

# Anxiety Of A Chicana

Carolina T.



As an oppressed artist, I often struggle between two ways of portraying myself and my people; do I create an image of power, or suffering? With this garment I sought to simultaneously acknowledge the reality of our affliction alongside our hope and deserving of respect and equal rights. Along with the visibility of pain, there must be the acknowledgement of peoples' perseverance. I am conflicted by the barriers oppression imposes on me. As a girl of color, there is often an expectation of strength, even in times where there is no reason to feel hopeful. Should I extend my compassion and endure oppression's sadism? Would this free me from the restraints of resentment and potential violence? To channel these frustrations and questions, I researched mental illness in indigenous youth, different modes of activism, and dialogue about oppression.

Chicanas lack economic, religious, and political power but have a strong influence upon fashion and culture whether we intend to or not. We have an untouchable coolness to us, and I want to acknowledge that within this artwork. The jacket mirrors a mariachi, demanding attention the same way these prideful performers do. The embroidery is a continuous narrative from front to back, sharing my dilemmas as to the correct action to take in the face of oppression towards Chicanas. Much like the mariachi jacket, the chilis draw attention and actively claim space. Chilis have strong and important associations with my culture, but are also used to caricaturize us. With this jacket, I am also reclaiming the concept of a "spicy Latina."

My vulnerability is not a reason to belittle or discredit me. I will not hide my strong feelings and adjust my reality to protect the fragility of the oppressor. This garment is progress towards my liberation from fear of being truthful about my feelings and realities. A lot of time and care was put into this work, and this acknowledgement of my struggle (along with the warm feeling of being content with my complicated identity) is very important to my lifelong process towards liberation from shame and fear.

Carly T.  
New Mexico

**Latinx:** *people of Latin American origin or culture-(not referring to race)*

**Hispanic:** *people of or descended from Spanish speaking cultures.*

**Indo-hispanx:** *people with Native heritage as well as a Spanish speaking culture (often specifically used to refer to people of the Southwest)*

**Chicanx:** *people of Mexico. Most often used for those living in the United States.*

**Native American:** *people of or descended from Native Nations of the Americas.*

**Mestizx:** *people of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage, someone of Spanish/indigenous culture.*

**Oppressor:** *The persons who commit acts of prolonged cruelty or unjust treatment or control.*

**Oppressed:** *The persons subjected to prolonged cruelty or unjust treatment or control.*

I fit into all of these labels referring to culture and race, many of which carry certain social connotations that separate and compartmentalize one another from each other. These social connotations are simplifying and deny people of a more in depth understanding of people and their culture and race. Many people of native heritage from Spanish speaking cultures have rejected "Latinx" or "Hispanic" because of their inherent connection from the colonizer's point of view. Personally, I prefer to call Indo-hispana, Chicana, or Native American.

People of similar backgrounds as me, especially when they are more pale or fair, often argue that they are "Spain Spanish" not "Mexican Spanish." "Mexican" has even been viewed as an insult in itself. Despite the lack of clarity that many of us have about what separates these two people, we know it is much more desirable to be associated with the colonizer, more specifically the Spanish. The Spanish identification which we Indo-hispanx's always cling to when filling out the race/ethnicity section of surveys, did not have red/brown skin. I didn't know that the reason for our darker pigment was because of our native ancestry. I don't know what tribe I am from. I wish my sister Celina had known, I wish my parents had known. I wish I had known sooner that I am not just of European descent but of a people with great knowledge, a people with self love and pride. I did not grow up calling myself a Native American and my family hesitated to call us Hispanics. My grandmother and step grandfather had their hands hit with rulers when they spoke Spanish. Generations before that, they would have been hit for speaking their native language - whatever language that might have been. Due to my knowledge of the history of assimilation I prefer to not identify with the colonizer out of respect for my ancestors and myself.

Once I began sharing my interest in learning about my culture, my high school art teacher was very excited to show me to the school's potential donors. She also began moving me away from my friends in class and getting mad at me when I would talk more than I had before. She saw me differently after I shared this with her. I was belittled by this tokenization/demonization but lacked better option for success and visibility.

I have been spared much of the colorist shame in my community but for other members of my family, this has not been the case. Celina is often stared at when we go to Missouri with my Anglo grandma. I used to tell Celina she was being dramatic when she pointed it out to me but these minor differences do not go unnoticed. Being white passing I have more control over how people view me. However, when I choose to be proud and speak the way I choose I am more easily simplified and therefore more easily silenced. Once I prove my ethnic background and I am seen as I am then I must prove that I deserve respect. I avoid saying words that we say in New Mexico because I am afraid I will make people feel intimidated. I am scared of making people feel guilty, I don't want to make them to feel like they must compensate. I can't show my accent because I will be trying to prove something but by hiding my accent I am still trying to prove something. This amount of intentionality in my speech and mannerisms sometimes happens without me thinking about it. I hate not always knowing what people are talking about because when I decide to ask it reminds them once again that I am not like them.

