist white society understanding that, historically, there has been a nation that looks back in contempt. Oppressive Eurocentric-dominated media has consistently portrayed Cholx as a negative aspect of society. Maxwell argues that what many don’t know is that it is this widespread discrimination that first led to the creation of this unique American identity and subculture. Cholx are aware of the oppression they face and they are also resistant to it. They are proud to be American by origin and at the same time they resist the American culture that systematically oppresses them. They live a double consciousness as experienced by other racially disadvantaged communities and discussed by Dubois. A Cholx is always aware that they are Cholx.

## **TRIBAL CRITICAL THEORY**

It is this awareness of oppression and resistance to it are also key tenets of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) as outlined by McKinley and Brayboy (2006) who argue that empowered People of Color need to teach themselves combining Indigenous discourse and addressing the discourse of the dominant culture, especially as it relates to American Indians. Combining knowledge and skills learned in mainstream institutions with their own Indigenous

ways of knowing is a tool used to meet the needs of Indigenous communities. McKinley and Brayboy challenge the notion that skills or knowledge unknown or outside the dominant discourse is considered less than. For example, storytelling is a different form of knowledge and theoretical application that serves as a basis for understanding how Indigenous communities work. The authors argue that these stories are knowledge as well as action. In addition, the liminality of American Indians is not addressed specifically in CRT. TribalCrit emphasizes colonization of American Indians as it is driven by imperialism, white supremacy, and a desire for material gain. Furthermore, the authors reveal that by colonization they are also referring to modern day colonization by white culture as a result of the colonization that took place 500 years ago. In other words, colonization by the white dominant culture is still going on to this day.

The tenets of TribalCrit specifically address the issues experienced by American Indians as a result of concepts such as Manifest Destiny and the Norman Yoke. The authors argue that what Eurocentric thinkers don't understand what they consider uncivilized and that the goal of civilizing others then is to make them more closely resemble the white dominant culture as opposed to trying to understand the other. American Indians have not only been physically set apart from the rest of society but they have also been erased from our consciousness, as a result of how they are represented or not represented in dominant discourse. TribalCrit argues that we advance colonization whenever POC fail to express themselves in ways that may challenge dominant society's ideas, especially of POC. The normalization of white supremacy naturally maintains hegemonic power. The authors give the example of attacks on affirmative action and how the argument focuses on POC but fails to acknowledge others who have benefitted from it such as white women, children of alumni, athletes who earn capital for the university, and veterans. The idea that American Indians must be federally recognized that is by their colonizer,

the US government, further demonstrates the power and processes of modern-day colonization. In essence, those not recognized therefore do not exist.

Knowledge as defined by TribalCrit is in conflict with knowledge as defined, authorized, and produced by dominant discourse, which uses exclusionary processes to avoid change in order to keep power intact. A survival strategy of TribalCrit is to utilize multiple forms of knowledge in order to generate power. Power defined by TribalCrit is about being able to collectively assert an identity, cultural traditions, and positionality, which may lead to sovereignty. The goal then is decolonization, which calls for self-determination, self-government, self-identification, and self-education. The problem with assimilation then is that the dominant culture you are assimilating into determines what is appropriate for you to learn in order to be integrated.

What is considered appropriate education is determined by whiteness discourse, which neglects and rejects cultural knowledge. TribalCrit asserts the importance of maintaining a strong Indigenous identity. Cultural integrity is important for the existence and maintenance of POC and the role of empowered POC is to pass on and share the knowledge they possess; this is the activism aspect of TribalCrit. The success of POC is not seen as individual success, but rather collective success for the betterment of a community. Therefore, in oppressive white dominant institutions the success of one is the success of all ideally, that is if the individual is connected and knowledgeable of their community. Because the communities of POC are in a disadvantaged position due to the advancement of colonization, individuality is not valued. More importantly, it is crucial for POC to contribute to the success of their entire community. TribalCrit highly values storytelling because stories make up theory that is a general understanding of the world. The

stories of POC then are counter-hegemonic discourse because they focus on race and racism and they challenge dominant ideology.

In addition, social justice activism and embracing experiential knowledge are central to resisting whiteness discourse. As a result, CRT expands into other disciplinary fields, such as ethnic studies, women's studies, and sociology. By examining the principles of CRT and focusing on particular notions of cultural capital through the analysis of LatCrit, Whiteness, and TribalCrit, these scholars provide capital perspectives that challenge dominant ideologies and serve to empower and transform racially and economically disadvantaged communities.

#### **RASQUACHANDO CON LA COMUNIDAD**

Ybarra-Frausto's (1965) rasquache methodology is about making do with what you have. Building on this idea, my project puts forth a new term rasquachando con la comunidad to refer to making with your community, producing with your community, and building with your community for and about your community. In my own work as a playwright and leading up to this dissertation project, I tested out the rasquachando con la comunidad methodology. In this early stage of development, I called rasquachando con la comunidad Do-It-Together (DIT).

In my experience rasquachando en El Paso, I developed a draft of an original musical with students and faculty at The University of Texas at El Paso. I came up with the main plot and characters and called this play script *Border Ballad Twinkle Toe Patrol: A Chicana Musical* (BBTTP, 2019). The project is also an example of the mixing of theatre genre styles as ways to play and perform Chicana/o theatre that examines the Mexico/US borderland as a critical space of inquiry. Specifically, for this project, I combined Chicana, Kabuki, and Brechtian genres and styles. I was first inspired to create the main character Coyote after learning about Enheduanna in

Jacqueline Royster's work (2003). I was impressed by Enheduanna's power and how she used her privilege as a poet to write herself into history, documenting her own experience. I was also inspired by real life female Coyotes, such as "Paula" whose story of crossing immigrants for twelve years since she was a teenager was shared in an NPR story (2009). Paula's story is especially compelling because of how she distinguishes herself as a "good" coyote, as opposed to the corrupt coyotes who mistreat and rob their clients and sometimes leave them stranded to die.

My play, *BBTTP*, is a comedic drama that features a Coyote named Ivanna who inherits and operates a mom-and-pop type of business that deals with assisting people in safe border crossings, specifically in the Juárez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas, region. Ivanna's trickster character is similar to the Aztec god Xolotl, except Coyote's job is to protect the immigrants from the dangers of crossing the border. Ivanna uses music and dance to put the border patrol in a trance, while the immigrants cross safely. Like Enheduanna, the story of "good" coyotes is a way to insert this perspective into discourses about immigration, ICE, and the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border. I wrote the idea for the play drawing on inspiration from Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino's *Actos* whose purpose was to inspire the audience to social action, illuminate specific points about social problems, satirize the opposition, show or hint at a solution, and express what people were feeling (Valdez, 1971). This project demonstrates Valdezian concepts and mixes it with Kabuki style theatre, a highly stylized and elaborate "avant-garde" or "bizarre" representation of ordinary life. The objective is to utilize the spectacle of theatrical elements to call attention to the mission of social protest and revolutionary theatre (Elam, 2001). The purpose is to understand how stories, characters, and themes in Chicana plays address the needs of culturally diverse populations.

I first presented *BBTTP* at a Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social<sup>9</sup> (MALCS) conference in El Paso, Texas, in 2018, while I was a doctoral student. I framed my discussion by introducing landscaping as the metaphor used by Royster (2003). Elite, white males have demonstratively landscaped most of what we know in the field of rhetoric. In response, scholars have made important interventions through recovery projects that bring visibility to discourses that counter Western, male, and elite perspectives. Inspired by women rhetors, I then introduced a framework I called D.I.T. (Do-It-Together, which I now call *rasquachando con la comunidad*), working with students, community, and other important stakeholders to co-construct alphabetic and visual stories from the border in order to be critically conscious of my own ideology and the ideology of others. The term D.I.T. was suggested to me by Angela Haas. I decided to use this title in connection to my previous workshop titles that dealt with D.I.Y. (Do-It-Yourself) Comics and since then I have put forth the term *rasquachando* to connect to the work of our beloved Chicano scholar in the Arts Ybarra-Frausto.

*BBTTP* mixes traditional Kabuki-style theatre, Brechtian production, and the Actos style of Luis Valdez. My disciplinary lens is Rhetoric and Composition in social justice situated contexts. Kabuki theatre is a classical Japanese dance-drama and it is known for the stylization of its drama and for the elaborate make-up worn by some of its performers (traditionally only men participate). Everything is live on the stage and the backstage production is revealed in Brechtian style. Inspired by the Actos of El Teatro Campesino, *BBTTP* features communal bonding, true stories basis, little or no scenery for easy travel, and it calls attention to struggle and border issues. The main cast features Ivanna, Leader of the Coyotes, her team of Coyotes, mostly/all

<sup>9</sup> As discussed by Alemán (2019), “in August of 2018, MALCSistas gathered in El Paso for the 34<sup>th</sup> annual MALCS Summer Institute. It was the largest assembly ever for the organization and its first time along la frontera, drawing Chicanas/xs and Latinas/xs to the literal and metaphorical borderlands that fashion much of their lived experiences” (p. 22).



women, Squire, Ivanna's assistant, a group of Immigrants, and Border Patrol Agents, male and female.

For my first D.I.T. workshop at MALCS, we read the first Act of the play out loud, which I had already written. We then created about six to eight groups of 2-3 people per group. Since we were at a MALCS conference, my audience was all female and mostly Chicana and Latina. I assigned each group an allegorical figure, such as Justice, Mercy, and Strength. The groups of women then completed a character development handout that asked descriptive questions such as name, age, occupation, favorite pastime, social and economic status, current job, and goals in life. After completing the character development handouts, each group then presented their character descriptions. I then asked a volunteer from each group to improvise a scene with the characters from the other groups. I told them the setting was a bar and they were waiting for Ivanna to arrive to discuss a job that required all their help. The participants were asked to stay in character. Their conversation revolved around the character's concerns, if any, about the upcoming job, what skills they hope to contribute based on their allegorical characters, and how they met Ivanna. Together with this group of women at MALCS, we co-constructed detailed descriptions of possible Coyote characters, which greatly influenced the playwriting. This D.I.T. storytelling method combines our shared knowledge and experiences living in a particular situation and location. I led three more D.I.T. character development workshops after this first one with three other professors at UTEP. The results of these D.I.T. workshops led to the creation of the Border Patrol Agents and Immigrants featured in my play that I was able to complete a draft of. *Rasquachando con la comunidad*, then, is a method for participatory composition, co-constructing knowledge, sharing resources and tools, being inclusive of

different perspectives, and it promotes activist rhetoric. Rasquachando con la comunidad is making do with community capital wealth and treating storytelling as treasure.

### **CHOLXING – FLEXING CHOLA, CHOLO, CHOLX**

As Cholx, you are expected to be “down for your barrio” meaning you defend your community. The Cholos I interviewed said that having bikes and cars gives them a feeling of accomplishment because people compliment them saying “Esta chida tu ranfla...tu bicicleta...te vistes chido...me gusta tu rollo” meaning “Your car is cool, your bike, the way you dress, I like who you are and how you are.” This is a picture of a white lowrider belonging to a member of the Movimiento Hermandad in Chihuahua City. Flexing Cholx can also be seen in other forms of expression and knowledge such as this academic project whose aim is to present the Cholx community from their perspective.



Figure 13.1: Lowrider belonging to a member of Movimiento Hermandad (Dec. 2019).

### **THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD CHOLO**

According to Mitú, by the 1700s, the term cholo is being used in Latin America. “In the popular 1851 novel Moby-Dick, the author Melville uses the term to describe a Spanish-speaking sailor. The term showed up again in 1907 in the Los Angeles Express. A headline read

‘Cleaning Up the Filthy Cholo Courts Has Begun in Earnest,’ and the article repeatedly used the terms Mexican and cholo interchangeably” (2018). Additionally, they add the term “cholo court” was used to refer to the poor areas where Latinos tended to live. Eventually, the word cholo was used interchangeably and derogatory with the words “Mexican” or “Latino”. Latino immigrants were especially recruited as braceros – farmworkers in the early 1900s. As Latino immigrant communities grew, bigotry and racism against them by whites also became more evident.

### **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHOLO CLASS**

According to the same article by Mitú, the word cholo is found as far back as a Peruvian text from 1609 written by Inca Garcilaso de la Vega in Spanish called *Comentarios Reales de los Incas*. In the text it describes Cholo as “The child of a Black male and an Indian female, or of an Indian male and Black female, they call mulato and mulata. The children of these they call cholos. Cholo is a word from the Windward Islands that meant “dog, not of the purebred variety, but of very disreputable origin; and the Spaniards use it for insult and vituperation” (2018). A visual image of the Spanish Empire Caste System shows Cholos positioned at the lowest level in society. Today, many of the Cholos I interviewed mentioned they were influenced by the Cholos in California. However, a major difference they say is that they are not in a gang like some in the U.S. In Chihuahua, your barrio is where you live and where you grew up. You are a Cholo with the people you grew up with. As mentioned in the introduction, Cholos as we know them today came after the Tirilones who came after the Pachucos.

## **PACHUCO ROOTS**

Braddy (1960) citing Thurston Scott's novel *Cure It with Honey* (1951) wrote in the *Southern Folklore Quarterly* "The toughest Pachucos come from El Paso but don't get smart until they pass through Losca" (Los Angeles, CA). He described Pachucos as jive-talking, anti-social, and fancying mambo music more than rock and roll. The infamous Zoot Suit Riots during the Great Depression in the 1930s, brought on increased violence toward people of Mexican descent. Between 500,000 and 2 million Mexican people were deported, including 1.2 million U.S. citizens who were deported illegally. The Mexican immigrant communities were torn apart and it impacted families in a negative way. Latino youth began creating their own familias known as "Chicano" and "Cholo" subcultures, as they were referred to by American newspapers. "Young Mexican Americans primarily banded together out of self-preservation and common interests—not criminal intent" (Maxwell, 2019). As discussed in the introduction of this research project, Caló, the language of the Pachuco, also known as Spanglish (mixing English and Spanish), is important because it was a way for Mexican and Mexican-American youth to form their own code words and their own culture to avoid assimilation, but also for protection. Certain code words, such as "trucha" is a way to warn someone that danger is coming.

Pachucos and groups of young Mexican American males were labeled as criminal gangs. As a result, the government rounded up some 600 Mexican Americans across Los Angeles, culminating in the wrongful conviction of 17 Mexican American youth, and later spawning the infamous Zoot Suit Riots (Maxwell, 2019). During the zoot suit era the baggy clothes became a staple of early Cholo culture. Barrios were full of the Cholo look, and white Americans labeled it as criminal and illegal. Racial tensions exploded in June 1943 with the Zoot Suit Riots. Chicano

youth, many of them teens, were targeted and physically beaten to the ground and stripped of their zoot suits by American military men and white civilians. Police did nothing to protect the Chicano youth. Cholo culture was now and continues to be the image of criminality.

“Following the riots, distrust of law enforcement skyrocketed, and Mexican Americans began protecting their neighborhoods from outsiders the same way outsiders had protected their neighborhoods from them. Worse, as drugs flooded the streets a few decades later and divisions between neighborhoods grew, rivalries intensified. Cliques became gangs. Barrios became war zones. The modern day Cholo (a Mexican American gang member) was born” (Maxwell, 2019).

Latino communities continue to experience police brutality to this day as a result of the negative images that were created by racist rhetoric in the media and even by the very government sworn to protect them.

## **EXPORTING THE PACHUCO IMAGE TO MEXICO AND LATIN AMERICA**

Juárez resident Germán Valdés most famously known for playing the popular Pachuco character named Tin Tan. Originally from Mexico City, Valdés is the nexus between Pachuco culture on the Juárez-El Paso border and inner Mexico in the 40s and 50s. Tin Tan often appeared wearing a zoot suit speaking Caló, the language of the Pachuco as discussed in the introduction. He is responsible for spreading the image of El Pachuco to Mexico City. In a television clip from 1943, the host Paco Miller asks Valdés how he invented the Pachuco. Valdés immediately responds in Spanish, “I didn’t invent it (the Pachuco). I got Tin Tan from the City of Juárez.” This is an image of Mexican actor Germán Valdés in his world-famous role as Tin Tan. Originally in 1938, when he started playing the character he called himself El Pachuco Topillo (trickster). He is known as the most famous Pachuco in Mexico. In this photo he wears a

vibrant blue zoot suit with long chain, bright red tie, white shoes and butterfly collar shirt, and a fedora with a long white feather.



Figure 14.1: Still image of Tin Tan (German Valdez) in zoot suit in 1945.

### IMAGE OF CHOLX IN AMERICA

As previously discussed, the Cholx culture evolved from the Tirilonos who come from Pachucos. The strongest depictions of Cholos and Cholas in Hollywood Independent Cinema were films such as *Mi Vida Loca* and *Blood In and Blood Out*. Aesthetically, men and women moved away from wearing traditional zoot suits and towards loose-fitting khaki pants such as Dickies with white knee-high socks, or creased jeans, and plaid or flannel shirts over white tank tops. Cholas are especially known for their signature pointed eyebrows, outlined lips, hair styles, and hoop earrings. Equally important, the Chola aesthetic may have a negative stigma as advanced by outsider racist culture. Having Cholx consciousness may prepare Cholx for dealing

with oppressive ideologies about them. Domínguez (2019), in her poem *Hoops*, has a line that describes what is felt by the speaker “You wonder is she a hoodrat,/ a chola, someone’s hyna?” (p.160). Hoodrat as defined by the artist Vicko Alvarez for this study discussed hoodrat as a term started as an insult. She argued “You’re literally being compared to an animal just because you live in a poor neighborhood or a struggling neighborhood. It’s definitely a super-loaded word, but generally it was used to degrade young people living in the hood” (2019). Jaina spelled with a “j,” also spelled with an “h” as in the *Hoops* poem, meant girlfriend or sweetheart according to the Pachuco dictionary (Cantú Jr., 2007). Both terms, hoodrat and hyna, refer to the Chola as being an animal or object to be desired, but Domínguez ends her poem with pride in the last two lines. She writes “when I smack my chicle (gum) and flip my hoops,/ I regulate” (p. 160). This Chola poet intellectual provides a counter response to hateful thoughts and preconceived notions about her.

Similarly, tattoos are also worn with pride and are a major part of the Chola culture as well with religious images such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, calligraphy, and the payaso (clown) images. Lowriders date back to the 40s and 50s, Los Angeles-based Mexican-American youth started redesigning cars, painting them and lowering them for aesthetic purposes. According to Mitú (2018), “It became a cultural phenomenon and political statement, reinventing the American automobile for the Latino community. California wasn’t having it, and in 1958 the state outlawed operating any car modified so that a part was lower than the bottoms of its wheel rims. Cholos were quick to circumnavigate the restrictions. A customizer named Ron Aguirre developed a way of bypassing the law in 1958 by using hydraulic pumps and valves that could change the height of a car at the flick of a switch,” (2018). Lowriders also take up space in Paola Rascón’s life-size Cholo paintings.

Paola shared that in her discussion with Cholas, she learned that Cholas traditionally stay indoors protecting the children. They were known as “bravas” and being very protective of their kids and their families, which is why the image of the Cholo may seem more dominant because we see him more. During an interview with Cholos in Paola’s barrio, I asked what Cholas are like. A Cholo responded “Pegan fuerte,” meaning they hit hard to describe their toughness. This comment drew laughter from the group of Cholos and one Chola, but it should also be noted that no one disputed the comment and the description of the Chola ended there. My cultural intuition also told me that they were referring to Cholas as being women you don’t mess with and that in many ways the Cholas are tougher than the Cholos. Cholas are not to be underestimated. In describing the exterior body of the Cholo, Paola described their look as a defense mechanism and as visual armor. She brought attention to the fact that Cholos often pose with their backs facing the audience for various reasons. They show their visual stories through the tattoos on their backs. Rhetorically they turn their backs to the colonial gaze while still looking over their shoulders signifying mistrust. The Cholo gaze on you lets you know that they are watching you.

Paola shared that she grew up knowing about Cholos and seeing them and being taught to be afraid of them. She said the Cholo was always present. She has also witnessed racist encounters having grown up on the Border and says she has felt the racism when she goes to another country. In Spanish she explained “You understand it, but there are some who can’t understand it or feel it as strong as those who live it. But there’s a part of you that understands it. So you fight to be who you are and say who you are.” Paola says we all have a little bit of Cholo in us because “we all need to say who we are,” in other words, we all have the need to be acknowledged and valued in society.



## **IMMIGRANT ORIGINS**

The history of the Cholo started with the immigrants who were being mistreated in the U.S. and denied healthcare, and suddenly deported in mass numbers back to Mexico in the early 1900s. The ones who stayed in the U.S. after the World Wars were considered outcasts. In my interview with Paola, she mentioned Cesar Chavez as an example of a farmworker who was fighting for the healthcare and human rights of farmworkers. The common thread being that Cholos and Cholas have always been and continue to be outcasts.

The migration experiences of Cholos going from one culture to another, forming a new mixed identity, and having kids born in the United States, it all together makes the Cholo identity very distinct. Cholos created their own identity because they were discriminated against. As a result, Cholos created their own style and their own community that lived and grew with the same cultural roots. As a group, Chols live similar experiences and they continue their connection through their culture. They start thinking the same and forming communities. The Cholos were formed from being considered low status to asserting a proud Cholo identity. The Cholo stance and iconography on the Cholo body signifies cultural pride, of being from Mexico, as well as being born in the U.S. As an artist, Paola says she values these stories and says it is rich to have this knowledge.

## **CHOLX TODAY**

Cholx have fought against oppression and discrimination since the beginning to today. Cholx have been subject to many injustices from being deported in mass raids, being violently stripped and beaten to the ground by American servicemen, fighting for civil rights in the 1960s, to being targets of today's mass incarceration of Black and Brown men. Chicano movement

activists of the 1960s brought attention to the negative ethnic stereotypes of Mexicans in mass media. The term Chicano itself was used interchangeably with cholo as a derogatory term for Latinos. These are the social conditions of racially and disadvantaged people that are often ignored, hidden, or discredited as gang violence, as if the lives of gang members don't matter. The Cholos I interviewed in Chihuahua learned about being Cholos from their cousins and family members in Los Angeles. Cholx today are an evolving brotherhood movement that links men of color globally.

### **TERMS FOR CHOLX SUBCULTURE**

Cholx are often viewed as gang members due to their appearances and language and because they hang out together. And yes, there are Cholx in violent gangs today, but their fraternization and coming together is a result of being abandoned by society or by their own families because they are racially and economically disadvantaged. The Cholos brought their American subculture and street aesthetics back to Mexico and Latin America, which gave way to notorious gangs like MS-13, Norteños, and Sureños. These gangs still operate today and are perpetuated in the American prison system. A belief and foundational element of Cholx culture is to help each other financially. Because Cholx were discriminated against, they continue to struggle for employment and higher education is not easily available. As a result, when your family is hungry, crime may be the only way. Additionally, as previously researched, Cholx have developed their own vernacular, which is a mix of Spanish and English known as "Caló (pronounced Kah-low), known as the language of the Mexican-American ghetto. Alvarez (1965) argued "It is the 'other' Spanish, the Spanish that is not taught in school, but that is learned in the many Mexican neighborhoods throughout the American Southwest" (p. 7). To demonstrate how

Caló continues to evolve, I wanted to address new terms that came up frequently during my interviews with Cholx that were not found in the Caló glossary (Melantzon, 1989) nor the Pachuco dictionary (Cantú Jr., 2007). The new words used by Cholx are:

**Pleito:** Conflict. Tension. Fight. Struggle. Drama. (Literal translation is lawsuit.)

**Hermandad:** Brotherhood. Loyalty. Protection. Defend. Unity.

The veterano from Juárez and Chaparral who I interviewed told me this in Spanish about pleito and hermandad, “Cuando había un plait, si había chansa que lo protegían ahí en el barrio, lo protegían la misma gente.” The English translation is “When there was a conflict, if there was a chance for your barrio to protect you, they would.” These are just two new Cholx terms and meanings that distinguishes the Cholx subculture. The Cholx terminology demonstrates the inventiveness and creativity evident in Cholx culture throughout history. From its evolution starting with Indigenous cultures to a mestizo identity as a result of European colonization to becoming American in the new United States formally Mexico. However, become fully American has never been realized due to the constant attacks on the Mexican and Mexican-American communities today as seen through family separation and immigration border conflicts to being targets of police brutality and the criminal justice system that has led to the mass incarceration of Black and Latino men. Nellis (2016) citing the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that “in twelve states more than half of the prison population is African American. The Hispanic population in state prisons is as high as 61% in New Mexico and 42% in both Arizona and California. In an additional seven states, at least one in five inmates is Hispanic.” Furthermore, these percentages reveal a degree of disproportion for people of color when

compared to the overall general population where 62% are white, 13% are black, and 17% are Hispanic as discussed by Nellis (p. 11). The purpose of this applied research<sup>10</sup> project, then, is to produce knowledge that can be used to address the social justice issues experienced by Cholx communities around the world.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

I allow myself to be guided by my cultural intuition (Calderón et al., 2012), which is informed by being raised in a colonia, a barrio, and growing up surrounded by Cholos and Cholas. I use this to guide my examination of Cholx, which took place in various locations, in Cholx barrios, from Southwest to Midwest, in Chihuahua, El Paso, Chaparral, and Chicago, in order to capture a wide range of geographical perspectives and analysis. I wanted to see how Cholx compare geographically from their rhetoric and artistic modes to ideologies and motivations. I conducted two artist interviews and collected twenty-two testimonios from Cholos and Cholas living in Chihuahua, El Paso, and Chicago. I interviewed Cholx ranging in ages from twenties to sixties. I recorded a wide generational response to my research questions and diverse perspectives on video, audio recording, and still photos in person in their barrios. I also examined library archives of photos featuring Chola Dynasty sculpture and installations. Some of the limitations of this study include limited research travel funds due to various locations spread across the country. I would have liked to conduct longer sit-down interviews with each Cholo and Chola who I met. In embracing alternative ways of knowing, I borrow from Ribero's (2019) call for the queering of dominant discourses. The way we do this she argues is "fuck the social order...fuck things up...as in fucking with...or messing with the viewer." Cholxing, I argue, is a

<sup>10</sup> Based on the definition provided by Sprague (2016).

form of queering. My research topic is not usual in my disciplinary field. The visuals and testimonios throughout this project will be jarring to a colonial gaze. I present Cholx narratives to demonstrate Cholx consciousness. As a result, I highlight the works of frontera Mexicana and Chicax artistas. In doing so, I hope to inspire other Xicana scholars by providing Cholx Rhetorics and methods as a tool for documenting Cholx' lives, history, and current realities. The mission is to insert Cholx voices into mainstream arts and disrupt dominant culture and ideology.

