

SELF-TO-COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS: WOMEN OF COLOR
INTERCONNECTING THROUGH ZINES

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DEDICATION

For women of color zinesters.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an examination of how women of color navigate their multiple identities in zines, which are informal, hand-made publications that are produced and distributed by people who make them. I argue that through their zines women of color zinesters incorporate self-to-community collaborations, which is a process of sharing pain with others in order to pursue healing and a global interconnectivity. While some zine scholarship addresses the ways that zinesters resist marginalization, much of scholarly work about zines does not include meaningful racial analysis. In my methodology I use in-depth textual investigation of three zines and autoethnographic analysis to address this gap. This is important because many women of color use zines to present their struggles associated with racism, sexism, abuse, and culture and analyzing zines allows us to see how marginalized individuals share their oppression and form interconnected communities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

By redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir or share with others so they too may be empowered.

Gloria Anzaldúa, "Now Let us Shift"

"Can I find your zine online?" asked a young Latina guest at the 2013 Denton, TX Latina artist showcase and zine release benefit, "Brown Queen: Our Voz Our Arte." As I wrote down the social networking sites for my feminist zine entitled *Muchacha*, she enthusiastically explained her interest in creating her own zine. Zines are innovative consciousness-raising self-published works of texts and images, usually between five and fifty pages. They are for the most part printed on paper and photocopied but electronic online zines, also referred to as "e-zines," exist as well. Zines range vastly in format and content and can include stories, essays, rants, poetry, art, photography, comics, and more. The content itself is often political in nature, extending from topics such as feminism, punk culture, LGBTQ liberation, antiracism, body positivity, environmental justice, disability rights, age discrimination, and other social justice issues.

Before I became immersed in the underground yet global zine community, which can be cultivated anywhere from punk concerts to social networking websites, my introduction to zines occurred in 2008 when a classmate in my freshman year women's

studies course gave a presentation about Riot Grrrl. A feminist punk rock movement that occurred in the early 1990's in Olympia, WA and Washington D.C., Riot Grrrl emerged when girls in the punk scene were dissatisfied with their music and zine communities and their culture at large. Defying the male-dominated culture around them, Riot Grrrl bands such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile changed the punk scene by creating a space for women to be producers of their own culture by means of their music and zines. Inspired by my classmate's presentation, I began reading Riot Grrrl zines and was moved by the way Riot Grrrl zinesters wrote about very painful experiences including sexual assault, domestic violence, incest, sizeism, and more. Although these issues are significant, I noticed that the authors were predominantly white and issues of race were often, if not always, excluded from their zines. There was hardly conversation on how sexism might be different for women of color, queer women, poor women, transgendered women, and more.

Historically, U.S. women of color have often been excluded from zine communities and it is critical to examine the isolation women of color have experienced when the needs and issues relevant to them were not met. While the Riot Grrrl movement was pivotal in its impact on feminism and emergence of a feminist zine culture, it was centered around white women. In her 2010 book *Girls to the Front*, Sara Marcus conducts extensive interviews with dozens of women who considered themselves Riot Grrrls in the 1990's. Washington D.C. Riot Grrrl leader and zinester Erica repeatedly attempted to have conversations concerning race. In her zine *Wrecking Ball*, Erica

described the Riot Grrrl 1992 conference in which white Riot Grrrls were defensive when Riot Grrrls of color brought up the conversation of racism:

"All these grrrls got defensive so it was really stifled, which sucks... I should've taken more responsibility to confront white grrrls in the meeting, but I was hoping they would follow by example and try to be better listeners instead of speaking up every five minutes to reassert the face that they are working on their racism" (quoted in Marcus 251).

Erica's zine displays how many Riot Grrrls focused exclusively on sexism without incorporating racism into their agendas. Twenty years after the Riot Grrrl movement, many feminist movements continue their focus on gender, thereby overlooking how race impacts the lives of women of color. When this happens, it is urgent for women of color artists, activists, and zinesters to engage in movements or create their own movements that reflect their needs.

Due to the lack of racial representation in Riot Grrrl zines, I became motivated to find zines created by women of color. In my search for women of color zines, it was difficult to find any via the internet, and I noticed that zine distributors hardly featured any zines written by women of color. NyKy Gomez, a woman of color zinester, also recognized this trend and founded the Brown Recluse Zine Distro in the summer of 2013 as a means to make people of color zines more visible and widely available. After researching further, I found more spaces where women of color zines were available, and reading and trading zines with other women of color was an extremely transformative experience.