We are taught by our Oppressors what is wrong and right and what we can and cannot do. There is an unspoken innate moral righteousness that is cultured to us in our supposed "post-racial" society. My Freshman year English teacher assigned a compare and contrast essay between Malcolm X's "By Any Means Necessary" speech and a Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Malcolm X spoke about the discreditation he faced for being a black man in support of violent protest - an approach my teacher described as "thuggish." This sort of switching tables is a prevalent tool of the oppressor particularly applied to women. The stereotype of an aggressive, angry, woman of color comes from the expressed frustration of being oppressed then belittled and relabeled as "crazy". Peaceful protest is challenging the stereotypes around the temperament and composure of oppressed people. These dismissive terms allow oppressors to influence the way in which we choose to protest and redefine ourselves.

I often feel flustered by boys, don't answer and avoid them. I have a very hard time having friendships with boys because I am suspicious of their kindness and often feel patronized even if that wasn't the intention. I am conflicted because I want to go out alone but it is more scary than empowering. There is so much weight in how men view us. It's a very rare thing that a man will have genuine and pure respect for a woman due to the way they are cultured to look down on them. When I was in elementary school boys would say they didn't want to be on a team with me. I have had friends who are cisgender boys and would say my body was gross and others who have said women are sexually appealing because they are inherently sexual beings. This idealizes them as being further separate from men. This friend also expressed his lack of respect for women like Nicki Minaj saying her body was disgusting and that she was a whore. What did that mean about me? I have heard many of these sentiments from my male family members. Uncles talk about the way I look and what I am relative to boys. Even other girls prefer to ask about my love life rather than what's on my mind and even if I do speak about what I am thinking or feeling these sentiments are once again trivialized to "wokeness." Emotions are seen as inherently feminine and therefore dismissed. It is frustrating having to constantly be faced with patronization that conflicts with the desire for good healthy relationships, happiness, freedom and my pursuit of knowledge. Oppression has taken away the privilege of simple love and simple friendships. The curiosity of young Indo-Hispanas is silenced by oppression and obligation. I wanna have conversations with people that show our similarities like our friends, our feelings but hopes and aspiration can tend to be a touchy subject due to varying likelihoods of success based on privilege.

Men feel entitled to be listened to, entitled to others time and attention, entitled to understanding. They are taught that they are entitled to end a conversation if they choose. When we have conversations with men about oppression, the guilt they feel makes them angry because they feel entitled to not being upset and the only way they feel they can express it is through rage.

In her essay “Women of Color in Higher Education,” published in the NEA Higher Education Journal in 2007, Stephanie Evans writes of the extreme scrutiny women of color are subjected to in higher education settings. Often, their mistakes are remembered with more frequency than those of their male counterparts and they are valued less due to their maternal roles. Evans talks about the excuses given for lack of diversity in colleges, including the often-used excuse that there is a “lack of good candidates.” This excuse is a difficult one to prove or disprove due to it being subjective but this might also be a product of lack of opportunity for the oppressed candidates that affects their decided worthiness and qualification.

Men of color hold a higher place in our social hierarchy and feel a lack of responsibility to their fellow women of color.

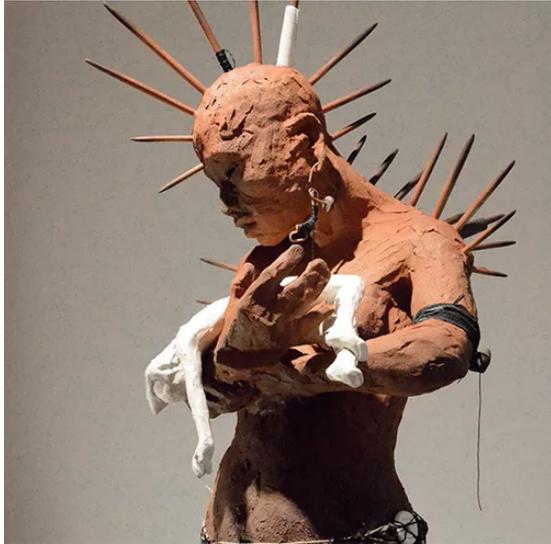
”What had begun as a movement to free all black people from racist oppression became a movement with its primary goal the establishment of black male patriarchy.” - bell hooks

I see this in the Chicano movement it is often referred to as “machismo culture” which is an aggressive masculine pride that discludes all other genders from the movement. The end goal of this Chicano patriarchy is not equality but just a different possession of power. We are all oppressed with different struggles but there are privileges within oppression.