Leon (p. 24) also argues that as rhetoric scholars, "we should be studying identity because it connects people and incites people to action." Cholx representation in art and academia is important because it demonstrates a resilient, revolutionary, counter-art, and counter-story visual subculture that connects people across cultures, countries, languages, and ways of knowing. Cholx methods are an example of counter-storytelling. The purpose of Cholx counter-storytelling is to discount majoritarian stories that create false narratives about Cholx. "Whether told by People of Color or Whites, majoritarian stories are not often questioned because people do not see them as stories but as 'natural' parts of everyday life" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These dominant false narratives silence and attempt to rewrite the Cholx experience. Therefore, Cholx Rhetorics are intended to be a direct affront to dominant oppressive ideologies. The racist and sexist practices of Hollywood cinema, repeat the same Cholx stereotypes that depict Cholx as gangbangers and loiterers. Cholx are resistant and demand to be seen, valued, and read on their terms through their clothes, tattoos, cars, make-up, physical stance, beliefs, and lived experience. While it might be tempting to see these Cholx as performing their identities (Butler, 1988), I argue that Cholos and Cholas aren't performing. They are *being*.

In this project, I also share my professional and personal experiences as related to these concepts and ideas. Cholx methods, then, function as counter-stories as discussed by Solórzano & Yosso. Cholx scholars are putting a human and familiar face to theory and practice. We provide a more intimate context of Cholx because we have a connection. As a result, Cholx scholars and artists produce a Cholx consciousness that may impact young Cholx. Most importantly, Cholx combine their own lived experiences with their rhetorics. This Cholx counter-story is meant to situate Cholx in their real lives drawing on their own knowledge using Cholx methodologies.

Cholx discourse is rooted in a history of being seen as low class and undervalued in mainstream media and real life. Therefore, I employ counter-storytelling methods to build on the rhetoric of Cholx identity, arts, and culture. I ask the Cholx artistas I interviewed, what their work means for them and for Cholx. They both share their desire for social justice for Cholx in their communities and a more accurate portrayal of Cholx to counter the Hollywood productions that depict Cholx as negative stereotypes. Cholos are often mocked and depicted as gangbangers and loiterers. In discussing Cholx in Hollywood Cinema, I draw on interviews about Japoneros who live in Japan and embody the Cholx identity, arts, and culture. They do so even religiously as they display devotions to La Virgen de Guadalupe in their barbershops and hanging on the mirror in their lowriders. They too experience a double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) coming from a traditional Japanese conservative culture and being Cholx in order to break free from oppressive dominant ideologies. As a Chicana Cholx scholar I'm changing the landscape by being Cholx to change the way we see, what we value, and how we read. I do this by inserting Cholx into academic discourses and spaces. The Cholx testimonios I gathered is an example of rasquachando. The interviews were unplanned until the day leading up to the actual interviews. It

wasn't until I arrived in the Cholx Artistas' barrios that any contact was made with local Cholx. I made do and with the Cholx that Paola and Vicko were able to connect me with. I also met them spontaneously in places where they worked, their local park, and in a few cases, their homes. By being flexible and meeting Cholx on their terms and in their territories, I was able to establish a genuine connection and use my own Cholx upbringing as a shared vulnerability in order to gain confidence in a very quick and short amount of time with the Cholx artists and Cholx in their barrios. Rasquachando con la comunidad methods will make research more inclusive by resisting dominant oppressive ideologies and advancing the lives of racially and economically disadvantaged communities.

Throughout the research process I attempted to capture what it feels like to live and act in the world as Cholx. I do this by interviewing Cholx artistas and the Cholx in their barrios from across borders and opposite geographical locations. I examine what Cholx artistas make and through testimonios Cholx Rhetoric and Methods are made salient. Cholx challenge the colonial gaze by expressing their Cholxness through visual rhetorics and counter-storytelling methods. I present Cholx forms, as well as social epistemological contexts.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Chola artistas are especially underrepresented in American mainstream comics, fine art, the film industry, and in academia. The disciplinary field of Rhetoric and Composition recognizes this but doesn't go far enough yet. Therefore, this research project examines the work of Cholx artistas who advance anti-racist social justice work through digital humanities and visual rhetorics. I focus on Cholx artistas because of the growing global interest in the Cholo and Chola subculture and Cholx resistance as style. Much like the Chicana/o Movement of the 1960s

that made an impact on American consciousness, the Cholx resistance-style may have a similar effect on human consciousness. Therefore, the purpose of my research questions is to identify and provide an analysis of Cholx consciousness as a global social justice movement for racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world.

RQ1. How is Cholx art creating a new Cholx Consciousness that is global and connects racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world? By examining the Cholo and Chola subculture through visual art from the perspective of Cholx artistas, we may gain a better understanding of what it means to be Cholo, Chola, or Cholx. The history of Cholos and Cholas and how they came together to resist racial discrimination and violence against them is a movement that needs to be made salient, especially in juxtaposition to the negative and demeaning images of Cholos and Cholas in American mainstream medias.

RQ2. How do Chola artistas transgress the normative practices in their artistic fields? Chola artistas have chosen to take up a subject and an image that may not be pleasant to the colonizing gaze. Using rasquache methods, the Chola artistas I examine mix methods traditionally reserved for upper class European men and women and they work in American mainstream industries, such as comics, that are dominated by white men. Because these artistas are Cholx themselves, it's important to understand Cholx consciousness. Regardless of their subaltern status in their artistic fields, Paola Rascón and Vicko Alvarez raise a finger to the status quo and instead chose to be radical by producing art that is tough, unapologetic, and fierce and that makes salient the bodies of racially and economically disadvantaged Brown men and women. This research question will take a closer look at Cholx philosophy as represented in the work of Paola and Vicko.



RQ3. How can these artists serve as models for being unruly and disruptive in order to create a new reality that is inclusive and centered on the subaltern? After studying and gaining a better understanding of the history and philosophy of Cholos and Cholas, we may use this knowledge to encourage the production of Cholx counter-stories by, for, and with Cholos and Cholas in racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world. Paola and Vicko demonstrate how to do this as working artists. They are disrupting mainstream American media industries and asserting the Cholo and Chola image as a source of pride and community and cultural identity.

## **BORDER CONTEXT**

I crossed the U.S.-Mexico border at the El Paso/Juárez border entry for this project. As previously mentioned, this is where I was born and raised. My hometown is the basis of my academic and creative work. In classical rhetoric, *topos* is used by rhetors to produce arguments. *Topos* as discussed by Walsh & Boyle (2017) as "... 'place,' 'space,' or 'stance,' the notion of *topos* as strategic position has always proven fertile ground for invention" (Walsh & Boyle, 2017, p. 4). Because I was born and raised on the border, I've witnessed the use of military and police force and mass incarceration to further oppress racially and economically disadvantaged communities. Therefore, my work as a scholar and artist reflects my *habitus*. My place, space, and stance stems from my personal experience growing up in a *colonia* in a major border city. I'm a first-gen college grad in a Rhetoric and Composition program at a university that has an 80% Hispanic student population— and an additional 5% from Mexico. The El Paso/Juárez Borderplex is one of the largest binational communities in the world with a combined population of over 2.5 million. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 20% of the population is living

in poverty and the median household income is about \$45,000. Drawing on Aristotle's Rhetoric (2.22) as discussed by Walsh & Boyle (2017, p. 4) I am "intimately connected with" Border discourse and with immigrant discourse as the child of an immigrant and being from the Border. El Paso is Spanish for "The Pass." Our puentes, bridges, connect us with our sister city Juárez. Thousands of people cross the bridge on a daily basis. There is a constant flow of trade and culture.

In my own work, I want to examine and produce Social Justice situated composition by combining topology and rhetoric and art with social justice. The work of Cholx artistas may serve as responses to wicked discourse that serves to further oppress Cholx communities. In response to #OscarsSoWhite, Chicana filmmakers resist negative reproductions or unproductions, meaning no productions, of themselves in film. Cholx must own the means of production and we must use *rasquachando con la comunidad* as our approach. We must remain dedicated to our art, regardless of our circumstance, and stay *trucha* – ready to recognize any chance to produce our work at any given moment *Teatro Campesino*-style. *Ponte Trucha* is Cholo lingo for watch out and be alert.

This is a still image of the Santa Fe Bridge from my short film *Mariposa*. I made the film in 2005 as my personal response to the unsolved murders of hundreds of Mexican women. The film is about a young Chicana who gets kidnapped by a corrupt cop and his girlfriend in Juárez. They prepare her for her murder.



Figure 15.1: Still image of Santa Fe Bridge in Juarez, Mexico from the short film *Mariposa* by Elvira Carrizal-Dukes

## QUALITATIVE STUDY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

My research approach is qualitative using participant observation<sup>11</sup> as an ethnographic procedure to collect data. My research qualitative approach includes video recording participant interviews as an ethnographic procedure to collect data. I'm building on Gloria Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness theoretical framework and putting forth Cholx consciousness. I'm building on Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's rasquache theoretical framework and putting forth rasquachando con la comunidad or making do with your community. I examine the rhetoric and art making methods of Mexicana and Chicana visual artists who depict Cholx imagery and identity in their work. I'm working on contributing scholarship that advances the visual storytelling and art making methods of Mexicana and Chicana border artists. I'm hopeful that I may blend visual rhetoric and composition and digital dissemination with ongoing disciplinary conversations about race, culture, and representation.

<sup>11</sup> Participant observation as defined by O'Reilly (2009) is the "main method of ethnography and involves taking part as a member of a community while making mental and then written, theoretically informed observations" (p. 150).

I conducted face-to-face in-person interviews because I wanted to shadow these artists to describe their lives in action and to develop trust during the time we spend together to gather deeper insights into their work and what themes represent them. I also filmed them, so that I may collect video documentation data and to produce multimedia elements to accompany this research project. I hope to give life to this research project beyond the dissertation phase through the production of a documentary or a digital humanities project. I used coding filters by identifying words or sentences that link to an idea that I later categorized. To begin coding my data, I employed two types of coding: 1) descriptive and 2) values coding. Descriptive coding “summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, p. 70). Values coding is the “application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Saldaña, p. 89). Values according to Saldaña are based on the importance placed on oneself, another person, thing, or idea and the attitude, which is the way we think and feel toward values. I coded all the interviews I conducted using the same data codes. I then analyzed the video and audio interviews, my fieldnotes<sup>12</sup>, and examined the art works and materials of Cholx artistas to conduct a thematic analysis, which Saldaña calls themeing the data (p. 140). This type of data analysis is commonly appropriate for qualitative studies, such as this. “A theme is a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (Saldaña, p. 139). In trying to understand the Cholx subculture phenomenon, I looked identified themes that described Cholx behavior, beliefs, values, morals, and iconic statements. I created categories for the different themes that emerged. Saldaña citing van Manen explains the aim of phenomenology, which is to “gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our

<sup>12</sup> “Fieldnotes are the written record of the observations, jottings, full notes, intellectual ideas, and emotional reflections that are created during the fieldwork process,” (O’Reilly, p. 70).

everyday experiences” (p. 140). My research project is a phenomenological study conducted on Cholx “belonging” – what it means to belong if you are being Cholx.

I chose to examine the work of Paola Rascón and Vicko Alvarez Vega because they are Chola artistas who are gaining success in their fields and are on their way to achieving mainstream recognition. Paola is an oil painter exhibiting in mainstream institutions. Vicko is a comic book artist who has been featured in international publications such as Remezcla. Paola is from Chihuahua, Mexico. She connected with Cholas/os at her local church and invited them to be the main subjects of her paintings. Her collection Cholo at the Border is life-size oil paintings that have been exhibited in prestigious museums including Casa Chihuahua in Chihuahua City, Mexico, and the El Paso Museum of Art in El Paso, Texas. Vicko is a Texas-born Chicana living in Chicago, Illinois. Her **Scholar** Comic Books tell the story of a nerdy Chola navigating girlhood. Vicko’s work deals with themes of growing up Latinx, queerness, and processing shame, fear, and other complicated emotions. Her comic book Rosita Gets Scared is about a young undocumented girl.

This is a photo of me interviewing Paola Rascón in her art studio in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, Mexico. She is facing the camera wearing a sleek bun, dark eyeliner, a black chic sweater with a cuthole on her shoulder, black skinny jeans, and tough and fashionable white boots with black laces. Behind her over her shoulder we see her work-in-progress of a life-size Chola in a knee-length black tight skirt, a black bra, and a little black coat that is open and exposing the fierce tattoo above her breasts. Paola explains that re-creating the intricate tattoos in her oil paintings is intimidating because she doesn’t want to misrepresent the tattoo artist’s original artwork. Because she often paints Cholos shirtless, she has had to recreate many tattoos.



Figure 16.1: Photo from interview with Paola Rascón (Dec. 2019)

## RESEARCH SITES

I've conducted the majority of my research where I examined and observed the rhetoric and composition methods of two major Cholx artists with contemporary creative practices through oil paintings and comic books. First, I interviewed and shadowed Vicko Alvarez Vega in Pilsen, a neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois. Second, I observed and interviewed Paola Rascón in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua. I also conducted interviews of Cholos and Cholas from their barrios. I then interviewed a Cholo named "Jay" in El Paso, Texas, and Cholos from the O.G. Family also from El Paso of the Ascarate and Alameda neighborhood. O.G. stands for Original Gangster. The members of the O.G. Family belonged to Los Fatherless street gang of South-Central El Paso. Lastly, I interviewed a veterano originally from Juárez, Mexico, now living in Chaparral, New Mexico, as well as Claudia, a young mother who grew up in a Chola environment.

## Chicago

I travelled by plane from El Paso to Chicago. My husband is originally from Chicago and he paid his own way to accompany me and assist me with videography and photography during

my interviews. My in-laws are from Chicago and picked us up at the airport. They provided housing and meals for the first and last days of my research trip to Chicago. They are now retired and living out in the country outside of Chicago, where they raise horses. My in-laws remember being in school before schools were desegregated. They have their own experiences with being racially and economically discriminated against. It's nice to see them having the opportunity to rest and be well after a lifelong struggle of dealing with a racist and bigoted system their entire lives. Having a moment to be received by them and benefiting from horse therapy was helpful in getting situated and focused. I visited Chicago toward the end of the Fall 2019 semester. I was teaching full-time as an Assistant Professor of Practice for Chicana/o Studies at UTEP. I scheduled my research trip during a long holiday weekend. During this PhD journey my nepantleraness meant juggling roles from being a university professor, to research student writing a dissertation, to comic book author and traveling to conventions.

Feeling the harsh cold winter on my face when I landed in Chicago felt good in a way that whipped me into the role of dissertation research student. I have previously lived in Chicago, so we felt comfortable navigating public transportation and getting around the city during the interviews with Vicko and Cholx from the community of Pilsen.

## **Chihuahua**

I travelled by bus from El Paso, Texas, to Chihuahua City in Chihuahua, Mexico. In total, the bus ride was about four hours. I was nervous, but after having experienced this round-trip bus journey I realized that bus travel between these two border cities is frequent and usual. Many Chihuahuenses travel to El Paso to shop. The Ómnibus de México was comfortable. I caught the yellow transborder bus in downtown El Paso early in the morning. Again, my husband Ronnie Dukes traveled with me. I rarely travel alone, especially because of negative encounters that I

often experience when I'm by myself and appear more vulnerable to perpetrators. The Ómnibus transports people across the border to the bus station in Juárez, where you get off and catch the bus to cities throughout Mexico and further south. My trip to Chihuahua was direct.

Before you board the bus they give you a small plastic lunch sack with a sealed ham sandwich, a small bag of chips, an energy bar, and a water or soda. I did board with one suitcase, which also contained my research materials, such as a video recorder, in addition to professional attire. My luggage was put in the compartment under the bus. My carry on was my backpack with notebooks, my laptop, and writing instruments. I followed the bus route on my smartphone. There is vast desert along the route. When I arrived at the Chihuahua City bus station, we hailed an Uber to the hotel. By this point it was sunset and the sky was dark blue. I saw for the first time the giant lit cross on the Chihuahua mountains. This reminded me of the Star of the Franklin Mountains in El Paso, Texas. They appeared to be facing one another. The Star in El Paso faces south and the Cross in Chihuahua faces north. It made me feel like I was traveling in a bowl from one set of mountains on the north side of the U.S.-Mexico Border to another set of mountains south of the Border.

As we drove through neighborhoods, some of the square-looking houses in dark blues or pinks were similar to compact cement homes in Juárez barrios. The center of Chihuahua City is brightly lit with restaurants, malls, movie theatres, and shopping centers. There is a giant Wal-Mart and other American corporations such as KFC and Burger King. I was relieved to arrive safely and to a comfortable and modern newly-built American hotel. We were hungry and it was dark, so we ordered a hamburger. My dinner melted in my mouth. I immediately remembered my parents' homemade hamburgers growing up with the toasted bun and dripping mayo and a nice juicy piece of hamburger. My senses felt familiar and I thought about my mother who grew



up in a colonia, a barrio somewhere outside of Chihuahua City near Madera, Mexico. I remember visiting my abuela as a child and seeing dirt floors that were so compact it felt natural. My mother was born in Chihuahua in a barrio and I grew up in one north of Chihuahua in Chaparral, New Mexico, outside of El Paso. By allowing myself to feel these personal connections, I'm employing nontraditional research methods, at least nontraditional to the dominant culture. Culturally-speaking, my ancestors would approve of me merging my scholarly work with my spirituality and Indigenous ways of connecting with the earth and others.

The following day, Paola picked us up at the hotel. It had been a year since I saw her. We drove to her studio, which is a remodeled basement of an old oatmeal factory. It's a white building with a historic structure and a tall mechanical iron fence. The scene beyond the gate where we parked looks like a beautiful Italian image of a dilapidated historic building. When you enter Paola's studio, you are immediately met by her life-size oil paintings of Cholos from Chihuahua. Some are shirtless, while others wear white tank tops. Most have identity, cultural, and religious tattoos covering their mostly brown bodies. They look at you as you walk around the studio. They seem like protectors of Paola's precious art works, gems in the basement of an old oatmeal factory that feels like a magical surreal space. Suddenly, I forget the long bus ride as I stare into the eyes of each Cholo giant leaning against the walls of Paola's studio in pure Cholo posture fashion. Chihuahua felt like returning home even though I didn't grow up here.

## **El Paso**

I interviewed a Cholo from El Paso, Texas, called Jay, and members of the O.G. Familia. Jay discussed the poverty and criminal aspects of Cholo life in a straightforward manner. I met founding members of the O.G. Familia after seeing a discriminating tweet about them. The O.G. Familia created the *El Poderoso Tejano* mural in El Paso after the Wal-Mart mass shooting that

was fueled by white supremacy and the intent to kill Mexicans. A local news station called them “unlikely artists” and focused on their gang-related past. As previously mentioned, El Paso is situated on the border next to our sister city of Juárez, Mexico. Many El Paso residents have strong ties, often including daily commutes, with the neighboring cities of Las Cruces, New Mexico and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. The total metroplex population is estimated to be at 2.7 million, where 22% of residents aged 25 and older have bachelor’s degrees. While 30% of the population speaks only English, 67% speaks Spanish or Spanish and English (U.S. Census, 2017). El Paso is also home to Fort Bliss, one of the largest (39,000 military personnel) army bases in the U.S. I was born in El Paso and so was my dad. Having had the opportunity to visit Chicago and Chihuahua, in contrast, El Paso feels harsher and more oppressive toward Cholas, Cholas, and Cholx.

### **Chaparral**

I met Tonio and Claudia through my cuñada. Tonio grew up in the barrios of Juárez, Mexico. He now lives in Chaparral, New Mexico. He is mostly retired from working. Claudia lives in Chaparral. I grew up in Chaparral, so it was especially important for me to capture Cholo and Chola perspectives from my own barrio. Chaparral is a sprawling desert town with mobile homes and mostly one-level cement houses scattered throughout the sandy landscape. A few main streets are paved. There is no uniformity to any of it. It is a small desert oasis surrounded by mountains. It is a working-class community with three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There is small store called the Mailing Place where you can buy stamps and mail packages. There is one major grocery store owned by a family that has been living in Chaparral since Chaparral first started becoming developed. The only corporate presence is a recently established Subway restaurant and a Fina gas station. There are close to

7,000 people living in Chaparral. My community does not have a local library, but we do have a prison called The Otero County Prison Facility, a privately managed prison for men. The facility opened in 2003 and has a capacity of 1420.

**Artist Participants: Paola Rascón, Vicko Alvarez, and Elvira Carrizal-Dukes**

In joining the ranks of Chicana Feminist scholars (Leon, Zepeda, and Saldívar-Hull), I examined nontraditional spaces for this project. Vicko Alvarez was born in Texas and is a Chicagoan Xicanx. She writes and draws her own comics featuring a pre-teen tough Chola growing up in front of our eyes and questioning the dominant oppressive ways of living that she finds herself in. I first met Vicko at a Cartoon Crossroads Columbus (CXC) comics and graphic novels event in Ohio 2018. I asked her then if I could interview her for my dissertation project. Vicko took some art classes in high school and one photography class in college. Other than that, Vicko shared that she's learned how to use design programs through YouTube. She started doing comics as a way to process all the pressure she felt from her parents growing up. Creating comics helped her move forward, but it's also given her a focus in her activism work teaching and mentoring young people from under-resourced communities. Vicko first created **Scholar** Comics when she was a student at University of Chicago. She was bonding with her friend Valeria who was a student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. They both felt out of place at mostly white populated universities and met through MEChA, which stands for Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán). Vicko describes her college experience as nerding out, however, she says she never lost the grit that she grew up with. As a result, Vicko created her first character, **Scholar**, a nerdy Chicana from the hood.