Interested in the politics of racial representation within zine scholarship, I noticed that much of scholarly work conducted on zines does not include meaningful racial analysis. While there is zine scholarship that addresses the ways that zinesters resist marginalization, I'm interested in incorporated race as a form of marginalization that exists in the lives of many zinesters. Stephen Duncombe's book *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, discusses ways that zinesters resist marginalization. In this first academic book published about zines, Duncombe describes how a variety of zinesters have resisted marginalization by redefining labels such as "misfit" and "loser." He states, "zinesters may be losers in the game of American meritocracy, but together they give the word 'loser' a new meaning, changing it from insult to accolade, and transforming personal failure into an indictment of the alienating aspects of society" (26). Providing us with a variety of personal accounts from zinesters, he analyzes how they have challenged the marginal labels of "loser" and "misfit" by using them to empower themselves. Duncombe's analysis of zinester's identity formation is relevant to my project in that I conduct a case study on identity, but I am interested in taking the conversation about marginalization further by exploring how women of color navigate their marginalization through zines.

While Duncombe makes valid points about marginalized people reclaiming their identities from others who have oppressed them, racial identity is hardly present within his analysis. As many women of color zinesters experience racism and sexism, it is important to explore ways in which they are reclaiming their complicated and multilayered identities. Though white zinesters have been marginalized, it is important to

examine the privilege of being white which often gains them wider representation within zine subcultures. Elke Zobl observes how white zinesters are often the center of discussion when looking at the historical continuum of zines. She notes, “Zine history from a (white) Anglo-American viewpoint suggests three main peaks of zine publishing” (2). These points were the 1930's science fiction fanzines, zines created by and for science fiction fans, 1970's punk subcultures, and the early 1990's Riot Grrrl movement. As Zobl, I agree that these vantage points are thought of as primarily white. Though women of color have been zinesters for decades and they have used zines as a medium to question and subvert dominant knowledge systems and cultural norms, the white vantage points can cause zine scholarship to fail to see these contributions.

Because zines are frequently thought of and written about from an “Anglo-American viewpoint,” (Zobl), this causes a gap in scholarship where meaningful racial analysis is missing. Scholars Alison Piepmeier and Adela C. Licona serve as some of the few exceptions to the rule. For example, in Piepmeier’s book *Girl Zines: Making Media Doing Feminism*, she discusses the racism which exists within zine subcultures and feminist communities. In doing so, she critiques the idea of a universal sisterhood that she calls “the white-girl idea of feminism” which relates to a sisterhood “that flattens differences, or more insidiously, functions to mask racial hierarchies” (131). Piepmeier is a zine scholar that does vocalize her concerns about racism and redefines feminism for what it should be, an intersectional feminism that analyzes multiple forms of oppression and how power and privilege work in complicated ways.

Scholar Adela C. Licona takes Piepmeier's concerns of white feminism even further as she has written the first and only academic book about women of color zinesters. Her interest in zines is exploring what she calls "third space theory," as applied to feminist of-color zines. The third space is an "interstitial space of intersection and overlap, ambiguity and contradiction, that materializes a subversion to either/or ways of being and reproducing knowledge" (11). The third space relates to Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands rhetoric, which rejects the us vs. them binary way of thinking and promotes ambiguous and contradicting ways of thinking, knowing, and being (13). Licona illustrates her personal connection to the ideas of living in the in-between because, just as Anzaldúa was raised near the U.S/Mexican border, as was Licona. Her experiences living on the El Paso/Juárez border encouraged Licona to question binary ways of thinking by recognizing that, like the border has been divided, as has her identity (5, 7).

How is third space theory relevant to my own project? Licona believes that "zinesters explicitly engage their lived contradictions and ambiguities in terms of racialized identities, gender identification, and sexuality" (9). In doing so, zinesters are producing their own knowledge in subversive ways that challenge mainstream identity narratives which often only demonstrate reality from a heterosexual, white, male point of view. Licona's third space theory can be a valid tool for me to investigate the contradictory identities that women of color must face and tolerate. While I find Licona's third space theory an imperative way to analyze women of color zinesters multiple identities, her analysis of zines is different from mine in that it does not include an autoethnographic analysis. Licona says that "zines are a community-building tool of

meaning making that can inform coalitional work” (60). She demonstrates the community-building aspects of zine subculture by investigating dozens of feminist of color zines. However, her analysis of zines is conducted without the lived experience of producing zines, trading zines, and participating within an underground zine subculture. She lacks, what Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga refer to as a "theory on the flesh," which is “one where the physical realities of our lives-our skin color-the land or concrete we grew up on-our sexual longings-all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (23). While Licona's idea of a "third space" describes her racial experiences of living on the "borderlands," Licona has not physically taken part in a zine subculture outside of her privileged position within the academy.