In the “Chalice and the Blade” it is said that matriarchs have never existed the same way patriarchs have in that they have never oppressed men the way patriarchs have oppressed women. It would be easy to say based on our societal beliefs that this is because of the inherent nature of women. Women are seen as the caretakers and men as the protectors. This, for me, is not a liberating narrative. When this is said it implies that those women who lack this kind of forgiveness and tenderness are not women or are wrong in their womanhood. This also implies the inherentness of people on the other side of the spectrum would be naturally war driven and fear provoking. The beliefs of innate tenderness or hostility are quite destructive and not empowering to anyone in a healthy way. I struggle with forgiveness and tenderness, I struggle with hostility. This struggle being associated with my gender identity has made me even further frustrated and enraged. People expect a certain kind of compassion from me due to my gender and I often provide it in fear of persecution. In this social hierarchy, experimentation and sureness are for the privileged who have supposedly worked for their freedom, the ones who have gained moral righteousness and right to judgement. I desire to feel worthy as a woman, I desire to feel like my intellect has a place, I desire to feel attractive, I desire freedom for sexual experimentation. These things being once again pinned to the type of Indo-Hispana I am makes me feel ashamed of my desires, exploration and my identity.

When concerning safe spaces as opposed to brave spaces, I find myself unsure on a better option. Brave spaces force oppressed people to constantly be vulnerable and explaining their struggle to people who don't understand. Safe spaces create an environment with no dialogue and lots of misunderstandings. Both options entail suffering for the marginalized group. This might be something that is just a given about oppression is that it's not ideal. If we decide to talk about it or not, to take action or not, it hurts but we risk it hurting forever if we refuse to respond. I love my friends and I don't want to be scared of trusting them. I want to be open and loving, I want to have conversations about their lives, their feelings, I want to get to know them better. We want to

enjoy our time with our families because we love our families. That's why we must talk to them so we can have understanding for each other but talking about these things can create resentment and tension.



“Forgiveness” by Rose B. Simpson is a clay sculpture of an unarmed native woman in cultural attire holding a weak and tired white figure. My interpretation of this piece is power and strength in the ability to forgive those who wrong you. I know from experience that forgiveness is difficult. I am skeptical of sacrificing yourself to send an intellectual message to others. How much less tiring is forgiveness, emotionally and spiritually, than hating them? Is this technique just a means of safety? Am I not mature enough to forgive? Would forgiveness liberate me? Is my internalized hatred the only thing imprisoning me? Do I need the understanding of the oppressor to be

free?

Rupi Kaur in her Ted Talk “Taking My Body Back” talks about her not being the one to hold the burden and sins of her oppressor. Compassion for those who think they are entitled to you is extremely hazardous. You must be good to yourself and know who it is worth being good to. Does this entail forgiveness or rejection? In the documentary “Awake, a story from standing rock” they insisted on remembering the humanity and loving the oppressors. along with the value of land and their compassion, I was drawn to the fact that they even restrained from anger along with self defense. They encouraged smiling and laughing as much as they could in the face of the people hurting them. I wonder if this was to boost motivation and moral or to take away the sadistic appeal the people silencing them might have to hurting the people's spirit. Indigenous people ate dirt and salt as a means of not submitting to the spanish, though that is a powerful message at this time the spanish who saw these people as savages, not people, didn't care if they ate dirt they were just animals. They were not their friends. They did not view them as their family across the ocean the way many native activist groups have promoted we view them. The expression of pain will only be used by the oppressors as a means to further and more deeply colonize the hearts of the people.

In Kendrick Lamars song “XXX” he talks about the paranoia and the anger he feels in response to the violence against black men at the hands of law enforcement. He speaks to how he would have no regard for the boundaries set by the struggle on how to properly retaliate in the instance someone in his family were to be shot by the police. His reaction wouldn't be for the bigger cause. However, it would inevitably be a reaction to oppression therefore viewed as a political act. Malcolm X's “By Any Means Necessary” promotes the idea that if we were to choose to physically defend ourselves it would be justified and we would be supported by one another.