Paola Rascón is a frontera Mexicana, a professional working artist and life-size oil painter from Chihuahua, Chihuahua, Mexico. She paints stunning Cholos and Cholas in

Rembrandt-style using modern mixed design methods. I first met Paola at her U.S. premiere of her “Cholo on the Border” exhibit at El Paso Museum of Art in El Paso, Texas, in 2018. I was introduced to Paola by then curator Dr. Patrick Shaw Cable. We had dinner and I asked Paola if I she would be willing to allow me to interview her in Chihuahua. She immediately said yes. Paola continues to take art courses when she can in nearby San Miguel Allende, which is considered to be a rich educational and cultural experience. After she earned her Psychology degree she moved to New York City. She made contacts through colleagues in Chihuahua. She enrolled in courses at The National Academy of Design and Fine Arts in painting and drawing. She learned about figurative drawing. She also worked as an assistant to contemporary artist Ray Smith, best known for combining elements of cubism, printmaking, art history, and collage. Paola describes this experience having a major impact on her work today. She says she learned so much from that experience. She met her husband in Chihuahua and now lives and works in her hometown with their families. She continued art courses at Bellas Artes in Chihuahua and earned a specialization in painting. She works with two young female assistants who help Paola with the commercial art that helps to fund her personal projects. After more than ten years of education combined with professional working experiences, Paola is no longer a beginner. Her paintings are highly valued.

As for me, I’ve always been an “unexpected” writer. It was around first grade when I was called into the principal’s office because my teacher was concerned with my writing. They called my parents. When they explained to my dad that my stories featured scary scenes with dogs jumping out of windows, he laughed and told them I was a huge Scooby-Doo fan and I was writing episodes for Scooby. In fourth grade, I wrote and made two original books using my original drawings, story, cardboard, wrapping paper, and glue. It was also in elementary school

when I made my first shoebox film using paper towel rolls and long sheets of paper with hand-drawn storyboards. My first journalism writing assignment was in fifth grade for my elementary school's "Roadrunner Express." I had my first dark room experience processing black and white photos in junior high when I worked for the school yearbook. I was consistently involved in extra-curricular activities and electives that involved writing, filming, and photography. By the time I got to high school, I became the yearbook and newspaper editor-in-chief. At the same time I was still hanging out with Cholos and Cholas, as well as my nerdy friends. I was nepantlera from a young age before I knew what nepantlera meant. Fortunately, because I had very strong creative interests, I was able to avoid getting into negative situations. I managed to survive and my high school guidance counselor recognized that. Before meeting with her, I had not even thought about life after high school. After having lost a best friend to murder in high school, I wasn't really excited about anything. It's a good thing there were others in my life who had positive thoughts about my future. As a result, I was able to attain higher education and I now have the privilege to write about my unique experience.

With this research project I set out to interview both Vicko and Paola in their neighborhoods to ask them questions about their Cholx art. I also ventured into their communities to meet and dialogue with local Cholos and Cholas. Through their testimonios, I will show how Cholx artifacts and writings illuminate community struggle, strength, and pride through a diverse range of artistic methods. In addition to the artifacts and writings of Paola and Vicko and the testimonios of Cholos and Cholas in their neighborhoods, I employ my own experience as well growing up in El Paso and Chaparral. In talking with these artists and reflecting on my own experiences, I realized we are Cholx artists. We demonstrate Cholx Activism through our art and writings, but also through our beliefs and knowledge about Cholx.

Table 1.1: Cholx Artistas in this case study

Artist	Modality	Topic	Product
Paola Rascón	Oil Paintings	Cholo/a Portraits	Imagery
Vicko Alvarez Vega	Comics	Chola Scholar	Story, words, dialogue
Elvira Carrizal-Dukes	Academia	Chola Scholarship	Knowledge

### **Cholo, Chola, Cholx Participants**

Vicko and Paola were my key informants<sup>13</sup> and connection to Cholx in their barrios. In Chicago, Vicko introduced me to and I interviewed Luz, Skeemer, and Zeye and also got to walk around and get to know the neighborhood of Pilsen and the infamous 18<sup>th</sup> Street. Luz is Cholx, originally from Oxnard, California, currently living in Pilsen in Chicago. She’s a writer, a DJ, an activist against domestic violence, and a photographer whose work centers Lowriders. Her Chola look includes the eyeliner and big earrings, long dark hair, and retro-Chola fashion with flared pants and tank tops. She shared her experience growing up with Chola cousins. Skeemer is a tattoo artist born and raised in Pilsen in Chicago. His family members are Cholos. He shares that people think there are no Cholos in Chicago. Skeemer discusses how for him being Cholo is not just an aesthetic that he gets to take off at the end of the day. Zeye grew up in Logan Square in Chicago. She’s a barber and a mural artist. She shares that all her cousins were gangbangers and that’s how she got into graffiti art. She talks about growing up in a violent culture, but how today in her own adult life and as an artist she mixes Hinduism with her Chola identity to help her live a more peaceful life.

<sup>13</sup> “A key informant is an individual who becomes central to the ethnography for one of a number of possible reason” (O’Reilly, p. 132). A role of key informants is to gain access to a group.

In Chihuahua City, I met Raul, Micke, Paul, Cristian, Casco, Dinamita, Spider, Shecko, Carmen, Danny, Daniel, Kecko, Shegar, Black, Carlos, Gerardo, and Carlos. They discuss as a group how they became Cholos around the ages thirteen and fourteen. They started being Cholo in the barrio with the same people who dressed Cholo. One Cholo commented that times used to be much more difficult and he struggled a lot. There was more violence in certain barrios because Cholos defended their territories. There were alcoholics and drug addicts and so there was violence. Now it's much more different they explain. They are a group of Cholos/as from different barrios united in the Hermandad Movimiento, which they say is about uniting with your people. They fundraise together to build lowriders together because it's an expensive hobby. The group discussed how they grew up and now when they see the violence in their own families people start changing because they don't want that life anymore. So people slowly start changing. The Cholx believe that other people have a bad concept of them because they don't know them. The Brotherhood discussed how there are all types of Cholos. There are those who dress like them and do bad things and because of those people, the Cholx get stereotyped. A further analysis of the interviews with the Cholos/as from Chihuahua shows how people only see the tattoos, but they don't really get to know the Cholx.

In El Paso, Texas, I interviewed members of the O.G. Familia and a Cholo called Jay. In Chaparral, NM, I interviewed Tonio and Claudia. Members of the O.G. Familia work in mechanic work and a t-shirt business. Jay is a diesel mechanic. Tonio is mostly retired but does occasional yard work. Claudia has worked in maquiladoras and doing nails. These interviews cover the struggles experienced in the barrio and the importance of strong family ties.

## DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The ethnographic methods used in this qualitative study included attending events where I met the artists I interviewed, participant observation, video recording semi-structured interviews, filming and photographing Paola, Vicko, and the Cholx in their communities or studio. I also took handwritten notes during the interviews. In addition, I gathered photos from the artistas' websites and social media. During the two years leading up to picking a dissertation topic, I attended the *Cholo At The Border* exhibition in El Paso summer 2018, where I was introduced to Paola by the curator of the exhibit, the late Dr. Patrick Shaw Cable. The topic of the Cholo was immediately of interest to me. I attended Paola's artist talk and after the museum event, I had the opportunity to speak with Paola personally during dinner, in which only Paola and her husband Pepe, Patrick, my husband Ronnie, and myself were present. I asked some informal pre-interview questions about Paola's work and before dinner ended I asked Paola if I she would be willing to be a subject in this dissertation project. I'm grateful she said yes. This meeting took place one year before I traveled to Chihuahua to conduct interviews in person. During that time, I stayed in touch with Paola, especially the months leading up to my visit to Chihuahua. We communicated through email and What's App.

A few months later in September 2018, I attended SÕL-CON: The Brown, Black, & Indigenous Comics Expo at The Ohio State University, which also included the CXC/ Cartoon Crossroads Columbus comic con in the same weekend. My husband and I were invited to attend to represent our independent comic book publishing company called DUKEScomics.com. I learned about SÕL-CON in May 2018 when I was accepted to attend The Digital Media and Composition Institute with the Department of English at The Ohio State University. I was able to participate thanks to a Cindy and Dickie Selfe DMAC fellowship. During this week-long



institute we examined the effective use of digital media in college composition classrooms, as we explored a range of contemporary digital literacy practices – alphabetic, visual, audio, and multimodal. As I became acquainted with my colleagues and they learned about my comic book work, I became aware of SÕL-CON and my peer Nicole M. Pizarro Colón put me in direct contact with Dr. Frederick Luis Aldama, a Distinguished University Professor at OSU who is a founding member of SÕL-CON. Professor Aldama immediately extended an invitation to us and a few months later we returned to The Ohio State University for the 2018 SÕL-CON/CXC comic con. It was at CXC at the Columbus Metropolitan Main Library where I met Vicko Alvarez Vega in person. I had already been aware of Vicko’s ScholaR comics and was already a huge fan for at least a year, so when I saw Vicko at CXC I was star-struck. She is a brilliant artist and writer who I admire very much. It was at her table that I introduced myself and asked if I could feature her as a subject in my dissertation because I saw the connection to Paola’s work that also features Cholx. Vicko said yes and I’m grateful to her for that. I stayed in touch with Vicko through Instagram and text messages.

Originally, I considered including a third artist, an award-winning Chicana filmmaker named Aurora Guerrero, a brilliant writer and director of films. I first became aware of Aurora when I was a film student at Columbia in NYC. In 2005, she directed a short film *Pura Lengua* about a young Xicana who is brutalized by police for being queer. In 2012, she wrote and directed her first feature-length film called *Mosquita y Mari* about two Chicana high schoolers assigned as study partners who find a bond that confuses them at times. The film was nominated for the Grand Jury Award at Milan International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and Outstanding Film at the GLAAD Media Awards in 2013. Aurora’s work represents LGBTQ communities through a Chicanx perspective. I reached out to Aurora and she agreed to an interview.

Unfortunately, I didn't receive enough research funding to be able to travel to Long Beach, CA, and was not able to interview her. However, Aurora's work definitely represents transgressive practices, social justice rhetorics, and Xicanx representation. My hope is to interview her in the future as I continue to research and write about Chicanx Cinema in my work. However, as a result, this narrowed the focus of my dissertation to artwork by, with, and about Cholx.

My IRB was approved the summer of 2019. I traveled to Chicago to interview Vicko in November 2019. I traveled to Chihuahua to interview Paola in December 2019. The remainder of the interviews in El Paso and Chaparral took place February 2020. As previously mentioned, I met the O.G. Familia because of the negative tweet I read about them. I personally know Jay and reached out to him, however, he asked that I call him by a different name. For the interviews in Chaparral, I reached out to my *cuñada* (sister-in-law) who is also from Chaparral and she introduced me to Tonio and Claudia. All my participants provided consent, please see Appendix: D to view the consent form. I received permission from my subjects to film them and use their real names and images of their artwork. Jay is the only participant whose name I changed and whose image will not be shared in this project. I explained to all my participants that the purpose of my project was to discuss the stereotypical images of Cholx in American mainstream media, to discuss what is Cholx, and to examine Cholx philosophy and consciousness.

## **INTERVIEW DATA COLLECTION**

In total, I recorded approximately fifteen hours of video footage from interviews. I borrowed the digital video camera and lavalier microphones from the English Department at UTEP. I interviewed Vicko twice on two different days. The first day, we met at Jumping Bean café on 18<sup>th</sup> street in Pilsen. We met for lunch. Ronnie assisted with filming and taking photos,

while I asked questions. After lunch, we grabbed coffee to go and walked down 18<sup>th</sup> street walking in and out of vintage shops, where Vicko likes to shop. As we walked and visited the stores, I asked Vicko questions. She wore the lavalier microphone, so she was able to walk freely, while I was still able to capture quality sound. I liked this approach to interviewing because Vicko was in her comfort zone, I got to know her by learning about her interest in vintage shopping, and we were able to capture interesting video footage of her in her community of Chicago. Nothing is standard in these vintage shops. Everything was unique, different, and creative just like Vicko. Her partner Lester Rey, a musician, joined us and he's also very unique and different. All of the places I visited with Vicko felt safe and warm and like an escape from the hustle and concrete of the neighborhood. After a few hours of vintage shopping, Vicko announced that she had a hair appointment and she invited us to tag along. I was surprised, but not surprised, to learn that Vicko's hair appointment was at Heart of Pilsen 22 Barbershop in Pilsen Chicago. Vicko and I were the only females there. All the barbers and clients were male. As I observed Vicko on the barber's chair in her Timberland boots, she was clearly in her comfort zone as the barber shaved the side of her head and created designs with his razor. The television monitor on the wall was playing reggaeton music videos. It was a very chill environment. After her shave, the barber offered us all a tequila shot. It was at this point in my observations of Vicko that helped me see how Xicanas, like Vicko and Paola and perhaps myself, embrace their femininity while at the same time flexing strong male energy. After the barbershop, we visited another barbershop and tattoo shop and this is where I met Skeemer Chorne. Vicko introduced me and told him about my project. He immediately expressed an interest, so we agreed to meet the next day for an interview.

The next day, I conducted my second interview with Vicko, which was a sit-down interview at her studio located at the Chicago Art Department in Pilsen. Before I sat down to interview Vicko, Skeemer arrived, as well as Luz Magdaleno Flores. Luz brought cans of beer to the interview and I took it as a sign of breaking bread. She was so sweet and hospitable, saying it was all she had in her fridge. After my interview with Skeemer, he mentioned a Chola named Zeye and agreed to introduce me to her. The next day Zeye and I communicated through text and I was able to meet up with her at yet another barber shop in Chicago. She was getting ready to paint a mural in the barbershop that I met her at. I'm grateful I was able to interview her right before heading to the airport.

A month later, in the middle of December, I traveled to Chihuahua City by bus to interview Paola. We arrived on a Tuesday evening. On Wednesday, we met Paola and her husband for lunch at a restaurant where her childhood friend is the Chef. We got reacquainted, since it had been a year since we last saw each other in person. We made a plan for interviews. On Thursday, I interviewed Paola at her studio in the old oatmeal factory. Paola preferred to conduct the interview in Spanish, which was fine with me. The video interview with Paola is the longest. We sat for about four hours. I learned about Paola's extensive research on Cholos/as and professional training in painting, as well as her international travel experiences. It was also the hardest interview to transcribe because I wanted to make sure I understood every word and sentence. The transcription of Paola's interview is in Spanish, as well as the English translation. That evening we had dinner at a different restaurant in downtown Chihuahua, but where Paola's same childhood friend is also the Chef, so we got to see him again and eat his delicious food. Paola also took us to a tiny comic book shop where we bought small pocket comics that are no longer being printed. She communicated with Raul, a Cholo featured in one of her paintings. He

agreed to meet with us the next day. On Friday, Paola took us back to downtown Chihuahua, where she gave us a personal tour of one of her husband Pepe's latest architectural projects. Pepe is a highly accomplished architect. He studied in Italy and has proudly designed many major buildings in Chihuahua City. That evening, Paola drove us to meet Raul and members of the Hermandad Movimiento.

I asked Raul how they wanted to be interviewed, individually or as a group. They asked if they could be interviewed as a group. I was a little nervous at first conducting the interview surrounded by a group of mostly Cholos and one Chola, but they immediately made me feel comfortable and I also knew that I didn't have much time to spend with them, so I just got straight into it and started asking questions. After each question, whoever from the group felt like answering would just start talking and I would walk closer to them to put the microphone near their mouth so we could capture good sound. We met in the evening at a park and the sun set as we began the interview. The park lights came on and the digital video camera I used is professional and handles filming at night pretty well. Something that especially stood out to me during the interview was a police patrol car that passed by. My experience in America told me that they were going to stop and start asking us questions, but they didn't. They kept driving. I had to ask the Cholos about that and this is when they shared that they have a mostly positive relationship with police in their community. In fact, the police attend some of their community events on Sundays.

I used the same video camera and lavalier microphone to record the members of the O.G. Familia, Jay, Tonio, and Claudia. I met the O.G. Familia one evening after work hours. We met at the *El Poderoso Tejano* mural in the Ascarate and Alameda neighborhood. They also chose to be interviewed together. I interviewed Jay in his home in El Paso, Texas. I only recorded audio

during this interview. I interviewed Tonio and Claudia in Claudia's home in Chaparral. Finally, the interview with Jadira Gurulé, Curator at the Art Museum at the National Hispanic Cultural Center, was conducted through email. For a list of interview questions, please see Appendix A, B, and C.

### **Vicko Alvarez Vega – Personal and Educational background**

Vicko was born and raised in Dallas, Texas. She left Dallas after high school to attend the University of Chicago. She describes her childhood as a household where survival comes first. From as early as third grade, Vicko already had an understanding that her role in her family was to make sure that they were all okay. The family's needs came before hers. Vicko discussed at great length her struggles as a young person and how that has impacted her work with young people today. She attended a selective enrollment middle school and ended up liking school so much because she said it was the one place where she felt she had choices. It was also where she learned to journal and draw, which is what helped her cope with some of her emotions. She even stayed after school whenever she could because she said it was the only place she could relax. When I asked Vicko about one of her illustrations titled Presumida, in defining what presumida means she shared how she was a hater when she was little. It was a negative word that meant show-off. She called rich girls presumidas, but as an adult she now realizes it was because she didn't have the cute clothes and make-up that some of the economically-advantaged girls in her school had. Because of her parents low income, Vicko grew up conservatively, so anything that was extra she considered showing off. She now says it's because of her upbringing that she's had to unlearn some things. Vicko's parents are originally from Guanajuato, Mexico, from a small farm town, where her grandparents are from as well. She is the middle child of five siblings. Her older siblings were born and raised in Mexico and they immigrated to Dallas at a young age with

Vicko's parents. Because her parents were recent migrants to a new city and learning English, Vicko shared that her siblings and her were mostly left on their own to figure things out. Vicko also shared that her father was dealing with personal issues that also made living at home difficult. After high school, she went straight to Chicago at first against her parent's wishes. Vicko has now lived in Chicago for over thirteen years and she now considers it her first home. One of Vicko's first jobs in Chicago was union organizing. This is where she became very connected with the community and also practiced her Spanish-speaking skills. Vicko attended graduate school for a short time to become a history teacher, but she didn't complete the program. Instead, she turned to her comics and used her experience in organizing and graduate school to inform her work creating educational content. During one of our walks around the neighborhood, Vicko's mom called and asked whose male voices were in the background. Vicko laughed when she shared that with me and also said that her relationship with her mom has improved, especially now that comics has provided Vicko an outlet to work through her feelings and emotions. And because it has worked for her, it is a major part of her artmaking and activism with young people.

### **Paola Rascón – Personal and Educational background**

Paola grew up in Chihuahua where she attended a traditional Catholic school. She has one sister. Her parents are also from Chihuahua and they live not too far from Paola. She shared that she has a strong bond with her family who instill respect and strong cultural values. Paola began taking art classes at a high school in Pennsylvania in the U.S. She was a foreign exchange student completing her senior year in high school age seventeen. Paola shared that she had a great art teacher who taught Paola well and was patient with her. This was Paola's first contact with drawing and she loved it. Her teacher encouraged her to continue working on her intuitive

art skills. Paola continued painting as a hobby, while going to college. She began exhibiting her work and this prompted her to see art in a more professional manner. She continued painting and completed her degree in psychology. Paola shared that she grew up very free. She said she and her sister were always outside playing in the neighborhood. They would come home to drink water and then go back out into the colonia. They would visit neighbors and friends and be all up and down the colonia. She remembers it as living without fear, but today she doesn't let her kids live that freely. The violence in Mexico has changed the city in respect to one's liberty. Paola says she can't give her children the same kind of freedom because a lot of values have been lost, a sentiment that I heard repeated in other interviews during this research process. As an artist, Paola feels that we have to express all these issues in our art, so she does.

### **Cholas and Cholos – Personal background**

I spent the most time interviewing Paola and Vicko who are my main subjects. As a result, I did not have as much time interviewing the Cholos/as/x for this project. My interview questions for the Cholos/as/x focused on defining Cholos/as/x and Cholx Aesthetics and Philosophy. Therefore, I do not have as much personal information about them, such as their educational background or their family life growing up. In Chihuahua, a major part of the conversation discussed the Cholos' rite of passage and how young Cholos start with a bike and as you get older you transition to a car. They also emphasized how working on the bikes and lowriders is very hard work, effort, and expensive. They enjoy the challenge of finding the parts you need to fix up an old car and finding the exact year that you're looking for. The Cholos commented that the majority of the car parts are found in junkyards, but now they can also be found on Facebook. The Cholos said they teach and pass on this lifestyle to their kids because they want to show them something positive. "At school, they may be told that their parents are



delinquents or drug addicts, so we want to teach our kids to have pride,” said one of the Cholos from Chihuahua. They get them involved in the bikes and lowriders to give them a positive outlet. This, the Cholos say, is a positive side of the Cholo Identity, Arts, and Culture.

In El Paso, I interviewed John, David, and Jaime, members of the O.G. Familia. Again, I didn't have much time with them, but I did learn a few things about their personal upbringing. John and Jaime are brothers. They grew up in the Ascarate barrio. Their friend David is from the El Paso Lower Valley, also a low-income community. John and Jaime mentioned that they had a younger brother who was stabbed and killed at age 12 in their front yard in their mother's arms. I first got in touch with John through his niece Cassy on Twitter. She was the one who posted a tweet in response to a negative tweet about her dad and uncle. A local news station in El Paso described them as unlikely artists of the *El Poderoso Tejano* mural and instead focused on their gang-related past. In response, Cassy wrote “Unlikely artist, my uncle and dad worked hard on this so put some respect on their name, John Ramirez and Jamie Hernandez Jr.” (2019). Her tweet went viral and received over sixty-four thousand likes, twenty-three thousand retweets, and sixty-one comments that were in support of the O.G. Familia. Again, the mural was made in memory of the Cielo Vista Walmart mass shooting victims in El Paso. Although some members of the O.G. Familia do have a criminal past and some have done time in prison, similar to the Cholos in Chihuahua, they find themselves at a different stage and age in their life. John expressed how he's working hard for his family and kids, but sometimes his patience is tested. He was laid off at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic and his boss was refusing to pay him his last check. John expressed to me that he felt his boss was taking advantage of him because of his criminal past.

I do know a little more about the Cholo called Jay for this project because we're from the same neighborhood. He dropped out of high school, but eventually received his G.E.D. He took some training courses to become a diesel mechanic. He spoke very candidly about the criminal life of Cholos because he himself participated in some of those crimes. Previously, he spent six years in prison. Since he's been out, he's worked extremely hard to stay out of trouble. He's married and has children. However, he's learned that it's difficult to get a good paying job when you have a felony on your record. As a result, he works out of town, approximately five hours away. He spends the week living away from home. He comes home most weekends to see his wife and kids. He explains that for the moment that's what he has to do to survive and provide for his family.

Tonio is the oldest of all the Cholos I interviewed. He's in his sixties and a Cholo veterano, meaning he lived the Cholo life. He moved to Ciudad Juárez, the sister city of El Paso, Texas, after he served in the military in Puebla, Mexico. He lives in my hometown Chaparral. He started wearing the Cholo and Pachuco style in the early eighties. In his interview, he reminisced about the old days when there was more respect for elders and veteranos. Claudia also lives in Chaparral. She completed high school and has children. She talked about the family aspect of the Cholo lifestyle. She says it's something she hopes to pass on to her children. Both she and Tonio agreed that not all Cholos/as are in gangs, but that those who are in gangs are about protecting their territories and their barrios. They want to protect their communities from any outside aggression.

## **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION OR FIELDWORK**

Both Vicko and Paola discussed the importance of community, family, and art. Shadowing them, I was able to see it. For Vicko, her Chicago Community is her family. I was able to see her friendships throughout the community of Pilsen on or near 18<sup>th</sup> Street. Walking around the neighborhood, I was able to observe her very close ties to the people and artists of Chicago. We visited barber shops, tattoo shops, coffee shops, vintage shops, restaurants, Harbee Liquor & Tavern where Vicko's partner Lester Rey was the featured DJ, and Pilsen Outpost art gallery. Everywhere we went, people knew Vicko's name. We also drove around in the same vehicle. While Lester drove, I was able to video and audio record Vicko in the front seat answering some questions. Ronnie and I sat in the backseat. Vicko had a lavalier microphone on. Ronnie filmed, while I took notes and reviewed my questions. Vicko pointed out murals and public art and talked about gentrification in the Pilsen neighborhood in the car rides. I got to know the community more through Vicko.

I spent the most time observing Paola because I was able to spend an extra two days with her in Chihuahua. It was after finals week, so I had more time for travel. She drove us around the city from the hotel to her home to her studio to different restaurants for meals and conversation. I highly recommend car rides with subjects you are interviewing. With both Vicko and Paola, I observed them being fully at ease and comfortable in their environment, especially because it was their barrio that we were driving around in. It also gave me the opportunity to build rapport<sup>14</sup> in a short time. I even met Paola's parents and other family members. Family for Paola is a major focus. When I first walked into her studio, I was excited to see the life-size paintings of Cholos

<sup>14</sup> Rapport is fieldwork that "entails a long-term commitment on the part of both researcher and participants, which involves establishing reciprocal relationships based on mutual trust and understanding, or rapport" (O'Reilly, p. 174).

leaning against the walls. As I looked around the room with the oil-painted Cholos all looking back at me, it felt like being welcomed by a family. I felt fully at ease and comfortable surrounded by Paola's artwork.