The theory in the flesh relates to my lived experience as a zinester. The embodied and physical nature of producing zines and participating within an underground zine subculture between 2011 and 2014 gives me insightful knowledge of zines that would not exist otherwise. My lived experience as being part of a zine community allows me to conduct zine research in a way where I am speaking with the zinesters and zines as opposed to speaking for them. I am not using my academic association with zinesters as a way to be the “all knower” of zines. I am also not using my experience with zines to claim an "all knower" position. Instead, by interconnecting with other zinesters through organizing zine release benefit concerts, supporting zine distros and libraries, collaborating with zinesters on projects, other zinesters and I are mutually benefiting from one another. For Licona, she is legitimizing zines and women of color voices within the academy, but I ask, how else are the zine "subjects" benefiting from her research?

Through the use of an autoethnographic methodology, my analysis differs from Licona in that I conduct research from a subjective perspective based on my own experience, which will be specifically explored in chapter four.

By using textual analysis and autoethnographic analysis, this thesis argues that women of color zinesters incorporate, what I call, self-to-community collaborations, which is the process of sharing pain and healing with others in order to pursue a more global interconnectivity. The first step of self-to-community collaborations is expressing the self. Reflecting on the self involves expressing identity which can be a painful process to navigate, especially for women of color zinesters who often embody multiple and contradictory identities. Through the painful self-reflecting process, expressing identity through zines creates a space where pain can be shared and this can become a shared experience, while also recognizing difference. The second step of self-to-community collaborations involves moving from the self to the community. When zines are created, many zinesters make a conscious decision to expose their inner-thoughts and struggles for others to read. For many women of color zinesters, zines are a way to share struggles that are associated but not limited to racism, sexism, abuse, and culture. Moving from the self to the community involves putting one's zine out there for others to read and this can be frightening, because anyone can potentially have access to one's personal experiences. Putting a zine out in the world is a vulnerable process but, at the same time, it can be an avenue for women of color zinesters to share their pain and heal together. Healing can have many definitions, but I use the term healing as treating our emotional wounds that have been caused by oppression. Self-to-community collaborations involves

finding meaning from the painful self-reflection process and healing together in order to build a global interconnected zine community.

In unpacking the idea of self-to-community collaborations, a particular question I explore in this thesis is: “How can zines created by women of color complicate our understanding of their multiple identities and why is this significant?” To address this question, I analyze *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better*, and *Skinned Heart*. *Mxd Zine!* is a 27 page compilation released in 2007 in Oakland, California edited by Nia King. Photocopied and printed, King's self-published zine is considered a half-size zine, which is created through folding a standard size paper in half like a booklet. As some zines only exist as a single issue, others continue to be published for years. *Mxd Zine!* is the first of a three part series that also includes *Borderlands: Tales from Disputed Territories Between Races and Cultures* and *Borderlands 2: It's a Family Affair*. In *Mxd Zine!* readers can find short essays and stories by five mixed race writers about how they negotiate their mixed-racial identities.

Another zine by Nia King, *The First 7-inch Was Better* is 18 pages and was released in 2008 in Oakland, California. In this quarter size zine, Nia declares her identity as an ex-punk by criticizing punk and activist communities for their racism, sexism, and homophobia. In addressing her complicated relationship to punk, she explores her alienation in a scene that she once felt part of. *The First 7-inch Was Better* illustrates how King's identity as a punk clashes with her identity as a queer woman of color.

Created in Seattle, Washington, the fourth issue of *Skinned Heart* is writer Nyky Gomez's 27-page half-size zine. Her zine features personal stories about her experiences

moving across the country, surviving a difficult break up, health issues, and cultural assimilation. The background of these stories is heavily collaged with art, patterns, and photographs that convey a deeper meaning, which I will discuss in chapter one. These visual elements are significant for how we can interpret the zine content and the discussion of identity being presented throughout the zine. In this zine, I particularly look at Gomez's discussion of her family's assimilation towards the American dream and how this has caused her to navigate her racial identity.

I chose these zines because they allow me to analyze the process of navigating multiple identities, and the significance of this process for women of color zinesters. Self-reflecting on one's identity can be a useful way to begin the self-healing process. For example, in *Mxd Zine!*, four female mixed race writers reveal the complexities of navigating their identities. The editor of *Mxd Zine!*, Nia King, gave other mixed race women the opportunity to participate in a space where they could freely tell their stories, and they weave their experiences dealing with racism throughout their stories. Within the context of self-to-community collaborations, writing and creating a zine is first and foremost a self-healing process. In “now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts,” Anzaldúa portrays ways in which navigating identity is a painful yet necessary process towards healing the self. The introductory quote: “by redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, *algo para compartir* or share with others so they too may be empowered,” reveals how goodness can stem from our most painful experiences (540). The idea that something valuable can come out of something negative can be directly applied to women of color zines. By

textually analyzing the pain that women of color zinesters write about and put out there for others to read, I demonstrate ways that their pain can be a way to begin the process of self-healing. Once one has started to self-heal, the next step within self-to-community collaborations is when zines are sent out into the world for others to read.