Native youth compromise their futures and their potential. They have no other option but to believe that they are not worthy of the investment in their happiness. I am in no way entitled to my choice of education or the pursuance of it at all. I am in no way entitled to the same freedoms in many forms that the boys of my race nor that of the white girls have been made to believe they

are. If I desire more for myself I must work for it. In a study done by the “Lean In” organization women of color, especially “Latinas” and Asians, in the workplace are more motivated to be in higher positions than white women but are less likely to get them. My mom wants the best for me and she thinks that I shouldn't focus on the lack of opportunities. I tell her that I feel wronged and she says to keep going because there is no time to feel wronged. I should just work harder and be as strong as I can to get more opportunities but like all other kids, I and other Chicanas have an emotional capacity and this capacity is often ignored when we are encouraging girls of color to keep going and work harder. Mental illness in my culture is seen as a disease of the privileged, a disease that we can't afford to acknowledge the reality of. Taking time to be frustrated and upset is a product of privilege. The misconception of it that exists in culture is that mental illness is a product of selfishness and ungratefulness. The feeling that this is completely self-inflicted is very painful and is something I have often been told. I am made to feel that I am the one who is hateful, I am the one who is excluding others. My mom thinks my anxiety will not help my academic endeavors and she is right it does not. My mom knows that it could most certainly be worse for girls like me and it is.

There is an extreme amount of intentionality that oppressed people must practice whether they choose to fight oppression or not. My art will inevitably be about being an indigenous woman and all my actions will inevitably be a response to it. It is difficult to be big and demanding of attention because we as Chicanas are often silenced and made to be ashamed for demanding attention. We are accused of being selfish. I have a hard time talking about my experiences to prove a point it feels selfish and inconsiderate, even though I know that is not the reason. Extending my similarities to others is emotionally exhausting, especially, when I am fearful of being discredited. 2013 CDC YRBS data shows depression rates:

- 39% American Indian
- 37% Latino
- 28% African American
- 27% White
- 29% Asian

The reasons given for the high depression rates among “American Indians” and “Latinos” were poverty, abuse and discrimination. Once you have symptoms of anxiety and depression it creates new barriers to struggle with.

In the “Chalice and the Blade” Riane Eisler talks about the importance of the emotions and accountability of all genders in society. It presents the question to me; how do we enable the oppressors to see their responsibility as opposed to their guilt? How do we make them see that they have a place and that is listening to what the oppressed are experiencing? we must partake in dialogue not in attempt to fix everyone but to learn. we cannot do it for the glory of saving the oppressed. We must go into conversations with genuine interest in the answer. It takes a lot of love and time to share one's feelings and must be treated as such. Love should not be idealized as something that is just pure comfort and appeasement but a process of investment and improvement. Having conversations and expressing sadness is an act of love. Critique doesn't equate with hatred. You have to love something to invest time and thought into it. My critique of the oppressor and movements to fight oppression are not my hatred but my investments in making it better.

Media builds the understanding of our origin stories and our place in it. Indigenous youth grows up seeing the simultaneous commodification, trivialization, sexualization, and demonization of themselves and their people. Media when in the hands of the oppressor is used

as a tool of oppression and what other narrative do we have to believe? The movie "Reel Injun" addresses the empowerment of having a say in your own representation. Elyssa Concha, a young native activist from the Lakota, Ojibwa and Taos Pueblo, encourages a span representation of native youth that isn't just their suffering. We should not be defined by their suffering but how we have persevered despite it. As an artist I makes decisions about how I represent myself and my people Art is a way of creating dialogue. Art in itself is an optimistic practice. Art is acting as if what we are doing means anything. I am still deciding whether I share this optimism. How do I properly react? What do I do with my pain?

In my experience of being a white passing Indo-Hispana I have not always had clarity about my place in oppression and privilege the way other indigenous people might have. When I first began acknowledging the reality behind the cultural differences I was experiencing at my high school I desired to be more sure about it.

"... Without a sense of identity, there can be no real struggle..." -Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire

In this quote Paulo Freire talks about the power of knowing where you stand in the fight against oppression and how you can use it. Whether this is recognizing your privilege or your oppression. There is clarity that one has when they know their history and have validity in their pain.

Malcolm X talked about how it's extremely discrediting to equate civil rights movements with the movements of the Nazis. It makes it seem as though there is no motivation just unprovoked rage and bigotry. Intellect can coexist with strong feelings including rage and sadness. Self-confidence and self-certainty is the basis for a fulfilling life and we live in a world that does not value lives of indigenous women let alone how fulfilling their lives are. The first time a teacher told me they sympathize for the kids of color and was willing to share this surprised me. They admit their bias for the oppressed people as an oppressed person. They recognized me for who I was they knew I couldn't just work to be something else. Visibility validates the suffering. I want to free myself from the fear that my oppression is just me being self-destructive. When the oppressed's pain doesn't have a place it is not true democracy and there will be a lack of mobility in peaceful protest. We need to know voicing our suffering has a place in these conversations.