### **Vicko: At the Barber**

Vicko shared that her family called her Vicky when she was a kid, but then her brother started calling her Vicko because it sounded like a boy's name and he was teasing her. Instead of being insulted, she said she reclaimed the name and is now only known as Vicko. This toughness that Vicko exhibits comes through in her work and in person. My favorite observation of Vicko was at Heart of Pilsen 22 Barbershop when she got the side of her head shaved. In this picture you don't see Vicko's Timberland boots or hoop earrings (she took them off for the shave), but you do see Vicko sitting in the barber's chair fully at ease and comfortable in this male-dominated environment, while the barber shaved his artistic designs into Vicko's already close-shaved head. Here we see Vicko flexing her male strength, while getting a shave so she can look cute later. This mix of femininity and masculinity is a characteristic that I observed in the Cholas that I met.

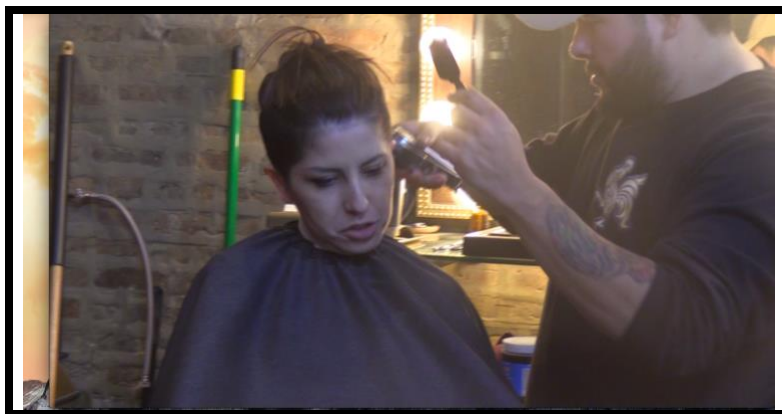


Figure 17.1: Photo of Vicko at Pilsen's Finest Barbershop (Nov. 2019)

### **Paola Rascón: Cholo Exhibition in Chihuahua City**

In rasquachando con la comunidad, Paola first met the Cholos who posed in her paintings at a church prayer group. “Cholos are religious. They are believers,” says Paola. The premiere exhibition of the Cholo At The Border series in Chihuahua City at Casa Chihuahua, was very well attended. The Cholos came to the exhibit but dressed not as Cholos. They didn’t want to feel like outcasts, but then people started recognizing them and asking to take photos with them. Paola says the Cholos’ heads came up. After that the Cholos started going to the exhibit dressed to the nines as Cholos. They’re pride was lifted. They felt accepted. They felt valued and proud after the opening exhibit. Many schools took students to see the exhibit as well. For Paola, her work is a form of teaching about this subculture and to counter the stereotype of a Cholo as just being violent. Raul of the Hermandad Movimiento shared with me that they felt respected and honored and that they weren’t expecting that. For Paola, she explained that her paintings led to discussions about Cholos/as in an effort to learn more and gain understanding.

Paola has always had an interest in painting figures and capturing their feelings and inner essence. She gains this insight after getting to know the Cholos and hearing their life experiences. She tries to capture the individual essence as well as the group essence of the Cholos. The interviewing process of getting to know her subjects before she paints them is the part in the art-making process that Paola says she favors most saying it provokes her interest in wanting to transfer that knowledge onto canvas. In Spanish, Paola expressed “We are who we are because of society, because we felt attacked in another country, so this is what we became. The oppressive dominant culture in the U.S. responds by saying the Cholos were illegal in the first place.” Paola argues that it may not be direct discrimination that we experience, but it’s felt

through other systematic ways. Paola's views are a great example of Cholxing. Her Chola activism is evident in her visual and verbal discourse. Paola shared that she believes art can be one form of teaching about the subculture and for her, this was an opportunity to bring understanding to all the layers of being Cholo and not just the violent stereotype.

#### **PARTICIPANT ARTWORK – PAOLA RASCÓN AND VICKO ALVAREZ**

For Vicko and I who are comic book authors and Xicanx, we're dealing with major odds against us. The entire comics market is 69% white, 12% Latino, 10% African-American and 8% Asian; which is whiter than the rest of America, but just as black, with fewer Latino customers. Because the overall superhero comics are 78% male and white, it's no surprise that the Chicana population is not a frequent customer. Therefore, access through cultural and gender representation is not commonly available. And for artists such as Vicko and myself, access to mainstream industries is a constraint. So how do we do it? How do we insert ourselves into these narratives? We start by doing, with or without mainstream support. This may lead to recognition which may lead to future opportunities and support from investors and production companies, as well as mass distribution.

In research conducted by CUNY's Guttman College in the fall of 2016, the study found that 80.5 percent of artists represented by NYC's top galleries are white. Latino artists are the most underrepresented demographic, making up only 1.2 percent of artists represented by New York galleries despite being the largest minority group in the U.S. and 16 percent of the nation's total population. Although Paola has a classical style training, she exercises nontraditional methods and subjects. She felt a form of censorship when a gallery in Monterrey told her that the

theme of her work was too strong and that if she changed it, her work would sell. Paola said she doesn't feel inclined to change her subject just to make sells.

A goal of Paola's is to elevate nontraditional themes, such as Cholos. Therefore, she mixes her classical training methods with contemporary techniques. She creates oil-based portraits and then tears it apart and plays with it to add different intentions to the work. She set out to paint Cholos in the style of Baroque portraits, where subjects are set against dark backgrounds and strong lighting is on their faces. "Baroque paintings were meant to capture the aristocracy, the nobles, and those they considered important people to show their economic status" says Paola. The lighting shined on their jewelry and other ornaments within the portrait and represented high status. Paola wanted to give this same value to Cholos "to this social community because it was very honorable how it started" expressed Paola.

Paola uses the same intent of Baroque artists, but with Cholos. When discussing the lighting in her paintings, Paola shared that her painting style brings light to the Cholo's face, clothing, tattoos, their eyes, and Cholo phrases such as "*Qué honda vato?*" Depending on how you say it, the tone of your voice and any hand gestures, this phrase can mean anything from "what's up" to "do you got a problem?" She said she wanted to resaltar, meaning to make stand out, all the Cholo faces, the attitude, everything they wear, and tattoos. "I wanted to be sure you could see it," says Paola. Currently, she's playing with gold foil material because it's symbolic of achievement in all areas of life. She's incorporating it as a theme to continue to further develop the theme of the Cholo and Chola.

The way the Cholos pose for Paola is entirely up to the Cholo. She says she met them on their terms. They would pose for her and she would take hundreds of photos. Her only prompt asked the Cholos to show her Cholo attitude and that they did. Although, she also shared that

some of the Cholos she interviewed were shy and didn't move that much. But there are ones that wanted to show everything, what they are, as told through the images and stories in their tattoo-covered bodies. A common tattoo on Cholo bodies is the happy and sad faces, which represent you are happy, but you never know when you're going to die. "So you say good-bye to your family every morning because you don't know if you're going to come back," Paola explains. They also have tattoos that show any gang affiliations and Mexican cultural symbols. Their tattoos show very strong Mexican identity. Cholos with all their body show where they are coming from. Paola explains the attitude as "I was born here and this is where I'm coming from" as the intended strong visual statement even between other Cholos.

This original painting by Paola features a Cholo standing and facing the audience. His arms are down but spread out a little in a popular Cholo stance. The purpose of this pose is to show the tattoo work on his bare chest, stomach, and arms. His tattoos include religious figures Jesus and Mary, roses, Cholo icons such as the happy now and cry later drama masks and the Mi Vida Loca slogan, a soldadera – an armed Mexican woman during the Revolution, as well as Indigenous-Aztec figures and the number thirteen. The lighting is bright on his upper torso. He wears a blue bandana around his forehead with text that reads Sureño, which represents his family, blue jeans, a black belt, and white sneakers. The background is pitch black. And in pure Paola style of mixing methods, the Cholo is surrounded by white outlined dragon figures, angel wings, and a halo. Paola says these figures represent the monsters that surround the Cholo, but at the same time he has protection with the wings and halo. The tattoo art on the Cholo's body and his pose serve as an open-book introduction to the viewer, as if to say this is who I am, this is my culture, my history, my religious beliefs, and most importantly, take it or leave it.



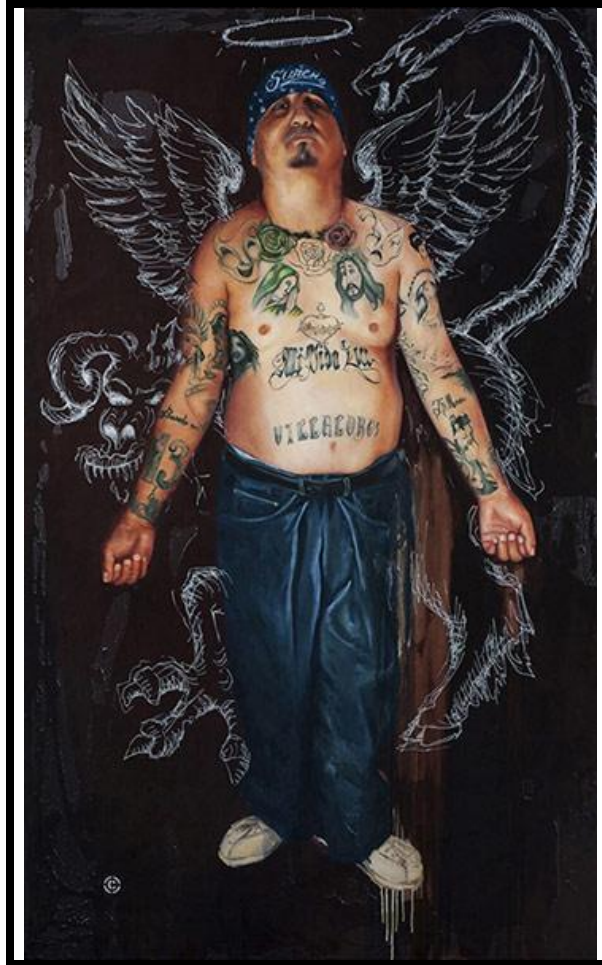


Figure 18.1: Original painting by Paola Rascón

#### **PARTICIPANT WRITING – PAOLA RASCÓN AND VICKO ALVAREZ**

One of my favorite comics by Vicko is one where her character **ScholaR** demonstrates a great deal of consciousness in regard to women's rights. She questions women's subjugated role in society and illustrates how these values and beliefs are taught to us by mainstream media and our parents. In the first frame of this three-frame comic, we see a close-up of **ScholaR** wearing a beanie and reading a book. We see the top half of her face, as her eyes stare directly back at us. In the second frame, we see a wide shot of **ScholaR** sitting on the couch still reading her book. She looks toward the television where she hears dialogue in Spanish coming from a novela, Spanish soap operas – the most popular ones are aired in the evenings. Vox Creative reported

that there are 5.7 million average weekly telenovela viewers with about 3.1 million between the ages 18 and 49 and are both men and women. “It's what's called a four-quadrant audience: younger and older, male and female. Which means that as the Latino population continues to grow, telenovelas will only become more popular,” (Vox, 2020). The dialogue coming from the television is in Spanish. A woman says “William Eduardo de La Luz Ferrari! I have my money, my house, my kids, my name-brand clothes, my own business, but without you....I'm nothing.” Scholar's response is “What?” She's obviously at a young age because as she sits on the couch, her feet don't reach the ground. What stands out to me about this is that this dialogue distracted **ScholaR** from her book and then provoked a response that signifies resistance. In the last frame of this three-panel comic, we see an even wider shot of the scene. This time, it's revealed that **ScholaR**'s mom is in the background washing dishes. We see her apron tied behind her back. The mom speaks first in this frame. She speaks in Spanish as she says, “**ScholaR**! Come help me in the kitchen. It's time to learn to cook, so you can cook for your husband when you grow up.” **ScholaR**'s response to her mom is “WHAT?!?” in all caps with two question marks and one exclamation, which again signifies **ScholaR**'s resistance to what she's learning on television and to what she's being taught by her mom. This time **ScholaR** looks directly at us, her bright eyes shining at us and expressing vulnerability and confusion, almost as if she's asking for a friend, as if she's asking us “Do you hear what I hear?” **ScholaR**'s consciousness, especially at such a young age, is transgressive because we see a little girl resisting and questioning her environment and the oppressive rhetoric that is being taught to her through both ears. On one ear, mainstream media is telling her she's nothing without a man. In the other ear, her mother is telling her to learn how to please a man. If 3.1 million young people are gaining knowledge from novelas that

advance gender stereotypes, imagine the Consciousness that may happen if 3.1 million young people read this comic.

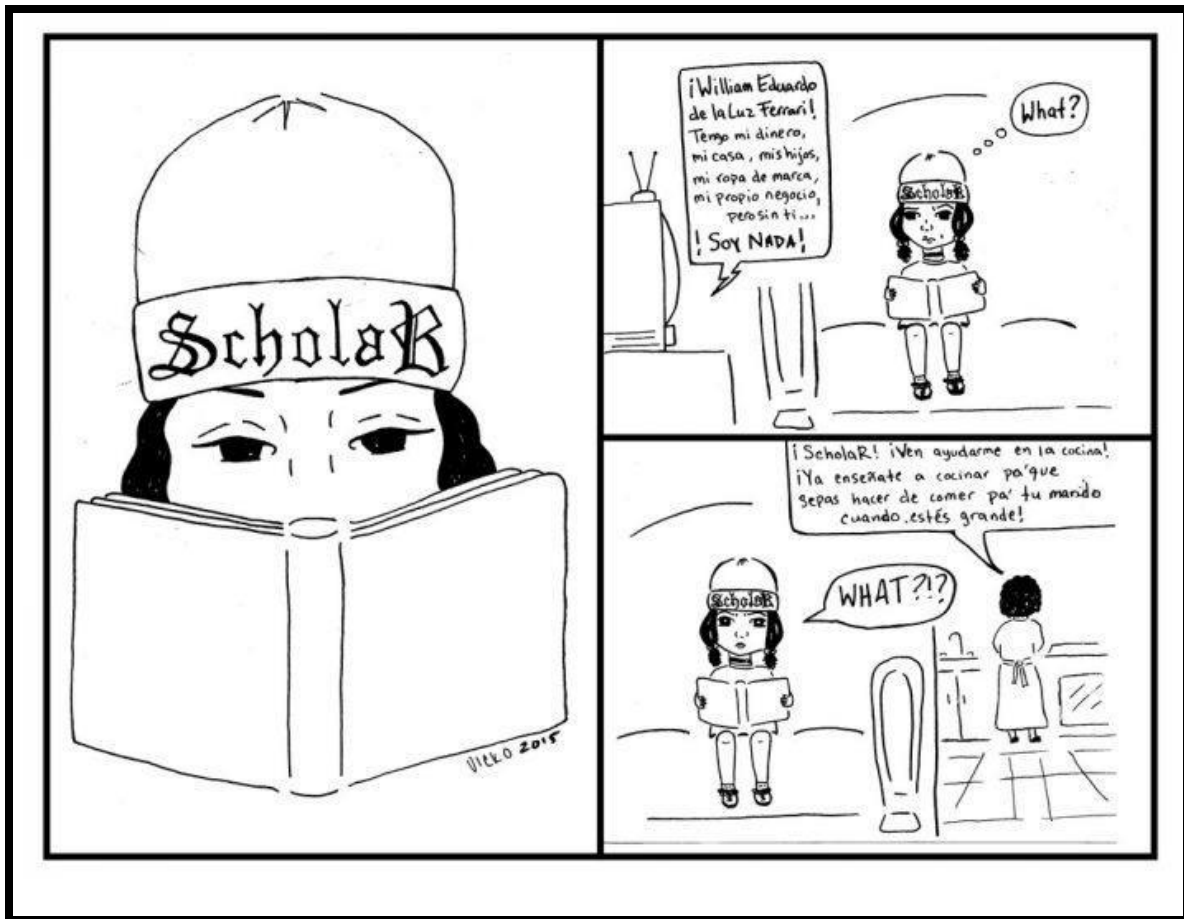


Figure 19.1: Original comic by Vicko Alvarez.

For Paola, art is storytelling. It provides an opportunity to gain knowledge on how people lived, how they dressed, and what they did. Paola argues, “If there was no art, we wouldn’t know people’s stories. There would be no history. We wouldn’t understand why we’ve changed.”

Paola believes that artists leave a mark on history with snapshots of moments in time and they show what is happening in society. She feels that art is for the future to understand how people have lived and can show the evolution of how people have changed and how ideologies change.

The white text within some of the Cholo portraits is Paola’s actual handwriting telling the history of Cholos. She writes random words that she would write down during her research of

Cholos. The words are symbolic and represent Cholx Identity, Culture, and Language. Paola also incorporates copies of actual articles or pages from books that discuss Cholos and she incorporates them into the mixed media portraits topped off with clear resin giving it a shiny brilliance and wet look. On a wall of Paola's studio we see tags or signatures of some of the Cholos that visited her studio to pose for her. They left their tag, a memory of having been there and in solidarity.

## **DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS**

Three notebooks with handwritten transcriptions of every interview I recorded, including Paola and Vicko and the Cholx in Chicago, El Paso, Chaparral, and Chihuahua, are my ethnographic record. They are not digitized. This is to meet my need for visual and material contact with my research data. I'm a visual learner. I receive messages from visual cues that help me sort, categorize, and imagine my research data and the overall story of my ethnographic record. I transcribed linearly in the order that I recorded the interviews. I also categorized my research data based on geographical location of interviews starting from north to south, from Chicago, to Chihuahua, then back to the border, U.S. and Mexico, El Paso, Juárez, Chaparral. The middle ground. My data is also categorized by territory. Table 2.1 represents the major themes in three geographic locations – Chicago, El Paso/Chaparral, and Chihuahua City. The themes are highlighted using the same color codes from Table 3.1: Cholx Data Coding Legend.

In Chicago, through my observations and in interviews, artmaking is a major part of the Cholx' lives. They also mix a traditional Cholo style with contemporary aesthetics, such as silver metal jewelry, black combat boots, hoodies and overalls. Living in Chicago they also endure longer and colder winters than in El Paso/Chaparral or Chihuahua and their clothes reflect that,

such as wearing layers. There also seems to be more of a mix between femininity and masculinity. The Chicago Cholx did mention social justice issues, especially police brutality, but a majority of the conversation was about how as artists they demonstrate resistance. Artmaking was a major interest and passion of the Cholx in Chicago. In the southwest hot desert of El Paso and Chaparral, art was discussed, but more of the conversation focused on the oppressive environment they live in and their struggles with police, the border, the need for protection, and being economically disadvantaged. Crime was discussed more with the El Paso and Chaparral Cholos/as. South of Juárez/El Paso in the interior of Chihuahua, we talked a lot about the original Cholo aesthetic. For me being from El Chuco, it felt like a more nostalgic conversation about returning to old school values and traditions and of course the lowriders was the most important art form discussed. There was a strong sense of brotherhood and family.

Table 2.1: Geographic Characteristics of Cholx in Research Locations

Chicago	El Paso/Chaparral	Chihuahua City
-Chicago aesthetic, Neo-Cholo	-Low key	-Original Cholo
-Cholx, Gender-bending	-Border, restrictions	aesthetic
-tattoos	-security	-arts
-barbers	-protection	-lowriders
-struggle/oppression	-crime	-paintings
-police	-culture	-old school, classic
-arts, murals, photography	-family first	-food
-comics	-help each other	-cookout
-history, identity	financially	

A potential element for this project that I may design is a virtual map where users click on links on the map and they hear a Chola/o/x interview or they access a photo or artwork. Murchison (2010) discusses how this can be a digital style of presentation of my research that “can produce particularly interesting ways of representing the complexity of social life” (p. 180). I also put tabs in my notebooks to make it easy to search for information. The data coding with the highlighting throughout is a great visual way for me to sort through my ethnographic record in a systematic manner. Coding is a stage of writing onto or into the record. I’m “revisiting the record I created through writing and adding another layer of writing (in code) that structures or organizes the record along different axes” (Murchison, p. 178). I worked alone during this process. I participated in the UTEP Graduate School Virtual Writing Retreat and Dissertation Studio to assist me with setting accountability, working with and supporting peers, and creating a structured schedule for myself. Ultimately, this coding is a subjective process of my own interpretation. I recognize that there are many different ways that this data could be coded if another reader of the record were to code it. However, I have been very careful, thorough, and systematic in the coding process. Writing this dissertation is a third telling of the story of my ethnographic record. Filmmaking is similar. You write the screenplay, you film it, and then you edit it. The final film is a third interpretation of the screenplay.

### **Coding Breakdown**

I chose to spread out my interviews geographically to see if there is a difference or similarity of Cholo and Chola identity in various regions. This table represents the final codes with brief descriptions of the codes. The Codes represent the seven dominant themes in my research for this project. I data coded every interview I recorded, including Paola and Vicko and all the Cholx from Chicago, to El Paso, and Chihuahua City.

Table 3.1: Cholx Data Coding Legend

Code	Description
Pink highlight	Art making and Writing, Communicating Messages
Blue highlight	Family, Brotherhood, Young People, Community
Green highlight	Aesthetics
Orange highlight	Struggle, Oppression, History
Yellow highlight	Philosophy (Chola/o/x)
<u>Red Underline</u>	Chola/Cholo/Cholx Identity Markers: Could be attitudes, responses, or moments.
Light purple highlight	Personal Information, such as birthplace, education, upbringing.

### STUDY LIMITATIONS

Although I would have liked to conduct more interviews with Cholx artists, as well as Cholx from their barrios, I had a limited budget and a timeline I was trying to meet for completion. I'm a full-time Assistant Professor of Practice and Undergraduate Academic Adviser at Chicana/o Studies at UTEP. During this dissertation process, in addition to working full-time and being quarantined due to the COVID pandemic, I was also rasquachando con la comunidad. I co-facilitated journaling and doodling workshops for the Alzheimer's Association West Texas Chapter to assist caregivers with stress and to teach them writing and drawing exercises for relaxation. Throughout this journey, I did the best I could with what I had and took chances all along the way.

### ROLE OF RESEARCHER

My role is subject and agent. I can connect personally to my topic, but I'm also the academic scholar recording and presenting these stories of artistas and Cholos and Cholas from their barrios. My mere presence as a Brown-skinned Chicana from the hood of Chaparral, led to

a more relaxed experience during my interviews and interactions with all my subjects. My bus trip to Chihuahua, Mexico, also served as a personal re-connection for me to my mom's hometown roots. Eating the food in Chihuahua City was definitely a highlight of this entire experience. Each bite gave me vivid memories of my parents and grandparents. I'm for certain that this is where I'm from. My mini-comics that I purchased in Chihuahua are some of the tiny treasures I gathered along the way. I'm a member of the community that I'm researching. I'm a native of El Paso and grew up in the hood of Chaparral, New Mexico. Being involved in brief moments of my participants' lives felt like connecting with brothers and sisters from around the world.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis**

### **INTRODUCING THE FIRST RESEARCH QUESTION: TOWARDS A NEW CHOLX CONSCIOUSNESS**

In this section I will first introduce my three guiding research questions followed by further discussion and supporting data in response to each question.

My first research question was: *How is Cholx art creating a new Cholx Consciousness that is global and connects racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world?* In trying to move from living a double consciousness, being American, but treated like an outsider, this project calls for a new Cholx consciousness that is global and connects those who feel excluded from society in racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world. Brayboy argues that POC live in liminality—we know we're oppressed but have not fully transitioned to liberation. To foster growth and a new Cholx consciousness, knowledge of the history and struggle of Cholo and Chola communities needs to be examined and valued from the perspective of Cholos and Cholas.



As discussed earlier, in order to further understand the production of knowledge, we turn to Leonardo who offers a strong look at *whiteness*, which is an academic term used to describe a social construct that has arisen out of the hegemonic force that is European colonialism. An understanding of whiteness allows us to see the connection between racism and colonialism to capitalism. Whiteness is evident through the ownership and appropriation of land and culture globally, which leads to economic power. “In order to confront whiteness, they (POC) have to be familiar with it,” (Dubois, 31). This insight by W.E.B. Dubois and his theory of “gifted with second- sight” is a double-consciousness that allows looking at oneself through the eyes of others. Whiteness, then, is a theoretical lens that POC may use to be able to identify and resist whiteness in order to not advance it. Hence, Leonardo calls for a “will to power” (Leonardo, 36). Instead of aiming to achieve whiteness in order to be accepted by the dominant culture, we have a choice to speak against it. Similarly, Paulo Freire argues for critical consciousness, while Antonio Gramsci argues that we consent to the white hegemonic power subconsciously or consciously. Furthermore, Leonardo argues that racial progress will only happen when white racial consciousness happens. In other words, if white people fail to participate in discourse about whiteness, then the white hegemonic oppression will continue.

A strategy of whiteness is to create the racial divide because whiteness is dependent on racism in order to maintain white power. Leonardo suggests that a critical analysis of whiteness is necessary in order to avoid creating the binary of them and us. Interestingly, Leonardo adds that white people are subjects of whiteness, which is a social construct and that more importantly, white people can choose to resist it. A reason for the negative portrayals and stigma surrounding Cholos and Cholas, is because not only have the tools not been available to POC to control their own messages about themselves, but the culture and race has been strategically

targeted. In order to counter the demeaning ideas and beliefs about Cholos and Cholas, focus is needed on the faults done to Cholo men and women and the consequences of being ignored and racial profiled.

My subjects for this project all discussed living a double consciousness as they shared their experiences of being Cholo and Chola. During Paola's interview, she shared that her motivation for doing the Cholo portraits was to have the opportunity to change dominant society's idea of them being violent and aggressive arguing "All people need to feel like they belong." Vicko discussed being taught as a young girl to stay quiet and reserved, even though she often times felt like speaking up. This is why in her comics; she shows how **ScholaR** reacts to moments where she's being taught what a young woman should be learning and doing from an oppressive and sexist perspective. She wants young women to learn to speak up even if it goes against dominant culture. Both Zeye and Luz shared that they were book nerds growing up in an environment where all of their cousins and adult family members were gang members. Zeye was an honor roll student but ended up graduating from an alternative high school because she was often involved in physical fights. One of her fights that she recalled was in junior high when a Polish girl told her that all Mexicans suck. When Zeye was seventeen, she got into a fight with a manager at a job who accused her of stealing and called her a spic, a derogatory term used against Mexicans. Luz, however, was protected by her older cousin Lil' Lovely who did not let her get initiated. Instead, Luz went on to be the first female in her family to go to college. Luz shared that she also challenges expectations of women by embracing her femininity, while at the same time asserting her masculinity because she says it makes her feel empowered. I can relate to Luz because my Cholo friends would also protect me and keep me from living that violent, gangster lifestyle. I remember being at a bonfire party in Chaparral when I was in high school

and when fighting was about to erupt, my friend Boxer told his lieutenant to take me home. I did not argue for several reasons, I was not a fighter and I feared my father's discipline if I got into any trouble. I was a book nerd at school, but my school was located an hour away across the Franklin Mountains, where most of my nerdy friends lived. I did not have a car, so most of my social time outside of school and on the weekends took place in my barrio. I did not fear Cholos and Cholas the way many adults may have because they were my friends, they accepted that I was a nerd, and they protected me.

For Tonio, the Cholo veterano, after getting out of the military in the eighties he moved to Juárez where he held a night job working at a factory. He had to walk through several barrios to get from his home to the factory and because it was a night job, he had to be extra vigilant walking at night to work. He dressed Cholo but was also a proud military veteran. He was not about the gangster lifestyle but walking at night by himself in the barrios of Juárez it was hard to avoid violence. He carried a gun and had to use it on occasions where he was being followed and needed to escape. He would shoot into the air to scare off groups of attackers. For the Cholo called Jay, he discussed the reason he got into criminal activity as a way to keep up with a capitalist society. He and his high school friends wanted to participate socially, but they had no money or jobs, so they started stealing cars. He says he wanted to fit in, but in order to do that, he had to keep up with capitalism meaning he had to become a capitalist in the only way available to him, which involved criminal activity. Just *being* Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Chicana, Pachuco, Pachuca, Cholo and Chola has consistently been criminalized.

For Cholos who step away from the criminal lifestyle, they still encounter the stigma of being Cholo. The O.G. Family turned to the arts and regular jobs, but the media still labeled them as unlikely artists and focused on them being former gang members when they unveiled

their *El Poderoso Tejano* mural after the mass shooting in El Paso. The O.G. members that I interviewed said they became Cholo because it was passed down from generation to generation. Johnny said it was normal and in your blood to be Cholo. David talked about how growing up you were lucky if you grew up with your dad and your mom. Instead, he said you grow up with your carnales or homies from the barrio and this becomes your family. In fact, this is the reason why Los Fatherless street gang called themselves Fatherless, because many of them did not have the consistent presence, if any, of fathers in their lives.

The Cholo and Chola subjects and artists for this project all come from racially and economically disadvantaged communities. They knew they were oppressed, but in many cases there was no clear path to liberation. Instead, what they all do have in common is engagement in the arts, which includes the Cholo/a aesthetics in fashion, lowriders, murals, graffiti, and tattoos. For Tonio, for example, dressing Cholo was about spending his hard-earned money from the military and his factory job on nice pants and shirts, tanditos (hats), gafas (sunglasses), and going out to the dances and parties in the barrio. He recalled walking into a bar dressed to the nines and people giving him respect. He said he felt pride when he paid for his drinks and he could see how the community felt pride in him. This is the lifestyle of Cholo that has nothing to do with being in a gang or being a criminal. In fact, for Tonio, it's the family unity and gathering of community that he says he values most about being Cholo. However, he says it's a value that is disappearing in Cholo communities as more young people are falling to drugs and gangs. Listening to Tonio talk about the old days made me miss it too, even though I didn't live it. Learning about this history raised my own Cholo consciousness about the struggle Cholos and Cholas have gone through and calls for an examination of the oppression that works against this subculture community and keeps them in a subaltern status. I should not have to choose between being

American and Chola because Chola is American, yet, it is seen as un-American. Cholos and Cholas honor their ancestors through their art, language, and cultural traditions because of the struggle they went through for future generations to have a chance at having a better life. Being Chola is about giving respect to your elders, the veteranos, who fought back against racism and discriminatory practices in order to protect younger generations from experiencing the same oppression. As the O.G. Family members stated, this practice of being Cholo and Chola gets passed down from generation to generation. This research project may serve as a guide for younger generations to learn from and to gain a new Cholx consciousness.

#### **INTRODUCING THE SECOND RESEARCH QUESTION: TRANSGRESSIVE PRACTICES**

The first research examined Cholx consciousness; this section will primarily analyze the transgressive practices of Cholx artists. To illustrate this, my second research question asks: How do Chicana and Frontera Mexicana artists transgress the normative practices in their artistic fields? As we learn from McKinley and Brayboy (2006) in *Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education*, “Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change.” By valuing the stories of Cholos and Cholas, the Cholx in my study are countering the dominant discourse that is demeaning toward racially and economically disadvantaged communities.

At a Conference on College Composition and Communication in Pittsburgh in 2019, professor Ana Ribero from Oregon State University discussed queering as the rejection of all normativity. She said to queer is to “fuck the social order.” She discussed queer as one who “fucks things up” as “fucking with” as in “messing with” the viewer. Borrowing from Ribero’s

discussion on queering, I would argue that Cholos and Cholas do just that – they cause pleito (conflict) just for existing.

Paola's oil paintings utilize the classic style of baroque artists, which was used to highlight the upper class and their riches. Paola uses the same technique, but highlights Cholos and Cholas and their attitudes, their bare chests, and tattoos explaining "I wanted to be sure you could see it (the Cholo attitude and culture)." In the portraits of the Cholos she also includes figures that represent U.S. dominant oppressive ideology, such as Uncle Sam. Animals and monsters that symbolize a shadow of the Cholo, which represents the heavy oppression from their own country on their shoulders. Additionally, Paola introduced a whole new audience into traditionally elitist spaces, such as city museums.

The members of the Hermandad Movimiento are messing with the practice of Cholo and Cholas warring with other barrios by uniting with other barrios and creating a bigger movement toward uniting racially and economically disadvantaged people and communities around the world. They have also adopted an open invitation policy and they encourage the community to participate in their activities, such as cookouts at the park on Sundays. They want their community to get to know them and their artistic practices, such as fixing up lowriders.

For Vicko, nothing is taboo. She addresses any issue that impacts young people such as gender expression. A character she is developing is Masir who is Palestinian and half Puerto Rican. He is a young person trying to figure out what it means to be of different cultures, while at the same time sneaking into his mom's closet and wearing her high heels. His story is about dealing with feelings of confusion. Vicko shared that growing up there were so many topics that were not up for discussion. She aims to provide an outlet for young people trying to figure out how to gain agency of their lives. Vicko also experienced much success with her comic about

Rosita, an undocumented Latina living in fear and trying to navigate her new school in America. She shared that after a single post on Facebook, the Rosita project gained much attention and many teachers started ordering the book. So although Vicko goes against the status quo and discusses controversial topics in her work, she's discovered that there is an audience out there that is hungry for this type of counterstory.

Both Luz and Skeemer discussed how being Cholas and Cholos outside of the typical L.A. scene garners them attention saying that many people assume they are from California. This is why in her photography, Luz captures lowriders from all over the world to demonstrate that lowriders aren't just in Cali. Skeemer emphasizes to people that he was born and raised in Chicago and when people question his wardrobe, he simply tells them that it's his clothes from the nineties and he sees no reason to get rid of it. His specialty in tattoo art is the depiction of his Indigenous roots. On the back of his head, he has a tattoo of Quetzalcoatl, one of the most important gods in ancient Mesoamerica. On the top of his head is a tattoo of Mixcoatl, the god identified with the stars and the heavens in several Mesoamerican cultures. On the knuckles of his hands, are tattoo portraits of important Latina/o figures, such as Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Cantiflas, and Pancho Villa. Not only does his look mess with the viewer, but Skeemer is also very conscious of his Indigenous and Cholo roots arguing that Cholos are the descendants of the bastard children of Pachucos or Zoot Suiters.

The O.G. Family encountered difficulty when trying to secure permission from the City of El Paso to paint their mural *El Poderoso Tejano*, so instead they asked one of their neighbors for permission to paint on the wall on their property. They went against norms in order to get the project done. In the end, they shared that many supporters came out for the unveiling including some border patrol agents and police officers. In addition, they produced a music video called *El*

*Poderoso Tejano* to go with the mural. When developing the concept, they specifically aimed to create a music video that was clean, meaning no depiction of alcohol or smoking and no foul language. In trying to build solidarity, similar to the Hermandad Movimiento, they invited rappers from different barrios to participate. Some even questioned their own safety and Johnny promised they were welcome. The filming of the video was a success and it's received over fourteen thousand views on YouTube. The video may be viewed at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fMoR2cYOqE>

This bringing together of the barrio to create something for the barrio about the barrio is another great example of rasquachando con la comunidad and Cholxing by all involved.



Figure 20.1: Image from interview with members of O.G. Family in front of *Gone But Never Forgotten: El Poderoso Tejano* mural in Ascarate and Alameda neighborhood (Feb. 2020)

## **RASQUACHANDO CON LA COMUNIDAD**

In my own experiences with rasquachando en El Chuco, I've also collaborated with colleges and universities in my local community. Constructing collaborations is a feminist strategy as defined by Sprague (2016) as having two key goals: 1) increasing the connections between researchers and the researched; and 2) compensating for the limitations in researchers' standpoints (p. 185). In wanting to experiment with making a feature film myself, but not having



the resources or budget, I collaborated with The University of Texas at El Paso, where I was able to develop a feature filmmaking course called FILM 4340 Film Studies in 2010. In this class, the goal was to work as a team to learn and engage in feature filmmaking. In teaching my students to make a feature film from script to screen, I was also able to benefit as a filmmaker. This is a still image from the unreleased film called OCHOA, which I wrote, but later adapted into a graphic novel called “A.W.O.L.” a military term for a soldier who leaves the military without permission.



Figure 21.1: Still image from unreleased film OCHOA by Elvira Carrizal-Dukes.

Making films is very expensive. I understand the Cholos in Chihuahua who are in constant fundraising mode to fund their artistic interests. Although the feature filmmaking exercise was a good learning experience, the film itself needed more work and I recognized that it was not on the caliber of Hollywood films. So instead, I worked with my husband Ronnie Dukes who is a comic book artist and together we adapted the screenplay OCHOA into a graphic novel. He used my storyboards from the film production as a guide. We changed the title to A.W.O.L. and self-published it in 2016. I was then introduced to a Japanese student in El Paso

who was excited to translate the graphic novel into Japanese. We self-published the Japanese edition in 2018 and as a result we were invited to Tokyo Comic Con in 2018. We sold out all of our Japanese and English copies in Tokyo. We met Japanese young people who were drawn to the art and our presence. I noticed we attracted a sort of hip hop-style audience, which in some ways is similar to Cholo and Chola culture fashion-wise. This is the original cover of A.W.O.L. English edition. On the cover we see the main protagonist Cruz Ochoa, a Xicana soldier who defies orders to go on a military mission in order to find her brother who has been kidnapped. It's a race against time to save him from being killed, but also to avoid being arrested by military police. Her nepantla experience is being devoted to her country and her family at the same time. When she's forced to choose, she demonstrates loyalty to her family above all else. In discussing inclusive young adult literature, Rodríguez (2019) citing A.W.O.L. noted the school and education themes surrounding the young adults in my graphic novel. "Economic structures and forces combined with workforce needs inform schooling as well as power dynamics interconnected to access, family, privilege, race, and opportunity," argued Rodríguez (p. 68). In writing this story, I wanted to provide insight into the tough decisions siblings have to make when left to care for their loved ones, while trying to set and meet goals for their individual future. Cruz learns that it's not that easy to leave your family behind, while you gain access to opportunities and privilege. As a military soldier, she learns it's not that easy to be loyal to a country that doesn't value your personal life as much as they value your service. Chicana soldiers, such as my dad, engage in combat on the frontlines of wars only to return home to a government that allows discrimination and systemic racism to persist.

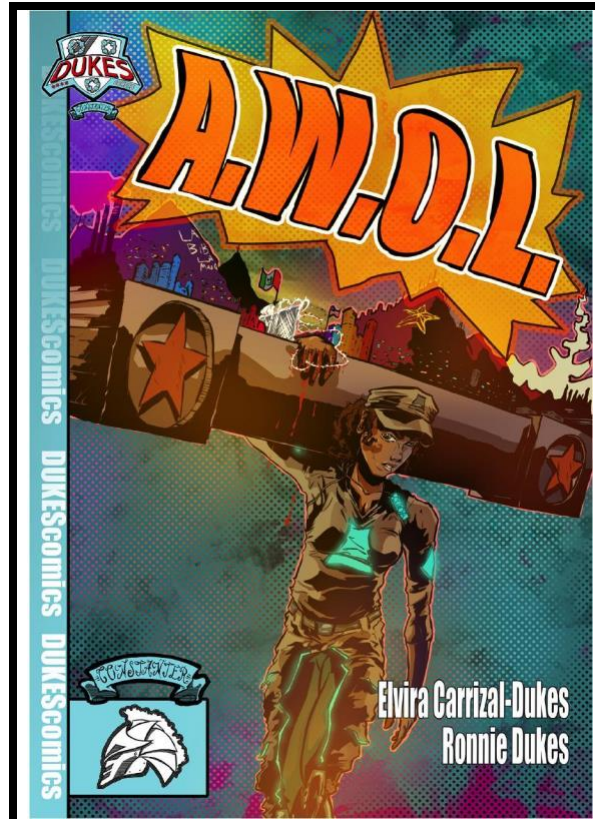


Figure 22.1: Graphic Novel cover of *A.W.O.L.* by Elvira Carrizal-Dukes.

Prior to attempting the making of a feature film, I made short films and plays. I used the *rasquachando con tu comunidad* method when I made *Mariposa*, a short film about a young Chicana who crosses the border to take photos of the grave site of missing women. This project first started as a 3-person play called *Escaping Juárez* in 2002 when I was commissioned by Intermedia Arts Teatro del Pueblo Political Theatre Festival in Minneapolis, MN. I then adapted the play for the screen in 2005 during film school and changed the title to *Mariposa*. I raised \$40,000 in one year with the help of my family and community members who assisted me with fundraisers such as enchilada dinners and art auctions. I also applied for grants and received a major boost from the James McNamara creative art grant. The running time of my film is a little over fourteen minutes. The film may be viewed in its entirety at this link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=2&v=IZlvKI-dwAc&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=IZlvKI-dwAc&feature=emb_logo).

In 2015, I was invited to participate in a local filmmaking competition to raise funds for Creative Kids, an El Paso nonprofit arts organization for young people. Again, I incorporated the rasquachando con la comunidad method and made this challenge into a lesson plan with my students at El Paso Community College (EPCC). The film is called “The Weeping Pimp,” which I wrote and directed. We made the film on a zero-dollar budget. My colleagues from the EPCC television station agreed to join me and my students and together we made this film, which ended up being about eight minutes, which was the time limit for this competition. The film may be viewed at this link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=250&v=U-jCg3Bt2a8&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=250&v=U-jCg3Bt2a8&feature=emb_logo).

The purpose of rasquachando con la comunidad, then, is to provide a practical guide for filmmaking that counters the dominant and oppressive culture that is found in the Hollywood system, but also advances the importance of making with your own communities in order to better serve POC and to develop critical consciousness in our community and beyond.

### **THIRD RESEARCH QUESTION: NEW REALITY**

In this section, I address my third research question, which was: How can these artists serve as models for being unruly and disruptive in order to create a new reality that is inclusive and centered on the subaltern? In letting go of the double-consciousness experience and asserting the Cholo and Chola identity, we resist seeing ourselves through the oppressor’s portrayal, perception, and belief of us. Through the examination of the methods and rhetoric of Cholo artistas, we witness the political act of inserting the counterstories of racially and economically disadvantaged communities into the discourse of what art and media get made and who gets to make it, as well as the rasquachando methods of getting our stories made regardless in whatever

form necessary. In the previous section, I discussed how the O.G. Familia created a mural for the barrio against all the odds. Cholx show leadership and creative problem-solving when dealing with obstacles and authorities not being very helpful. Because Cholx perspectives are missing from American mainstream media, Cholx artistas are more resilient than ever. Cholx consciousness contributes to the remembering and revisioning of our own histories in contrast to stereotypes and false narratives. Cholx arts as rhetorical invention should be used to combat oppression in American mainstream media and beyond during a time of increased hateful and discriminatory acts.

### **Example One: Cholo Angel Wings**

Paola playfully illustrates white angel wings on the backs of Cholos. The white sketched oil painted wings are a sharp contrast to Cholos depicted as villainous characters. The handwritten text are positive words that describe Cholos and their history of struggle. He sits next to his white lowrider as he looks off into the distance in a reflective mode. Under the tire is one of the monsters that Paola says symbolize the oppressive dark shadows that follow the Cholo. The angel wings also signify that the Cholo is being carried and protected by his ancestors.

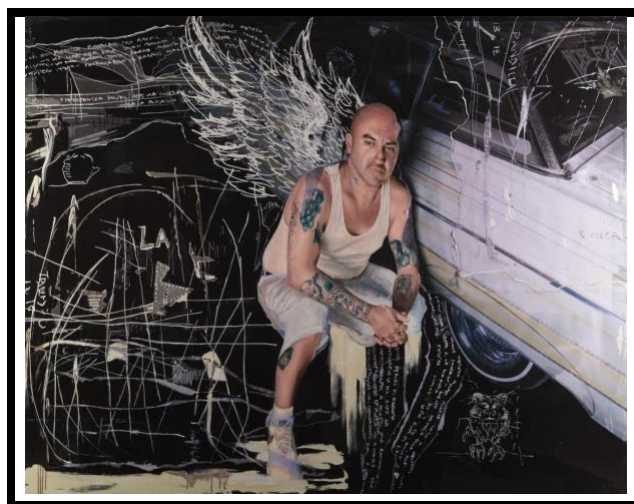


Figure 23.1: Original painting by Paola Rascón

## Example Two: Cholas reading in Comics

Vicko's nerdy Chola demonstrates a well-read and informed young Latina activist. In this black and white illustration her character Cholactivist reads the suicide note of Lilian Oliva Bardales, a 19-year-old mother in U.S. custody at Karnes County Residential Center in Texas, a family detention facility for migrants. In 2015, Lilian attempted suicide by cutting her wrist using her broken ID bracelet. She was put on suicide watch, but eventually was sent back to Honduras, where she gave an interview describing a dramatic six days – in which, she said, she was taken from her 4-year-old son, stripped naked in front of screaming staffers, put into isolation and then hidden at a hotel before a hasty deportation according to a report by the McClatchy Washington Bureau. In Vicko's comic, Cholactivist reads Lilian's suicide note highlighting the quote "You have treated us worse than an animal" and the hashtag Not(one)More. Vicko's depiction illustrates a Chola who is concerned for her community and creates awareness about social justice issues.

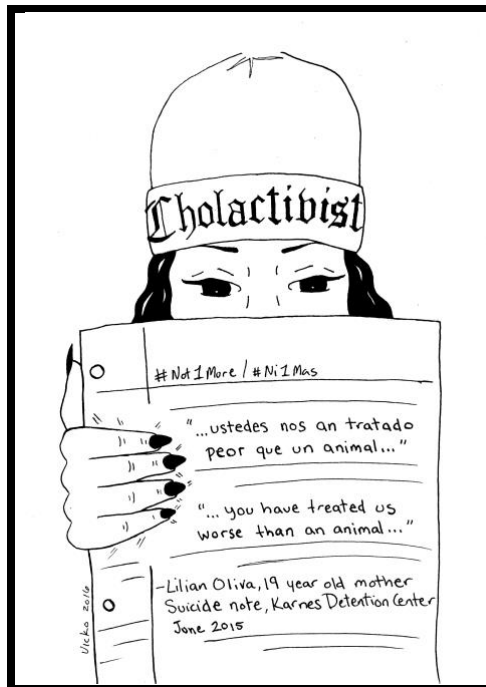


Figure 24.1: Original comic by Vicko Alvarez.

### Example Three: Hindu Chola Art

Not all Cholas are violent criminals as depicted in Zeye's mural art where she mixes Chola culture with Hindu culture and peace and meditation practices. No longer wanting to live that violent life, Zeye seeks to break the cycle by creating Chola art that depicts peaceful homegirls. She said that growing up her mom tried to introduce her to other cultures and raised her on Indian food because she had a lot of Indian co-workers. Zeye grew up admiring Indian culture and art and their belief in Hinduism. She shared that although she grew up super Catholic, Hinduism and Buddhism helped her find her inner peace. Zeye became familiar with Middle Eastern and Buddhist art when she would go shopping at thrift stores with her mom. This mural shows Zeye's style of art that depicts a Chola holding up Hindu meditation hand gestures. This Chola-Hindu piece by Zeye reminds me of the Chola Dynasty sculpture I mentioned before with the hoop earrings, hand gestures, and feminine and confident pose. The interesting connection between the Chola Dynasty, as well as Peruvian Cholas I'm learning about, are research topics I want to explore further after this dissertation project is complete.



Figure 25.1: Original mural painting by Zeye.

## CHOLX INTELLECTUALS

In order to advance Cholx consciousness, we need more Cholx intellectuals, such as Paola and Vicko who center the stories of Cholos and Cholas and challenge the dominant discourse that is demeaning or stereotypical. David Forgacs, in his chapter *Intellectuals and Education* (1988), pointed out the meaning of intellectuals as redefined by Gramsci. Forgacs cites Gramsci's definition of intellectuals as "anyone whose function in society is primarily that of organizing, administering, directing, educating or leading others" (300). Both Paola and Vicko expressed awareness about their role as artists and activists and working to provide understanding and a new positive image of Cholos and Cholas. As insiders of this subculture, they are able to provide a more intimate look into Cholx lives that goes beyond the one-dimensional stereotype. Forgacs adds that Gramsci is "concerned both with the analysis of those intellectuals who function directly or indirectly on behalf of a dominant social group to organize coercion and consent and with the problem of how to form intellectuals of the subaltern social groups who will be capable of opposing and transforming the existing social order" (300). It is well-known that people of racially and economically disadvantaged communities are not well-represented in mainstream American media industries, such as the Hollywood filmmaking industry. It is a fact that Chicanx are underrepresented in mainstream cinema. Although Hispanics represent 18% of the U.S. population, contributing 21% percent of U.S. box office revenue, only about 5% percent of actors in top Hollywood films are Hispanic (Ryan, 2017). Hispanic representation behind the camera is just as dismal. Unsurprisingly, Latinas in the U.S. are near non-existent in the director's chair according to the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. Only one Latina worked as a director out of 1,223 individuals and 1,100 films from 2007 to 2017. The one Latina to make the cut is my former classmate from Columbia University film school



Patricia Riggen who directed *Under the Same Moon*, *The 33*, and *Miracles from Heaven*. The 2020 Hollywood Diversity Report also includes a workplace analysis of 11 major and mid-major studios, which found that 91% of C-level positions are held by white people and 82% are held by men. Among all senior executive positions, 93% percent are held by white people and 80% by men. Based on these upsetting statistics and the lack of representation in front of the screen, these intellectuals are advancing the beliefs and perspectives of a dominant social group. Forgacs citing Gramsci calls for intellectuals from subaltern groups to counter these oppressive narratives arguing “organic intellectuals must have a critical consciousness of the world, a desire to question and to change existing conditions, and a sense of collectivity with others in working to restructure society. Their task is to enhance and reinforce emergent elements” (59).

Now more than ever, Cholx intellectuals are called on to produce art and media by any means necessary. By doing so, we may advance our own knowledge about ourselves, our culture, experiences, and history, which may contribute to a new generation of Cholx consciousness.

#### **HOW DO CHICANA AND FRONTERA MEXICANA ARTISTS TRANSGRESS THE NORMATIVE PRACTICES IN THEIR ARTISTIC FIELDS?**

An insider perspective of Cholo and Chola culture is what is needed in order for Cholx intellectuals to more accurately depict this subaltern community. Paola remembers being a kid and walking down the street and being told to move over when a Cholo was also walking down the street. She was taught to see Cholos as a threat and a sign of violence. Because of this, she took it upon herself as an artist to conduct her own research and connect directly with the Cholo and Chola community of Chihuahua. She understands that some are in gangs, but their conflicts were between other gangs not the community at large. Through her own sit-down interviews,

Paola learned that many Cholx are religious, as we see on their bodies, tattoos with symbols of the Virgen de Guadalupe. Cholx also stress the importance of family. I also learned this in the interviews I conducted for this project. “Above all family first,” remarks one of the Chihuahua Cholos. Paola’s intention with the Cholo Series she says is to highly value the Cholx culture. She aims to document the history of Mexican and Border identities and culture. She is capturing a moment in our current society, so that other people can learn about it.

Paola’s new series features Cholas. When she began the Cholo project, the men were the ones who stepped up to participate. They were not afraid to be exposed, but they do protect the women and children as Paola learned. The men are the ones who put themselves out there front and center. However, the Chola is very strong and possibly stronger adds Paola. You hardly see the Chola because as she mentioned, they stay in the background taking care of the family saying it’s not a sexist thing. “It’s about protecting the family and their children,” said Paola.

For Vicko, it was the outsider perspective she experienced in college that made her resist the Euro-centric culture at the University of Chicago, a private research university in Chicago, Illinois, where about 7% of the student body is Hispanic/Latino, which is more than the African American student population, over 40% is white, and over 20% are international students according to student body demographics spring quarter 2016. Vicko shared that she felt out of place and that the institution was not reaching out to her. Although she was, as she says, nerding out, she never let go of the grit that she grew up with because it’s the grit that she says got her there in the first place. Growing up, her immigrant parents were hardly home because they were always working. So, Vicko had to learn to fend for herself. It was difficult for her to relate to the majority white student population many who she describes as being wealthy economically. It was during this time that she first developed her **Chol**activist character to represent being a

scholar who doesn't forget where she came from and who is not afraid to stand up for herself and her community.

### **Paola Rascón – Cholos in Large Scale Oil Portraits ala Upper class, Baroque style**

Paola views her Cholo series as her personal view of Cholos. Having studied the history and origin of Cholos, she sees the Cholos with a lot of pride having learned about their predecessors, the Mexican immigrants, and their bravery in a country that was oppressive and violent towards them. They had to make a statement that says, "I don't care, this is what I am... They are a very brave group," says Paola. This is why she uses chiaroscuro style of the Baroque period, which was reserved for the wealthy class. Paola gives Cholos the same high honor for their courage to create their own support groups, their own culture, and their own ideology. "They created an entire culture. This started many years ago and we still see it. And now we see it all over the world. It's impressive how strong it is. The values and energy of this group has to continue," argues Paola. In this piece, we see a bare-chested Cholo standing tall. His face is very well lit. He holds up hand gestures. Tattooed across his chest is the name Socorro in cursive with the years of her birth and death. On his left arm, we see a woman's portrait. Similar to her other oil portraits, Paola's own handwriting is seen in white text with words of empowerment that represent the Cholo identity, culture, and history. Toward the bottom is typed text, which are pages she copied from actual textbooks about Cholos. On the sides of his legs we see a monstrous character and rooster feet. Over the Cholo's left shoulder behind him is a giant eagle, which represents the eagle in the Mexican flag. The eagle's wings spread out as if embracing and helping to push forward the Cholo. The Cholo is wearing streetwear, jeans and Nubuck Timberland boots, as well as a baseball cap. We also see Paola's signature style of ripping this elegant work and paint dripping.

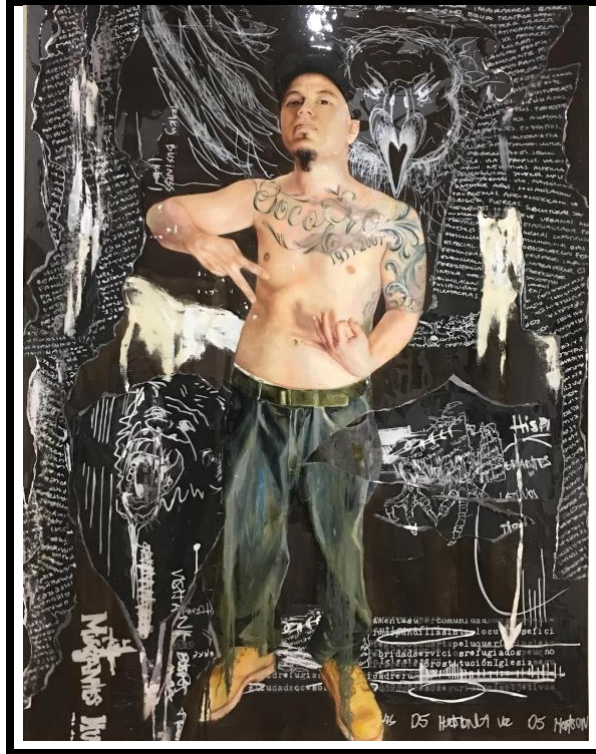


Figure 26.1: Original painting by Paola Rascón

### **Vicko Alvarez – Little Tough Girl expressing her feelings**

Although Vicko’s illustrations and main characters represent a tough exterior, her stories are about the vulnerable feelings and emotions that young people experience and have no one to talk to about it. Vicko stressed that her work with youth is especially important. In every scenario that she paints, Vicko focuses on the feelings. For example, ScholaR represents anger, Rosita represents fear, and Masir is a character struggling with feelings of confusion. For Vicko, not being able to identify how you feel is something she struggled with as a kid saying that the reason she created her comics was to start to give some vocabulary to those feelings and to give some relatable stories to complex situations young people find themselves in. Vicko’s characters represent a Latinx diaspora to emphasize that Latinas/os come from everywhere. Although some of her family members have resisted her storytelling saying that she should not be airing her family’s dirty laundry, she tells them that she does it because other people need to hear these

stories. In comics, Vicko believes that everything is up for discussion with young people because it's what she needed when she was growing up. "No 12-year-old needs to be hiding that they're questioning their sexuality" argues Vicko, adding "No 12-year-old needs to be hiding that they're stressed out because their mom is stressed out that they can't pay the bills." Vicko mentioned that her comics are widely purchased by educators. When I asked her if she wished her mom had educational comics like this, she said that her mom would be too stressed out to do anything like that, but that her teachers would have used them. Her comic Rosita was inspired by Vicko's elementary school experience in Dallas where most of the newly-arrived immigrant kids were put into the English as a Second Language (ESL) class. The kids in her school made fun of that class because they couldn't speak English. Vicko remembers no adults telling them to stop bullying the ESL kids. She says her teachers didn't have the tools to teach the kids to be respectful to their classmates. Vicko said her comic Rosita adds context for students like her who didn't fully understand the undocumented or immigrant experience, even though she herself was a first-gen American-born Latinx kid. The biggest difference being that she spoke English and this is what separated the students in her school – the kids who spoke English and the kids who spoke Spanish. Vicko's dominant language was English, so she was not in the ESL class. She expressed regret about bullying ESL kids in elementary. Although Vicko encourages educators to use her comics as a teaching tool, she also cautions that the teacher should be familiar with the immigrant experience in order to feel comfortable discussing undocumented students. She says these critical topics require informed discussions and she hopes that a teacher doesn't just hand the interactive comic to the students without any explanation. In this piece by Vicko, we see a young **ScholaR** superhero at the center of the frame. She's wearing her beanie and two ponytails, as well as a red flying cape. Her socks with the ruffles look like their spinning, which Vicko did

intentionally because she remembers being forced to wear these socks as a kid and in her mind turning them into flying socks. Near her feet are blue clouds signifying **ScholaR** rising high into the sky.



Figure 27.1: Original comic by Vicko Alvarez

### COMBINING STYLES/AESTHETICS FOR RHETORICAL PURPOSES

The original Cholo aesthetic was a mix of working-class migrant clothes, jail attire, and gang culture all on a budget. In addition, the lowriders are slow and low in contrast to fast and furious car racing pastime in America. Chols have resisted forced assimilation, especially during times when they were being used as cheap labor, deported in masses, and segregated and kept in a low status economically and culturally. Vicko believes that Cholo/a communities came out of an acknowledgement that they were living a life that wasn't ideal, but they had to be proud of who they were, so they attached an identity to it. "It was actually young people resisting being labeled something negative, young people being told that they weren't gonna' amount to anything besides shit that they were served already. So, it's a culture of resistance," asserts Vicko. In preserving this culture and history and having pride and love for your ancestors, the

Cholo and Chola culture continues to evolve. In Chicago I observed a new generation that mixes the old Cholo immigrant culture with Chicago windy city futurism aesthetics, a retro style mixed with hood mixed with modern aesthetics. When I asked Vicko if she considers herself Chola she responded, “I consider myself part of the Chola diaspora, like the evolution of.” In this section, I will discuss the aesthetics and arguments put forth by some of the Cholos and Cholas I interviewed.

### **Skeemer**

Skeemer Chorne is a humble and down-to-earth person. When I asked him if he identifies as an artist, his response was that he doesn't brag about it. Growing up his family sent him to schools in the north side of Chicago because they said that's where all the white people were and so he'd have access to a better education. However, Skeemer said that it didn't matter because he was in an unknown neighborhood and he encountered similar problems from gangsters asking where he was from. For Skeemer, the Cholo style was seen normally amongst low income kids. For those who only wear the aesthetics, he says they get to take it off at the end of the day. He does not get to take off his struggle or sacrifice. “I don't feel like you can just pick it up like a video game or a pair of shoes,” said Skeemer about the Cholo subculture. Instead, he feels it's something that's inherited and it comes from your parents and your elders. Skeemer grew up admiring his family and friends who were given respect in a world that didn't give them any. This is why the history of the Cholo is important to him because otherwise people outside the culture will engage in the aesthetics without understanding the consciousness. Skeemer's parents are born and raised in Pilsen, Chicago. His grandparents were from San Antonio. They moved from San Antonio to Pilsen during the Zoot Suit riots. Skeemer's uncles were Pachucos. There other half of his family is from Mexico City. He says growing up his mom would teach him a lot

about his cultural identity. His uncles would also share stories about the pyramids in Mexico and their Indigenous roots. He says he learned more about his own history from his family and not at school. Skeemer said that in school he thought he was a bad kid because he was always the one getting in trouble. He believes the adults failed him. Skeemer remembers people telling him he looked like characters from Chicano movies such as *Blood In, Blood Out* and *American Me*. However, he was too young when those movies came out, so he didn't know what people were talking about. When he finally saw the movies, he remembers being shocked seeing people who look like him in movies. In this photo we see Skeemer standing next to a light brown lowrider with intricate design, silver rims, and hydraulics. He wears Pachuco pants with three long silver chains, a white tank top and black suspenders typical of Cholo style, and we see tattoos on his arms, chest, and neck. The most prominent tattoo that we see is an image of Jesus Christ on the cross. His dark sunglasses are on top of his head. He has a long beard that is tied together in several elastic bands.



Figure 28.1: Photo of Skeemer



## **Luz**

I especially enjoyed my conversation with Luz. She gave details about the pleito (drama) she experienced when she was growing up. She especially remembers when another gang was trying to rush her, and her cousin came to her defense telling the other girl gang “Don’t touch my cousin. I’m going to fuck you up.” As these girls grew up, they all ended up being part of the same crew. Luz shared that she had a lot of strong Chola figures in her life. The males were more like the novios (boyfriends). In discussing the evolving Chola identity, she mentioned that the same Chola cousins who came to her defense as a kid turned into norteña girls (northern Mexican music style) and then became religious saying they found Jesus, even though they’re still a little hood. Luz also discussed Cholos and Cholas as typically being Mexican American, but that since moving to Chicago she’s seen Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Salvadorans dressing like Cholos and Cholas. She is also aware of how Cholos are depicted as a danger to society, but that’s it’s really just them trying to reclaim their culture adding that the southwestern United States was once Mexico. “We didn’t really want to assimilate. We wanted to keep in touch with what it is to be multidimensional, cultural, and Latinx and not necessarily assimilate to white standards of beauty” asserts Luz. Her aesthetics she says may be confusing to others until they get to know her. Luz wants people to recognize her as being POC, as a Latina, while also still trying to learn for herself what it means to be a Queer person. For Luz, being Chola is not a trend. This is her life that she’s living as a first-generation Latina American. “I’m always gonna’ have my nails long. I’m always gonna’ get my eyebrows done. Red lipstick. Those are things that will connect me to who I am, and I hope it reminds people I am not going to forget that,” said Luz. “I’m gonna’ survive. I’m gonna’ be here whether you like it or not.”



Figure 29.1: Photo of Luz

### **A Cholo Called Jay**

The Cholo called Jay asked for his identity to be kept private, which is why I changed his name for this study and am not using a photo. When I asked him about his aesthetics, he said he's not sure, but that at work one day a coworker called him an outlaw and started laughing. He believes others see him as an outlaw, even though he's purposely stayed away from tattoos on his body to not give off that image. He says he prefers to stay under the radar, but people still see him and think he's up to something. When I asked him what he thinks they're judging him on, he said mainly because he has a bald head. I then asked him if he thinks bald-headed Jeff Bezos gets this same type of treatment. Jay immediately said no because he's probably wearing a suit in nice places. In other words, his financial wealth is more apparent. When discussing Cholo aesthetics, Jay talked about the graffiti letters saying that's what he's into. He believes this is a true depiction of Cholo culture versus Hollywood that focuses on more of the stereotypes, like lowriders, dickies, a bunch of tattoos, and aggressive dogs. He specifically mentioned the film Friday and the Cholo character who wears a beanie all the way down past his eyes, which

obviously makes it so he can't see. Jay says this is not real, but what is real are the letters because it takes lots of experience and skill.

### **Tonio**

Tonio's aesthetics have gone through many stages. From being in the military to being a Pachuco and Cholo, to his retirement stage where he sticks to streetwear basics, such as hoodies, white t-shirts, jeans, boots, and baseball caps. However, when it comes to special occasions such as his children's weddings, he brings out his Pachuco clothing, which he still has. Tonio was also humble and soft-spoken. He became the most animated when recounting his days walking to his night job in Juárez and fleeing from violence. For him, the most notable aspect of the Cholo aesthetic is the nice, well-kept clothing, shiny shoes, stylish hats, and fixed-up cars. Tonio stressed the respect that the community had for Cholos who presented themselves looking polished and smooth.



Figure 30.1: Image of Tonio during interview (Feb. 2020)

**HOW CAN THESE ARTISTS SERVE AS MODELS FOR BEING UNRULY AND DISRUPTIVE IN ORDER TO CREATE A NEW REALITY THAT IS INCLUSIVE AND CENTERED ON THE SUBALTERN?**

In thinking about where Chols have been and knowing their history, acknowledging the struggle of those who paved the way, our elders, is critical. When I was in film school, I never learned about filmmakers who looked like me or shared my culture and history. It wasn't until 2016 that I learned about Chicano filmmaker Efrain Gutierrez who co-wrote and directed the film *Please Don't Bury Me Alive!* in 1976. I learned about him because his film was awarded National Film Registry Honoree. The National Film Registry is the United States National Film Preservation Board's selection of films deserving of preservation. Efrain's film is a slice-of-barrio- life produced in San Antonio, Texas, spring of 1972 in the midst of the Chicano Movement and the Vietnam War. The film begins at a funeral of the brother of the main character. I invited Efrain to El Paso, Texas, to screen his film and meet with local student filmmakers. During this time, I learned more about Efrain's struggle to get the film made and an even bigger struggle to get it screened at independent cinemas. A powerful line narrated by Alejandro the Chicano protagonist of the film is "It's a strange thing living in a world that makes you different from the rest of the people." He continues by contemplating his Nepantla experience arguing "How the hell am I going to be Chicano and compete in an Anglo world." I consider Efrain a Cholx intellectual for bringing awareness to the conflict and struggle of the Chicano community during the Civil Rights Movement. He made his film *rasquachando con la comunidad* by any means necessary. He never gave up even though he said he never thought we (Chicanos) were going to be the movie makers (2016). Efrain is a great example of a Cholx filmmaker who was unruly and disruptive in order to produce his reality on the big screen. His resistance to being told he would never be a filmmaker paid off thirty years later when his film

was given such a high honor by the National Film Registry. He paved the way for future filmmakers from subaltern communities. He created a new reality.

### **Chihuahua Cholos – Hermandad Movimiento**

The Chols in Paola's barrio of Chihuahua are forming a new way of being. The Cholos and Cholas that I interviewed were all from different barrios, but they all associate as one group, especially since they are all from Chihuahua. The Chihuahuense Chols described their organization as un hermandad movimiento or a brotherhood movement to show that Chols are not bad and that it's a culture. The cars and style of clothes is part of the culture, but most importantly they stress the importance of friendship and fellowship. They organize fundraising events in their barrio to help people and to help the community. They're unity came with maturity saying that years ago they may not have been able to be on friendly terms because it was more about the gang and defending your territory. Now, the Cholos and Cholas have families, they have jobs, so they focus more on the cars and what they like. They expressed that they want to communicate to the people that they are people too and they have hobbies and they want to do something positive for the people. The Cholos come from different clubs and different families, but they have something in common which is the lowriders. As a group, they are very organized and always involved in projects. Members present project proposals and together as a group they make plans for the future. Building and maintaining lowriders is a fun pastime for them, but apart from this they have families and responsibilities. The Hermandad Movimiento of Chihuahua is a positive force. They demonstrate that people who used to be enemies can come together for the better good and to continue this culture. The Cholos shared that they were able to get rid of their vices and become more concerned with their families and

friendship. Ultimately, they say they do it for their children, so they can grow up with a positive culture.

### **Chihuahua City Public Relations with Chols**

Regarding problems of the barrio, the Cholos believe the government should be more supportive of their colonias and people with low resources. They shared that they would like to see more parks, so that the kids aren't playing in the street adding that there are empty lots that are all dirty, which they say should be fixed, so that the land can be used by the community. Although they are economically disadvantaged, it seems the city of Chihuahua is making efforts to end discrimination against Cholos and Cholas. During my time there, I visited the Federal Palace of Chihuahua, an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century building in downtown Chihuahua City. It is the former jail cell of father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, considered the Father of the Nation. As you enter the center of the building, there is a courtyard surrounded by stunning murals on the four walls, which tell the history of oppression, independence, dictatorship, and revolution in Mexico. It is in this building where I took a photo of an anti-discrimination poster on some of the office doors. The image on the poster features two Brown men wearing baseball caps, sunglasses, and have a street urban, possibly Cholo look. The Spanish text on the poster in English is a message about not judging people by the clothes they wear.



Figure 31.1: Anti-Discrimination Poster hanging in government building in downtown Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, Mexico (Dec. 2019).

There seems to be a trend toward cultural acceptance. This poster in Chihuahua demonstrates that the city seeks to generate respect and legitimacy for Cholx. In Tijuana, Mexico, the City's premier professional soccer team are emblematically the Xolos. Car shows in the southwest and certainly in El Paso and other public events display elements of Cholo culture which is now more accepted. UTEP recently presented Walls that Move at the annual Lincoln Center with young people dressed as Cholos and Cholas as still images that the public liked enough to pose with them. The UTEP students had performed a *Zoot Suit* musical at UTEP in the same attire with Pachuco music from the 40s and 50s. Both events were organized successfully by UTEP Theatre and Dance faculty Lisa Smith. A car club was invited to the UTEP campus to display its period-correct cars (1940s) outside the Recital Hall. Dennis Bixler-Márquez of Chicana/o studies at UTEP commented he had the late Juan Contreras, a performance poet and Chicano Studies instructor, open the musical event with his rendition of the *Wizard of Saz*. The

poem appears in a booklet illustrated by El Paso Artist Carlos Callejo, and the *Wizard of Saz* is depicted in full Zoot Suit regalia with Pachuco body motions. The picture hangs outside Dr. Bixler's office and the poetry booklet is in the literature section on his bookshelf. Dr. Bixler believes "The low rider cars and 'juila' shows are an artistic manifestation of contemporary Cholx culture that the El Paso public, including children, now fully embraces." "Juila" means bicycle in Caló. National car shows on television now feature low-riders with appreciation of the cultural identity projected by its car club members. That is a far cry of the 1970s attempts to ban low rider club meets in San Jose, after the now defunct Low Rider Magazine proclaimed Sanjo (San Jose) to be the low-rider capital of the US.

### **CHOLX PHILOSOPHY**

In several of the interviews, many of the Cholos and Cholas reflected on the original intention of this cultural identity and subculture, which was to resist oppression, forced assimilation, and to create a family and a sense of community in places where they were not accepted, specifically in the United States. The Cholo veteran Tonio solemnly shared that these values are fading. Even the Cholo called Jay expressed concern about homies from his barrio saying that many have fallen into major drug abuse. He believes it's destroying the community saying that instead of helping each other they are stealing from their neighbors and instead of making money, they're losing it to drugs. In reflecting about creating a new Cholx consciousness, I asked all my interviewees to define Cholx philosophy and what it may teach future generations of Cholos and Cholas, as well as people from racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world. For Paola, she believes Cholx philosophy is about identity, about a social group that needed an identity. "They were Mexican and American, two



very strong identities. They grew up in America and no longer felt directly related to the immigrant. They didn't feel accepted here nor there. They needed to feel their own identity and needed to create their own community," said Paola. As an artist, she believes all artists should document snapshots of what's happening in society so that future generations understand how people have lived and how they've evolved and changed. Vicko highlighted the resourcefulness and hard work that Chols put into their communities, which is why she feels Cholo and Chola history should be taught under the umbrella of movement history and radical activism. She believes Cholos and Cholas were the first ones to "tell white people to piss off and if they had to do it with their fists, they did," adding that "they expressed the real rage and anger that a lot of us are too scared to sometimes express."

For the Cholos in Chihuahua, raising money for the community is so that the younger generations have a better future. They strongly believe that Chols philosophy should be about friendship and fellowship and about making plans for the future for the entire community. It's about uniting with your people, respecting your elders, working through differences, and staying away from vices. They argue that without these principles the culture gets lost. Zeye expressed that there is a need to learn how to handle your problems without resorting to violence. She addresses the mental wellness of Cholos and Cholas as a priority. Her message to future generations of Chols was "They hate us, cuz they ain't us. We're pretty amazing people. We're hard-working. We come from a long line of intelligent people. They were mathematicians, they built things, they didn't have the technology we have now. We come from that and I think that's pretty awesome." Zeye also added that no one is perfect and that it's okay to fall sometimes as long as you pick yourself back up. This is what she teaches her two young sons. She helps them see that there are other ways to go about conflict and channeling your inner peace is key to that

as she's learned from Hinduism, Buddhism, and her inspiration Bruce Lee. For Luz, she believes Cholx philosophy is about embracing every aspect of yourself and stripping away the idea of what it means to be feminine and what it means to be masculine. She wants Cholx to embrace who they are and their chosen identity. Skeemer agrees with self-identification and self-education, but also stresses that Cholx be adamant about their Indigenous identity. He also believes that the subculture requires mentors, even though he said he doesn't consider himself one. The Cholo called Jay also discussed the importance of veteranos going back to the barrio and talking with the young people. Skeemer described a Cholo mentor as being someone who is not perfect but takes the time to tell a kid in the barrio how to practice the culture, for example, explaining which spray cans to use for graffiti or how to wear their socks and what kind of shoes to wear. Above all, he said young Cholx should not call themselves Latin/Latino/Latina/Latinx because it stems from "a language spoken in Italy" meaning that's not where Cholx come from. The O.G. Family members assert that Cholx philosophy is about carnalismo (brotherhood) and cora (heart) saying that this is what keeps people together and it's about building a bond with your community, which they view as one big family. Tonio and Claudia echoed this sentiment. Tonio believes that we all have the same patron (boss), which is the community and that's who we should be working for. Claudia agreed saying that it's important to keep our families united because family comes first and we should protect our families both blood-related, as well as friendships. The Cholo called Jay summarized Cholx philosophy as sticking together saying Cholos do it "to overcome, sometimes it's illegal, but it's the only way you have to overcome it or to get out from wherever you're at. Maybe teach those skills, that attitude, your mindset that I can go out and do this and I'm gonna' make this money. I'm gonna' get myself out of this."

## **Resistance to Cholxing**

Practicing Cholx philosophy is Cholxing and future generations of Cholos and Cholas should also know that they may be met with resistance or mockery. Cholxing can get you stereotyped or even worse – killed or murdered in broad daylight. Cholx remember what happened to Pachucos during the zoot suit riots. They were stripped naked on the street and beaten to the ground by American servicemen. The police who were supposed to protect and serve them turned a blind eye to the brutality that these young Mexican, Mexican American, a.k.a. Cholos and Cholas, endured.

## **Jay, Tonio, Skeemer: To Cholx or Not to Cholx**

The Cholo called Jay and Tonio who live on the highly militarized U.S.-Mexico Border do less Cholxing to avoid being targets of police brutality. Jay's aesthetic as previously discussed is low-key, yet he's still seen as a criminal. For Tonio blending in is especially important at his age now for his own safety. Skeemer who lives in Pilsen, Chicago discussed being treated like a sideshow saying that tourists in Chicago ask to take photos of him when they see him Cholxing on the street. What this means is that he's simply walking down the street wearing Cholo aesthetics, his regular wardrobe. He describes his Napanla experience as existing between exploitation and negativity. He's been called a piece of shit and a thug and has experienced microaggressions such as people making jokes like "Oh, your socks are too high." What makes him the most angry is when people stop him on the street and ask to take a picture with him. His response to that is "Get the fuck away from me. I'm not a cardboard cutout." He goes further explaining his Napanla state of being as "It's the you're so cool they don't want to understand you and you're so shitty they don't want to understand you. So, too cool to give a shit about why and too crazy-looking to want to understand." Skeemer shared that he feels he becomes a mascot

for some people. He says because he's not in L.A. and instead is in the Midwest, where you may not see as many Cholos, people may not understand that being Cholo is his lifestyle not an aesthetic choice that he takes off at the end of the day.

The data I gathered from coded interview transcriptions and my observation notes of Paola and Vicko, along with the coded interviews of all the Cholx I interviewed combined make up what I'm putting forward as the philosophy of Cholx consciousness. The next chapter will serve as the most important tool coming out of this project, which is a new Cholx consciousness that IS a social justice movement. Once Cholx consciousness is attained, the Cholx social justice movement will continue to gain momentum around the world.

## **Chapter Five: Towards a New Cholx Consciousness**

### **OVERVIEW OF STUDY**

Building on Yosso's work (2005), the aim of this study is to examine and gain some insight, using ethnographic research methods, on the cultural capital of Cholx and puts forward testimonios of being resilient, fierce, independent, and unique. Yosso asks "Are there forms of cultural capital that marginalized groups bring to the table that traditional cultural capital theory does not recognize or value?" (77). This research project provides a response to this question by examining the cultural capital of the Cholo and Chola subculture.

To examine Cholx consciousness and the visual rhetorics of Cholx artistas as a method for social justice movements, I conducted qualitative research using ethnographic methods. The questions that guided my study were: 1) How is Cholx art creating a new Cholx Consciousness that is global and connects racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world?; 2) How do Chicana and frontera Mexicana artists transgress the normative practices in

their artistic fields?; and 3) How can these artists serve as models for being unruly and disruptive in order to create a new reality that is inclusive and centered on the subaltern?

The following is a brief overview of what I'm calling the Cholx philosophy of the Cholo and Chola subculture based on cultural values as expressed in Cholo and Chola interviews I conducted, and data coded using the same coding that I used for the interviews with Paola and Vicko. The interviews with Cholos and Cholas represent four geographic locations: (1) Luz, Skeemer, and Zeye in Pilsen, Chicago, U.S.A.; (2) the members of the Movimiento Hermandad in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, Mexico; (3) members of the O.G. Familia and a Cholo called Jay in El Paso, Texas, U.S.A.; and (4) Tonio and Claudia in Chaparral, New Mexico, U.S.A. with life experience from Juárez.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The evidence of the rhetoric and methods of Chola artistas Paola and Vicko is supported by the testimonios of these Cholos and Cholas from various barrios. It is also important to note that this research project is being written and led by a native of El Paso, which in Pachuco language means "Pachuco." Similarly, a person from El Paso was commonly referred to as "Del pachuco" (Barker, p. 13). In the early 1900s many people knew that the Spanish word El Paso meant El Pachuco in Pachuco. The language of the Pachuco, Caló, was passed down to Cholos and Cholas with its own evolution to keep up with today's jargon. Evidence shows that the language and dress of the Pachuco originated in El Paso, a.k.a. El Chuco. After the major U.S. World Wars, an entire generation of young Mexican-American youth came back to the U.S. from the armed forces. The only important difference in their style was the mixing of their old army uniform "drapes" (pants) with the Pachuco style of resistance. Songs by Lalo Guerrero elevated

the Pachucos in his lyrics and demonstrated the respect they received from members of their own community as discussed by Tonio and his memory of the Pachuco dress.

### **Cholx Values**

The following Cholx philosophy is an overview of the Cholx values as based on the interviews and observation notes and on the visual art and written texts of two Chola artists Paola and Vicko as recorded by me, the writer and researcher of this project. Additionally, the Cholo and Chola participants provide content to their interviews as examined from the standpoint of the Cholx values involved. Cholx values, which make up the Cholx philosophy, may be said to be briefly stated as follows: (1) Cholx believe in protecting their neighborhoods, community, and family; (2) Separation of families goes against Cholx beliefs and acts; (3) Cholx believe in having cultural pride and expressing that pride through art such as lowriders, bikes, clothing, make-up; and (4) Cholx want and give respect. They want liberation from racial and economic oppression.

The Cholx philosophy stemming out of these coded testimonios may be divided into four groups, El Paso, Chaparral, Chihuahua, and Chicago. The values articulated in the participants' stories make up the philosophy of Cholx. The first of these values relates to the way in which Cholx artistas regard themselves; the second concerns Cholx lives and relations with others. The Cholo and Chola have a strong feeling of resistance toward abandoning their culture. The Cholo and Chola today came from parents who come from a society that wanted to mimic the dominant Euro-centric culture. Now more than ever, the descendants of the Pachucos and Pachucas want to mimic the culture through Cholo and Chola aesthetics. The Cholx consciousness is being passed down, so that younger generations of Cholos and Cholas can use this Cholx philosophy as a tool

to shape their values, which includes strong cultural values and values of respect and economic parity for their families in order to sustain their lives.

### **Cholx Tenets**

The following tenets demonstrate Cholx cultural wealth and are based on the strongest statement from each of the Cholos and Cholas I interviewed. These are the tenets as stated in the testimonios of the Cholo and Chola participants for this study:

**Be proud.** “They hate us, cuz they ain’t us,” said Zeye;

**You have a right to exist and resist.** “I’m going to survive. I’m going to be here, whether you like it or not,” said Luz;

**You’re on Native land.** “We come from here. We’re not aliens. We’re not foreigners. To dispel all the layers of suffering and hate and stigmas that are put on our culture,” said Skeemer;

**Know your history.** The Tirilones came after Pachucos before Cholos, Melantzon, 1989. “Protegían la colonia, protegían el barrio porque eran varios barrios. Controlaban ahí de que no hubiera pleito. Eran los mismos del barrio que cuidaba que todo este bien” dice Tonio. (In English: “The tirilones (means Cholos according to Melantzon, 1989), would protect the colonia, they would protect the barrio because there were many. They would control the situation to make sure there were no fights. They were the same ones from the barrio that protected their own barrio,” said Tonio;

**Family comes first.** “Que no pedrería la union familiar entre familia,” said Claudia. (In English: “To not lose the family unity within family,” said Claudia.);

**Protect one another.** “Protect each other...Look out for each other...You have to overcome,” said a Cholo called Jay;

**Grow the culture.** Continue to “grow this culture, many of us got rid of our vices, we’re more concerned with our families and friendship. To do it for the children, so they can grow up with a positive culture,” said the members of the Movimiento Hermandad in Chihuahua; and;

**Pass it down to the next generation.** “It has to get passed generation to generation, so the younger generation learns from the older generation who learned if from the older generation. It’s a cycle,” said members of the O.G. familia in El Paso.

### **Cholx Philosophy**

In several of the interviews, many of the Cholos and Cholas reflected on the original intention of this cultural identity and subculture, which was to resist oppression, forced assimilation, and to create a family and a sense of community in places where they were not accepted, specifically in the United States. The Cholo veterano Tonio solemnly shared that these values are fading. Even the Cholo called Jay expressed concern about homies from his barrio saying that many have fallen into major drug abuse. He believes it’s destroying the community, saying that instead of helping each other they are stealing from their neighbors and instead of making money, they’re losing it to drugs. In reflecting about creating a new Cholx consciousness, I asked all my interviewees to define Cholx philosophy and what it may teach future generations of Cholos and Cholas, as well as people from racially and economically disadvantaged communities around the world.

For Paola, she believes Cholx philosophy is about identity, about a social group that needed an identity. “They were Mexican and American, two very strong identities. They grew up in America and no longer felt directly related to the immigrant. They didn’t feel accepted here nor there. They needed to feel their own identity and needed to create their own community,”



said Paola. As an artist, she believes all artists should document snapshots of what's happening in society so that future generations understand how people have lived and how they've evolved and changed. Vicko highlighted the resourcefulness and hard work that Cholx put into their communities, which is why she feels Cholo and Chola history should be taught under the umbrella of movement history and radical activism. She believes Cholos and Cholas were the first ones to "tell white people to piss off and if they had to do it with their fists, they did," adding that "they expressed the real rage and anger that a lot of us are too scared to sometimes express."

For the Cholos in Chihuahua, raising money for the community is so that the younger generations have a better future. They strongly believe that Cholx philosophy should be about making plans for the future for the entire community. It's about uniting with your people, respecting your elders, working through differences, and staying away from vices. They argue that without these principles the culture gets lost. Zeye expressed that there is a need to learn how to handle your problems without resorting to violence. She addresses the mental wellness of Cholos and Cholas as a priority. Her message to future generations of Cholx was "We're pretty amazing people. We're hard-working. We come from a long line of intelligent people. They were mathematicians, they built things, they didn't have the technology we have now. We come from that and I think that's pretty awesome." Zeye also added that no one is perfect and that it's okay to fall sometimes as long as you pick yourself back up. This is what she teaches her two young sons. She helps them see that there are other ways to go about conflict and channeling your inner peace is key to that as she's learned from Hinduism, Buddhism, and her inspiration Bruce Lee.

For Luz, she believes Cholx philosophy is about embracing every aspect of yourself and stripping away the idea of what it means to be feminine and what it means to be masculine. She wants Cholx to embrace who they are and their chosen identity. Skeemer agrees with self-identification and self-education, but also stresses that Cholx be adamant about their Indigenous identity. He also believes that the subculture requires mentors, even though he said he doesn't consider himself one. The Cholo called Jay also discussed the importance of veteranos going back to the barrio and talking with the young people. Skeemer described a Cholo mentor as being someone who is not perfect but takes the time to tell a kid in the barrio how to practice the culture, for example, explaining which spray cans to use for graffiti or how to wear their socks and what kind of shoes to wear. Above all, he said young Cholx should not call themselves anything Latin, including Latino/a/x because "it's a language spoken in Italy" meaning that's not where Cholx come from. The O.G. Family members assert that Cholx Philosophy is about carnalismo (brotherhood) and cora (heart) saying that this is what keeps people together and it's about building a bond with your community, which they view as one big family.

Tonio and Claudia echoed this sentiment. Tonio believes that we all have the same patron (boss), which is the community and that's who we should be working for. Claudia agreed saying that it's important to protect your family. The Cholo called Jay summarized Cholx philosophy as sticking together, saying Cholos do it "to overcome, sometimes it's illegal, but it's the only way you have to overcome it or to get out from wherever you're at. Maybe teach those skills, that attitude, your mindset that I can go out and do this and I'm gonna' make this money. I'm gonna' get myself out of this."

## **BUILDING A MOVEMENT**

A concern of Tonio, the veterano from Chaparral, is that the Cholo culture is disappearing. He shared how he's observed how many young people today don't respect their parents, especially when they visit the U.S. The Cholos in Chihuahua expressed something similar. They asserted that the Hispanic community in the U.S. is losing their principals that they had with them when they first crossed the border as migrant farmworkers. The Cholx in Chihuahua believe they are descendants of the Pachuco. During the World Wars in the U.S., the Mexican children of immigrants didn't want to fight in those wars, especially because of how they were discriminated against in the U.S., so they rebelled. This is when one may say the Cholx Movement started and it started because they were protecting themselves and their barrios.

## **CHOLX CONSCIOUS ARTISTAS**

The results of this qualitative project, as evidenced through the findings, demonstrate that Cholx conscious artistas, such as Paola and Vicko, with insider knowledge and a historical understanding, make them the Cholx intellectuals in the community. They represent the griots of this Cholo and Chola subaltern community and they are needed in order to defend Cholo and Chola communities and families. They serve an agentic role in highlighting the positive aspects of this subculture through visual and written texts that are easily accessible by the Cholx community. When Cholx stories are not written by Cholx, by outsiders, misunderstandings will happen. When the communication tools are not available to Cholx to share their own stories, their stories get told through others who are in positions to be able to document others' stories.

Cholx had been represented negatively by contemporary sources. The early history of the El Paso, Texas, area has been well traced by Anne E. Hughes in 1965 (Coltharp, p. 1). She documents the minimal media outlets from radio and television stations to newspapers in English and Spanish both in El Paso and across the border in Juárez, Mexico. The community was receiving mass messages with a standard message that communicated similar messages, beliefs, and ideologies. The Pachuco language practices, as well as their defiant style of resistance and not wanting to fit-in in a society that rejects them has been well-documented.

The visual and written counterstories as created by Cholx artistas and intellectuals such as Paola and Vicko and examined in this research study, serve as a form of resistance to the misrepresentation, unrepresentation, and demeaning representation of Cholos and Cholas in American mainstream media. For instance, the Pachuco language was widely reported in contemporary media as being unintelligible (Hughes). Alvarez (1965) argues that if Caló is “to be considered a distinct language form, then the Mexican-American is not bilingual, as is commonly supposed. Rather, he is trilingual” (Alvarez, p. 10). The trilingual testimonios gathered for this study with all the participants – the Cholos, Cholas, and Cholx from Chicago, Chihuahua, and El Paso, provide context for the subculture that’s being represented.

Because there is a lack of positive Cholx representation in American mainstream media, their artistic works help to fill that void and serves as a tool for teaching about Cholx lives, history, and philosophy. Additionally, this Cholx project recognizes that research has been done that values POC cultural capital, counterstory frameworks, and rasquachando methods and aims to provide a specific Cholx perspective. Finally, the Cholx testimonios demonstrate the practice of Cholxing as resistance to forced assimilation and demeaning depictions of them.

## UNDERSTANDING CHOLX THROUGH ART

Cholx artistas create art for and with their community. They consciously engage in the political act of inserting ourselves into dominant discourses that value Euro-centric perspectives of People of Color. They also mess with the social order of who gets to make art in mainstream American media by employing in order to get our stories made regardless in whatever form necessary. Cholx artistas are more resilient than ever and their mission is to present positive Cholx perspectives. Cholx art contributes to the remembering and revisioning of Cholo and Chola communities. Therefore, this project argues that Cholx art as rhetorical invention should be used to combat oppression, especially in regard to representation in American media during a time of increased hateful and discriminatory acts. For instance, for Paola, the Cholo subject as an artist is to bring awareness to reality and the social issues in our society. Her art is about portraying people who we don't normally see in media and in the arts. She aims to provide an intimate perspective of these people.

There are some museum institutions that are highlighting the Chola subculture as a source of cultural capital wealth. In an email interview with J. Gurulé (personal communication, June 16, 2020) curator of the 2019 *Qué Chola* exhibition in the Art Museum at the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque, NM, discussed the development of this exhibit featuring Chola art works. Gurulé was born and raised in Albuquerque. She worked closely with the museum research and curatorial assistant who is a grad student in Art History at UNM on this exhibit. Gurulé shared that she grew up surrounded by Cholas and she admired them, but it wasn't until college that she started to learn more about aesthetics, art, and subculture which she said added a more academic lens. She was in graduate school when she first read an essay by Rosa Linda Fregoso, a Chicana scholar who centers women filmmakers, and was so struck how

she articulated from an academic perspective, things that Gurulé said she felt but couldn't articulate as a young person. Despite the overwhelming positive response to the *Qué Chola* exhibit, the museum did encounter viewpoints by those who had pre-determined notions about what and who the Chola represents. However, Gurulé added that these allowed for some important discussions to take place. In presenting the Chola subject to the public, Gurulé and her team made conscious decisions. First, the key word used throughout the exhibit was "complexity" recognizing that the exhibit would have a huge range in audience, from those intimately familiar with the Chola, to those who had never heard the word before, to those who only knew Cholas to be associated with gangs. Second, the art museum took special care in addressing the museum text saying that it was a challenge conducting docent trainings to this range of audience members. Gurulé said they were also "weary of the risk of unintentionally reinforcing stereotypes and inadvertently creating a space for the uncritical consumer to enter, consume content they might otherwise avoid, and do so without checking their bias" (J. Gurulé, personal interview, June 16, 2020). She added that this is an area that is a little hard to gather hard data on. Otherwise, Gurulé shared that the most common "negative criticisms" of the subject matter were related to the Chola's association with gang activity and, like the Pachuca, assumptions regarding promiscuity. However, Gurulé added that the art museum took a great deal of care to avoid vocalizing value judgements in response to any of these areas. They neither wanted to associate Cholas with these things nor distance them from them. Adding they "did not want to respond in ways that might project the idea that gangs are bad or sexuality in women is bad without first advocating for a consideration of the range and complexity of human experience, survival, and resilience. Instead, we advocated for visitors to reflect on the complexity of their own life experience, their own desire for group belonging and support, the

challenges they face, the empowerment they feel through dressing in a particular way, etc.”

Third, the art museum developed a definition of “cholas” for the museum text (for those that might not have any idea of what they were talking about), but also included a note to problematize the act of creating definitions for people, noting that “most people defy rigid categorization and in fact, one of the goals of the exhibition was to highlight complexity, not squish anyone or any art into a box.” Finally, Gurulé added that she was expecting many visitors to be prepared “to recognize the chola as a challenge to feminine norms—she is in the public sphere, she can drink, smoke, and fight with the boys, her clothing is quite similar to her male counterparts, etc.—but the queer perspective of Q-Sides was really important for expanding ideas regarding gender and heteronormativity a little further, to think beyond the definition that even the museum presented in the text.” Gurulé ended by discussing the importance of *rasquachando con la comunidad*. She added “Community-building is central to the work we do. We see our role as being an accessible place where people of all walks of life can gather to celebrate, learn together, find strength and solidarity. Part of this includes catering exhibitions and programs to a wide audience and developing multifaceted approaches to better understanding the needs and wants that our many, diverse, communities have from their museums and cultural institutions. Community-building isn’t a one size fits all sort of mission so part of our role is the continual assessment of how we can do better at this task.”

## **CHOLX GLOBAL**

The American export of Cholo and Chola culture to other countries such as Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam demonstrate how Cholx culture is able to transcend any language. Young people around the world are adopting Cholx resistance as style. Vicko attributes this to the age of

technology and being able to share experiences so much more easily on social media platforms. She added that we're so interconnected across the United States and beyond with other countries around the world. This connection across distance is what Vicko says leads to adaptations of Cholo and Chola culture. When discussing the Japonero phenomena with the Cholos in Chihuahua, they responded "Está chingon eso," (That's cool) adding "it feels great knowing that they are practicing us." For Zeye, she gained empowerment and inspiration from growing up with her dad who had a lowrider and would take her to lowrider shows. She started getting the Lowrider magazines and would skip to the back to look at the art. For Zeye being Chola means "being your own badass and not caring what anyone says about you." Luz stresses that Chola is about reclaiming your culture and to dress the way you want to dress and not conforming to gender stereotypes. Skeemer's message to those practicing Cholo and Chola culture is to "give a shit and do some research" because for him you can't separate the lifestyle from the aesthetics. Johnny from the O.G. Family feels similar, saying "I'm what you see 24-7. I don't take it off and then hang it up." For the Cholo called Jay, he was able to experience the sense of family and protection while in prison saying that he was immediately befriended by the Sureños even though he was not officially part of the gang. He learned that the gang members in prison come from a long line of gangsters "like the grandpa's in the gang." He understands why outsiders would want to adopt the Cholo style because "it's a cool style" but, he adds "I bet you a lot of them have jobs, have careers, they just like the style...here, some of them are becoming dope fiends, so that hood you're supposed to be protecting now you're stealing from it." While some practice Cholo and Chola culture for aesthetic reasons, it became clear that these Chols understand the deeper layers of this culture and identity, which stems from the history of struggle



and oppression, which continues to impact racially and economically disadvantaged communities to this day.

### **CHOLX ARTISTAS ARE ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS**

Gramsci developed theories of mass culture and proposed a dynamic view that “the importance and the operations of mass culture not only as an agent of consent but also as an important factor in the encouragement of counter-hegemonic practices” (58). Hollywood is the sender of negative messages about Cholos using their mass media channels, such as movie theatres and television broadcasts. As gatekeepers, Hollywood executives who are majority white and male ultimately decide what information we receive. The subaltern are the receivers. In order to counter this systematically racist system, POC need to be the writers, directors, and producers of their own story. The Cholos I interviewed mentioned that they see Cholos in film and some of it may influence them, but for them Cholo life is a reality. They’re not in a movie. Life is more complex and it’s not what they see in the movies. In contrast, when I asked how they feel about Cholos in art by Cholx artists, such as Paola, they said they feel proud and it lifts their hermandad movement.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOR CHOLX DEPICTION**

Cholx consciousness is needed in order to better serve Cholo and Chola communities. Cholx may be able to define the new status quo for our own community. In order to do this, Cholx need to counter the false narratives about them. By becoming an educated member of your community, you raise yourself and you raise your community. For educators who want to empower their students, we must first understand the students that we are dealing with. A way to

do this is by emphasizing the underlying connection to each other, such as our educational goals and the goal to lift up ourselves and our community. Cholo consciousness is understanding that Cholos and Cholas are a subaltern population that is socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of our society. The dominant force is embodied as American suppression of racially and economically disadvantaged communities in the U.S. and globally. We must recognize symbolic violence as ingrained ideologies perpetuated through social institutions that serve to continue the suppression of POC.

An overall feature of hegemony is the numbers, but just because you're in power doesn't make you right. The only way to offer a rebuttal to the hegemonic force is to have the numbers to do so. Ultimately, we have to be able to replace one hegemon with another. Ideally, the goal is to replace the current hegemon with a critically aware and critically conscious one that doesn't allow for the perpetuation of institutions and ideologies that serve to continue the oppression and discrimination of POC. We may use technology and social media available to us as a means by which to promote our message and as an extension of the classroom. In doing so we are offering an antithesis to the hegemonic view of Cholos and Cholas as violent criminals. Instead of allowing people like Donald Trump to define what POC are, POC define themselves. Courses in Cholo arts and philosophy should be considered. Skeemer discussed the Cholo lifestyle as one that includes what could be considered the sports of Choling, which include lowriding, tattooing, graffiti writing, murals and art, and the fashion and uniform of Cholos and Cholas. Each of these topics along with the history and philosophy may be an entire lesson plan or course topic.

## **Recognizing and Taking Responsibility**

In order to dismantle an oppressive system, we have to adopt a new consciousness first. Without critical consciousness no real change will come. In *Rhetorics of the Americas*, Damián Baca and Victor Villanueva (2010) explain the pictographic rhetorical practices of Mesoamerican people prior to the Spanish conquest in 1519. They write, “The postconquest era saw a rapid and violent transition period from a predominantly alphabetic one within a single generation,” (p. 144). Baca calls on the field of Rhetoric and Composition to change its practice of disregarding the visual and written contributions of Mesoamerican and Mexican peoples in the framework of rhetorical history and rhetorical theory, both ancient and new. He argues that “Repeated omissions can be found in the majority of the field’s publications, which fail to devote a single line to five hundred years of intellectual contributions from Central and South America as well as the development of highly complex rhetorical traditions long before the Conquest” (Baca, p. 144). My work aims to fill this void and my being from El Chuco puts me in the best position to assist in the recording and sharing of these Cholx counterstories.

## **Teacher Preparation for Teaching Cholx**

Our positionality as teachers includes being members of the community where we teach. We are byproducts of the community. As a result, we only ever have our students’ interests at heart in the sense that our students, much like ourselves represent our community. Our responsibility as educators is to facilitate the development of the critical consciousness to let them know this is more than just an institution that grants you a degree. Instead, educational institutions should be a space where you come to learn about your community and to develop ideas for addressing inequalities. As an educator on the U.S.-Mexico Border, where I was born and raised, I recognize that I am also coming from the perspective of my students. Because I

grew up in this community, I understand the importance of educating borderland students as more vital than ever. I see my role as an educator as training the voiceless, as empowering frontera lives to be active and to challenge the hegemon in order to escape their subaltern status. Participating in a Cholx social justice movement is needed in order to redefine the image of what it means to be a borderland student and teacher building community.

My research connects with the growing interest globally of Cholo and Chola identity, arts, and culture. My work will make a positive contribution on a global scale because we are still very U.S.-centric. This study is a critical examination of this phenomena through Visual Rhetoric and Writing Studies as a critical disciplinary lens, especially representations in comic books and fine art as it relates to literacy and media studies. I argue that we maintain high standards through Cholx consciousness by emphasizing our cultural capital. In doing so, we lift up Cholos and Cholas, a racially and economically disadvantaged community. Counterstory methods may allow us to achieve an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exposure of social and political contradictions. Cholx consciousness also includes taking action against the oppressive elements in one's life that are illuminated by that understanding as noted by educational theorist Paulo Freire.

## **LIMITATIONS**

This study examined Cholx consciousness and the visual and rhetorical practices of Cholx artistas as a method for social justice movements. I used ethnographic methods and I was able to travel to and visit Cholos and Cholas in the barrios of Pilsen, Chicago, Chihuahua City, and El Paso. Although an ethnographic approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of Cholx and Cholxing, I would have liked more time to conduct individual lengthy interviews with all the

Cholo and Chola participants from the artistas' own neighborhoods. Although I met and was able to identify Paola and Vicko as my main subjects a year leading up to the sit-down interviews, limited travel funding restricted my face-to-face interaction with them. Originally, I had also planned to include interviews from Japoneros, but I was not able to get to these interviews until a few months leading up to the submission of this study. The coronavirus pandemic also kept me in quarantine, and I was not able to travel to Japan to shadow Japoneros in person. I continue to collect this data, but it won't make it into this study. Instead I'll include it in the continuation of this project beyond the thesis. The work continues.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO RHETORIC**

My purpose is to show how the counterstory as discussed by Solórzano & Yosso, Villanueva, and Martinez applies to the Cholx subculture. I provided an updated examination of this subaltern community as previously discussed in Pachuco and Caló scholarship by Alvarez, Barker, Braddy, Cantú Jr., Coltharp, Gonzalez, Melantzon, and Ornstein-Galicia et al.. I offer *rasquachando con la comunidad* as a method for owning the means of production and building community. I put forth *Cholxing* as a term that refers to Cholos and Cholas who demonstrate Cholx aesthetics and philosophy in order to challenge dominant and oppressive ideologies about them. *Cholxing* in academic scholarship is a social justice rhetoric framework for recovering and putting forth stories and voices that we don't normally see, read, and hear in American mainstream media. Finally, this project articulates the Cholx consciousness through visual rhetorics as a method for civic engagement that is needed to better serve our community and ultimately transform the world. Cushman in discussing the rhetorician as an agent of social change argues that we "can empower people in our communities, establish networks of

reciprocity with them, and create solidarity with them” (p. 7). We can begin by working with local communities where universities and colleges are located. Throughout this research project, I’ve discussed case studies, including my own that feature *rasquachando con la comunidad*, creating with your community, for the community, about the community. My work will make a significant contribution to Rhetoric and Composition and it will advance our field to make it more interdisciplinary.

## **BEING CHOLX**

What is needed along with the Cholx underdog aesthetic is an unruly and uninhibited conscious act of making salient the images and stories of the subculture in order to disrupt oppressive and exclusive systems and ideologies. Specifically, we must examine Cholo and Chola subjects as agents of social change. We must acknowledge their past roots and origins in order to better understand this resilient subculture. The passing down of Cholx consciousness is necessary so that younger generations of Cholos and Cholas can use it as a tool to shape their values and their culture and in order for this subculture to survive. Cholx today feel a strong connection and belonging to the community and to the society of their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, as far as memory can take them or stories passed down from generation to generation.

My father never admitted to me that he ever smoked marijuana. However, I ran across his old high school yearbooks from the 1950s in El Paso, Texas, and toward the end of the yearbook there are student-drawn caricatures of the students. My dad was drawn as “El Marijuano” (dude that smokes marijuana) and he looked like he was wearing “drapes” mixed with Pachuco style

and gafas (dark sunglasses). It was during this period, when drug laws began to include cannabis, that Pachucos began to get into trouble with the law for this reason (Braddy, 1960).

Right after high school my dad joined the U.S. Marine Corps hoping to be on the right side of things, only to come back and live in poverty and be confronted with racism. My dad rarely discussed his time as a sergeant in the Marines, but he did share stories about being in full Marine uniform and having to enter a diner from the back because he was Mexican-American or “colored.” Now I’m his legacy, the next generation who was guided to take the college route. And here I am telling this Cholx counterstory, organizing this valuable knowledge into one form accessible to the younger generation – my nieces and nephews because they are what matters. Their actions will be guided by Cholx philosophy. In order for Cholx to survive as a subculture, their images, philosophy, and acts need to be by, for, and about Cholx.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

#### Research Questions for Artists

1. Where did you grow up, what experiences did you have, and how does that inform your work?
2. What issues capture your attention and how do you see things?
3. What does marginalization mean to you and how does that affect places and styles?
4. What angle do you write, paint, and direct from and how is it similar or different from other angles?
5. Do you consider yourself radical and/or more accurate than mainstream mass medias?
6. Describe your medium and artistic practice.
7. Have you had any formal or professional training in the arts? If so, from where?
8. Do you work independently, with a collective or organization?
9. How are you able to fund your practice?
10. How do you identify yourself artistically? (Ex: Chicano artists, borderland artists, community activist, educator, ....)
11. What role does your ethnicity and culture play in your art?
12. What are the key themes represented in your artwork?
13. Is your work inspired by any artists, art movement or social movement? If so, who, what, or when?
14. At any point during your artistic practice have you felt the need or pressure to censor any part of your work for the larger audience? If so when, what and why?
15. What do you hope to communicate and/or accomplish through your art?
16. Do you think that your art helps educate and foster a better quality of life for individuals and your community? If so, how?
17. How might your art help educate and foster a better quality of life for individuals outside of your community?

**Research Questions for Cholas/os/x Subjects**

1. Where did you grow up? What experiences did you have?
2. How and when did you begin to identify as Chola/o or Cholx? What was that experience like?
3. What issues capture your attention? How do you see things?
4. How do you think other people see you?
5. How do you feel about how you're represented in the artist' artwork, film, or comic book?  
How is it similar or different to mainstream mass medias?
6. How did your family and friends react to how you are represented in the artwork, film, or comic book?
7. How do you think people who are not Chicax, Chola/o, or Cholx will react to the artwork, film, or comic book?
8. How do you define Cholx philosophy? What should be taught to younger generations of Cholx?

**Research Questions for Curators / Museum Directors**

1. What practices are effective in making art museums and cultural institutions more inclusive?  
By what measures?
2. How has your museum or institution been successful in diversifying the content of your exhibitions and collections? What do you consider diverse?
3. What complexities or challenges do you face in diversifying the content of your exhibitions and collections?
4. How do you see Chicana artists in comparison to the majority of your exhibitions and collections? What makes them similar or different?
5. How are Chicana artists represented in your exhibitions and collections?
6. How do you view rasquache art? How is it similar or different to the artwork in your current exhibitions and collections?
7. How do you view Chola/o subjects in art? How is it similar or different to the artwork in your current exhibitions and collections?
8. What do you consider high art? What do you consider low art?
9. How does your museum or institution work with your local community in building exhibitions and collections? How is the local community represented in your museum or institution's exhibitions and collections?
10. What role do you see your museum or institution in community-building?

May 24, 2019

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: ***The Rhetoric and Methods of Mex-Chicanx Artistas: Chola y Queer in Comics, On Canvas, and in Cinema***

Dear Vicko,

I am currently conducting interviews and research as part of my dissertation project to examine visual narratives of marginalized people made by Mex-Chicanx artistas – mujeres. I'm focusing on the work of three artistas who work in three genres – film, comic books, and paintings. I would like to feature you as the artista in comic books. I'm interested in your work because your content transgresses normative practices that we may see in mainstream productions and because it may be considered unruly and disruptive simply for the fact that you portray Chola subjects and because you are Chicanx.

I find that you are an ideal candidate for this research dissertation project because your recent work “Rosita Gets Scared” has not only served as a form of entertainment but you have also incorporated a social and cultural message behind it. I have personally witnessed your “Scholar Series” and dynamics that it has had in the community by attracting a diverse audience and bringing much thought, dialogue, healing and knowledge. I find that it is important to document your story as a contemporary Chicanx artist so that others might have the opportunity to learn more about you and your work.

The interview takes around one to two hours and will take form as a conversation. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed for the purpose of this research project. I would also like to video record broll footage of you engaging in your art, such as illustrating, writing, working with your community, or any other activity you suggest. You will also be asked to provide any other additional information, references, artist's statement, photographs and personal website as personal sources for this research, if available. You have the full right not to give permission to use any parts of your work and your story in this dissertation and can skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be highly valued and might be additional exposure to your work.

If you are willing to participate please let me know if you may be available any time between August 3 – 13, 2019. I also teach full-time, so I'm trying to schedule interviews before school starts or long weekends. If early August does not work for you, is there a long weekend that may be more convenient for you? My plan would be to fly out to where you are and spend 2-3 days observing you work and to conduct the interview. I could also interview any community members that have participated in your work. I would be staying at a nearby hotel.

My goal is to complete all the interviews before November 2019, so that I can write the dissertation. My goal is to complete the dissertation by March 2020. If you have any questions I can be reached through email or personal cell number (telephone number deleted for privacy).

Thank you for considering this invitation. It would be a great honor to be able to feature you in this dissertation project.

Muchas gracias,  
Elvira Carrizal-Dukes



May 24, 2019

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: ***The Rhetoric and Methods of Mex-Chicanx Artistas: Chola y Queer in Comics, On Canvas, and in Cinema***

Dear Paola,

I am currently working on the beginning stages of research for my dissertation project, which includes conducting interviews to examine visual narratives of marginalized people made by Mex-Chicanx artistas – mujeres.

I'm focusing on the work of three artistas who work in three genres – film, comic books, and paintings. I would like to feature you as the artista in paintings. I'm interested in your work because your content transgresses normative practices that we may see in mainstream works and because it may be considered unruly and disruptive simply for the fact that you portray Cholo/a subjects and because you are Mexicana.

I find that you are an ideal candidate for this research dissertation project because your recent work “Cholo on the Border” has not only served as a form of entertainment but you have also incorporated a social and cultural message behind it. I have personally witnessed dynamics that it has had in the community by attracting a diverse audience and bringing much thought, dialogue, healing and knowledge. I find that it is important to document your story as a contemporary Mexicana artist so that others might have the opportunity to learn more about you and your work.

The interview takes around one to two hours and will take form as a conversation. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed for the purpose of this research project. I would also like to video record broll footage of you engaging in your art, such as painting, working with your community, or any other activity you suggest. You will also be asked to provide any other additional information, references, artist's statement, photographs and personal website as personal sources for this research, if available. You have the full right not to give permission to use any parts of your work and your story in this dissertation and can skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be highly valued and might be additional exposure to your work.

If you are willing to participate please let me know if you may be available any time between September – October 2019. I also teach full-time, so I'm trying to schedule interviews on long weekends. My plan would be to fly out to where you are and spend 2-3 days observing you work and to conduct the interview. I could also interview any community members that have participated in your work, such as the Cholos you painted.

My goal is to complete all the interviews before November 2019, so that I can write the dissertation. My goal is to complete the dissertation by March 2020. If you have any questions I can be reached through email or personal cell number (telephone number deleted for privacy).

Thank you for considering this invitation. It would be a great honor to be able to feature you in this dissertation project.

Muchas gracias,  
Elvira Carrizal-Dukes

Appendix F

May 24, 2019

Invitation to participate in the research project titled: ***The Rhetoric and Methods of Mex-Chicanx Artistas: Chola y Queer in Comics, On Canvas, and in Cinema***

Dear Aurora,

I am currently conducting interviews and research as part of my dissertation project to examine visual narratives of marginalized people made by Mex-Chicanx artistas – mujeres. I'm focusing on the work of three artistas who work in three genres – film, comic books, and paintings. I would like to feature you as the artista in film. I'm interested in your work because your content transgresses normative practices that we may see in Hollywood productions and because it may be considered unruly and disruptive simply for the fact that you portray Queer subjects and because you are Chicanx.

I find that you are an ideal candidate for this research dissertation project because your recent work “Mosquita y Mari” has not only served as a form of entertainment but you have also incorporated a social and cultural message behind it. I have personally witnessed your first short film “Pura Lengua” and dynamics that it has had in the community by attracting a diverse audience and bringing much thought, dialogue, healing and knowledge. I find that it is important to document your story as a contemporary Chicanx artist so that others might have the opportunity to learn more about you and your work.

The interview takes around one to two hours and will take form as a conversation. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed for the purpose of this research project. I would also like to video record broll footage of you engaging in your art, such as working on a film set, writing, directing, working with your community, or any other activity you suggest. You will also be asked to provide any other additional information, references, artist's statement, photographs and personal website as personal sources for this research, if available. You have the full right not to give permission to use any parts of your work and your story in this dissertation and can skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be highly valued and might be additional exposure to your work.

If you are willing to participate please let me know if you may be available any time between August 3 – 13, 2019. I also teach full-time, so I'm trying to schedule interviews before school starts or long weekends. If early August does not work for you, is there a long weekend that may be more convenient for you? My plan would be to fly out to where you are and spend 2-3 days observing you work and to conduct the interview. I could also interview any cast or crew or community members that have participated in your work. I would be staying at a nearby hotel.

My goal is to complete all the interviews before November 2019, so that I can write the dissertation. My goal is to complete the dissertation by March 2020. If you have any questions I can be reached through email or personal cell number (telephone number deleted for privacy).

Thank you for considering this invitation. It would be a great honor to be able to feature you in this dissertation project.

Muchas gracias,  
Elvira Carrizal-Dukes

## **University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects**

**Protocol Title:** The Rhetoric and Methods of Mex-Chicanx Artistas: Chola y Queer in Comics, On Canvas, and in Cinema

**Principal Investigator:** Elvira Carrizal-Dukes, Rhetoric and Composition PhD Candidate at UTEP's Department of English.

In this consent form, "you" always means the study participant (in this case, the artist and Cholo/a)

### **1. Introduction**

You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. Before agreeing to take part in this research study, it is important that you read the consent form that describes the study. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

This dissertation research project is intended to examine the lives and work of artists and Cholos/as like yourself, who through your artistic practice and collaboration with members of your community, have created art projects that have not only served as entertainment but have also brought social, cultural and environmental awareness about some of the current issues in the Mex-Chicanx border community.

By exploring your rhetoric and methods as a contemporary artist and/or as a Cholo/a, I intend to not only highlight your artistic experience, history, struggles, success, cultural and community influences as borderland artist and people but most importantly how your work in the arts has contributed to a better quality of life for many individuals in the borderland and beyond.

### **2. Why is this study being done?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study about the rhetoric and methods of Mex-Chicanx border artists and the impact of that art on our U.S.-Mexico border community and beyond.

### **3. What is involved in the study?**

If you agree to take part in this study, Elvira Carrizal-Dukes will ask for one personal interview that should take anywhere between one to two hours max of your time. This interview will be formatted as a Question and Answer conversation about your identity, your art, and labor history as an artist and/or Cholo/a and your recent contributions to art depicting Cholos/as and to your community.

With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed for the purpose of this dissertation research project. You will also be asked to provide any other additional

information, references, artist's statement, photographs and personal website as personal sources for this research, if available.

You have the full right not to give permission to use any parts of your work and your story in this dissertation and can skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. A copy of your interview will be shared with you in appreciation for your participation for you to share or store as you see fit.

#### **4. What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?**

Being that you have already actively worked in the public and public arts, there are no potential risks in taking part of this study. Some of the benefits of taking part in this study could be more public exposure of yourself and your art.

#### **5. What will happen if I am injured in this study?**

While the likelihood of you becoming injured during this conversation is very small, the University of Texas at El Paso and its affiliates do not offer to pay for or cover the cost of medical treatment for research related illness or injury. No funds have been set aside to pay or reimburse you in the event of such injury or illness. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form. You should report any such injury to Elvira Carrizal-Dukes at (telephone number deleted for privacy) and to the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-8841) or [irb.orsp@utep.edu](mailto:irb.orsp@utep.edu).

#### **6. What other options are there?**

You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

#### **7. What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study or withdraw at any time without penalty. You are free to pause, skip, or delete any part of your interview if you feel uncomfortable at any time during or after the interview.

#### **8. Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Elvira Carrizal-Dukes at [ecarrizaldukes@ utep.edu](mailto:ecarrizaldukes@utep.edu) or Dr. Kate Mangelsdorf at (915) 747-5543. If you

have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-8841) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

**9. What about confidentiality?**

Your participation in this study is confidential. If you consent to be recorded, the digital recordings will be used only by Elvira Carrizal-Dukes. They will never be released to anyone else for any reason. You will also be asked if you prefer to go by your name or prefer to be referred to by using an alternative name to protect your confidentiality.

**10. Authorization Statement**

I have read every page of this form (or it was read to me). I know that being in this study is voluntary I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I will get a copy of this consent form now and can get information on results of the study later if I wish.

*First, do you consent to being digitally recorded? The recording allows us to most accurately represent you and your story.*

- **In signing, I give consent to be interviewed and digitally recorded:**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

- **In signing, I give consent to be interviewed, but not to be digitally recorded:**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Digital recording consent explained/witnessed by:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

*Second, do you allow us to use your story in this dissertation research project?:*

- **In signing I give the consent for Elvira Carrizal-Dukes to use my story in this Dissertation Research Project. I know that I will be given the opportunity to review my story (if it is used) to be sure I am happy with how I am represented.**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

- **In signing, I do not give the consent to use my story in this Dissertation Research Project.**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Dissertation Research Project consent explained/witnessed by: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_



**University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Rhetoric and Writing Studies  
Informed Consent Form**

**Title:** Towards a New Cholx Consciousness: The Visual Rhetorics of Cholx Artistas as a Method for Social Justice Movements

**Interviewer:** Elvira Carrizal-Dukes, RWS PhD candidate at UTEP

In this consent form, “you” always means the study participant (in this case, the artist)

**1. Introduction**

You are being asked to take part voluntarily in a scholarly article for educational purposes.

This interview is intended to give voice to the lives and work of artists and curators like yourself, who through your artistic practice and collaboration in the public arts, have created pedagogic public art projects that have not only served as entertainment but have also brought social, cultural and environmental awareness about some of the current issues in border community.

By exploring your life story as a contemporary curator, I intend to not only highlight your artistic experience, history, struggles, success, cultural and community influences as a borderland arts advocate but most importantly how your work in the public arts has made an impact to the communities you serve.

This interview will appear in my doctoral dissertation for the UTEP Graduate School Rhetoric and Composition Doctoral Program and any published work that results from the dissertation research.

If you agree to be interviewed, Elvira Carrizal-Dukes will ask for one personal interview through written communication.

With your permission, Elvira will send you the questions electronically through email. You will also be asked to provide responses to the questions in writing and send back to Elvira via email your responses and any other additional information, photographs and personal website as personal sources for your work.

You have the full right not to give permission to use any parts of your work and your story in this interview and can skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. A copy of your

interview will be shared with you in appreciation for your participation for you to share or store as you see fit.

Being that you have already actively worked in the public and public arts, there are no potential risks in taking part of this interview. Some of the benefits of taking part in this study could be more public exposure of yourself and your work and your institution.

Taking part in this interview is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study or withdraw at any time without penalty. You are free to pause, skip, or delete any part of your interview if you feel uncomfortable at any time during or after the interview.

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Elvira Carrizal-Dukes at (telephone number deleted for privacy) or [ecarrizaldukes@utep.edu](mailto:ecarrizaldukes@utep.edu) or Dr. Kate Mangelsdorf at (915) 747-5543.

I have shared this form with you through email. I know that being in this interview is voluntary. I will get a copy of this consent form now. This form requires that you sign your name 2 times.

- **In signing, I give consent to be interviewed via email:**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

*Second, do you allow Elvira to use your interview for her research project as described above?*

- **In signing I give the consent for Elvira Carrizal-Dukes to use my interview in for her doctoral dissertation and any publications that are a result of the dissertation. I know that I will be given the opportunity to review the interview (if it is used) to be sure I am happy with how I am represented.**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

## Vita

Elvira Carrizal-Dukes is an Assistant Professor of Practice and Undergraduate Academic Adviser for Chicana/o Studies at The University of Texas at El Paso. She earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Rhetoric and Composition from UTEP, a Master of Fine Arts degree in Film from Columbia University in the City of New York, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities in Journalism and Chicano Studies and a minor in Theatre Arts. Elvira teaches Chicana/o Cinema and Theatre, American Cinema of the US-Mexico Border, The Roots of Latina/o Hip Hop, and Chicano/Latino Music in the U.S. She has also taught Contemporary Hispanic Theatre and Drama, Technical Communication, Cinematic Genres, Screenwriting, Cinematic Directors, Film Theory and Criticism, and Feature Film Production. Previously, she was a Tenured Assistant Professor at El Paso Community College where she taught film, video, and mass media courses. She was a Knight Fellow for the PhDigital Bootcamp at the Media Innovation Lab Texas State University, a Cindy and Dickie Selfe Fellow for DMAC at The OSU, a National Consortium of Environmental Rhetoric & Writing Writer-in-Residence Fellow, and a research fellow for the UTEP Multilingual User-Experience Research Center. Elvira's scholarship centers the lives of women and racially and economically disadvantaged communities. In 2019, she co-authored the peer-reviewed article [La salud en mis manos: Localizing Health and Wellness Literacies in Transnational Communities through Participatory Art and Mindfulness](#), published in the PresentTense Journal. She is a screenwriter – *Mariposa* (2006) and *The Weeping Pimp* (2015); playwright – *Father's Shadow/Sombra del Padre* (Dramatic Publishing, 2001); and comic book author – *A.W.O.L.* (DUKEScomics, 2017). *A.W.O.L.* was exhibited at Tokyo Comic Con in 2018 and is available in English, Japanese, and Spanish. For more info. about Elvira visit: [www.dukescomics.com](http://www.dukescomics.com).

Contact Information: [ecarrizaldukes@utep.edu](mailto:ecarrizaldukes@utep.edu)