My analysis of zines as sites for women of color identity formation and interconnectivity include my personal experiences creating zines as well as organizing zine release benefit concerts, trading zines, and supporting zine spaces, such as zine distros and zine libraries, from 2011 to 2014. My methodological approach used in this thesis draws from autoethnographic analysis and an in depth-textual investigation of three particular zines in order to show diverse ways in which women of color's identities are being used in this thesis. Using these methods allows me to build upon theoretical frameworks that explore identity and interconnectivity. In my analysis, I build upon the theoretical frameworks of third space theory, identity politics, and *conocimiento*.

In chapter two, I use *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better* and *Skinned Heart* to describes women of color zine aesthetics, including zine images and format along with a brief descriptions of its content. As women of color, the producers of these zines are expressing their complicated identities and struggles with racism, sexism, and culture. In this process, the zinesters are choosing to intimately invite others to read their stories and potentially build community. Chapter two will provide descriptions of each of the three zines in order to introduce zine aesthetics.

Chapter three examines theoretical frameworks discussed by women of color authors including the third space and identity politics. I have chosen these particular

frameworks, because they incorporate the themes of identity formation. In self-to-community collaborations, one must begin with healing the self and knowing who one is before one can move to the community. This can be difficult when one is living multiple and often contradictory identities. While exploring the third space, I also research identity politics in order to frame my examination of identity.

Chapter four shows how navigating one's identity provides a foundation for expanding the self towards the community. By using the ideas of girl bedroom culture, and *conocimiento*, I discuss how women of color zinesters create a space for interconnection. Further, I use autoethnographic analysis to demonstrate the community-building aspects of zine culture I have personally observed and taken part in. While an ethnography explores cultural phenomenon and an autobiography is an account of one's life, Steven Pace, writes that an autoethnography is "a qualitative research method that combines characteristics of ethnography and autobiography" (1). An autoethnography involves reflecting on one's personal experiences in order to make observations about particular cultural issues. Heewon Chang's book *Autoethnography As Method* presents several ways that autoethnographic projects can be useful for researchers. One of these ways is that they "transcend mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (43). As a zinester, creating and trading zines with other women of color causes me to move beyond the self and observe the complicated identities of women of color zinesters in insightful ways that are beneficial to my research.

Conducting an autoethnography is also valuable in that it is characterized by what Susan R. Jones, Yoolee Choe Kim, and Kristan Cilente Skendall describe as "vivid

stories aimed to evoke an emotional response from the reader and invite her or him into the lived experience" (703). This thesis combines textual analysis with lived experience in order to paint a picture for readers of what it means for women of color zinesters to navigate their multiple identities and to be part of an interconnected community of zinesters. An autoethnography is also beneficial for readers, because reading about lived experience is a powerful way to reflect upon social issues happening in our world. Holman Jones characterizes autoethnographic texts as a way to "point out not only the necessity of narrative in our world but also the power of narrative to reveal and revise that world" (767). In this way, narratives, or lived experiences, can help us to reveal social and cultural realities that are occurring in the world and understand how we can "revise," or change these realities for the better.

Holman Jones' belief in the power of narrative is shared by scholar Barbara Christian who discusses the importance of storytelling as legitimate ways of knowing for many people of color. In her article "The Race for Theory," Christian illustrates how people of color often theorize through "narrative forms". When alluding to women of color that Christian grew up around, she describes their theorizing as a "pithy language that unmasked the power relations of their world" (336). Many women of color scholars, such as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa and Patricia Hill Collins have used narrative language to address social reality in their scholarship. I say this not to imply that every women of color produces knowledge in narrative ways, but rather to demonstrate that many do and their work is not always validated within traditional academic canons.

Using lived experienced as knowledge relates to an autoethnographic methodology, because both frameworks challenge traditional approaches to scholarly research. Conducting scholarship through an autoethnographic framework can be a means to resist what constructionist theorists Laura L. Ellingson and Carolyn Ellis consider dichotomous traditional approaches to research. These binary forms of research include but are not limited to self-other, subject-object, humanities-social science, emotional-rational and passionately involved-neutral. Rather than conducting research in binary ways, Ellingson and Ellis argue that an autoethnography can become a space "in which an individual's passion can bridge individual and collective experience to enable richness of representation, complexity of understanding, and inspiration for activism" (448). Ellingson and Ellis' idea that an autoethnography can allow researchers to transcend binary modes of thinking is relevant to my own project in that my research creates bridges between binaries. For instance, I simultaneously conduct research that is both emotional and rational or in where I am both passionately involved and neutral. An autoethnography, in these ways, allows me to legitimate my own personal lived experience as a zinester that is making observations about women of color zinesters identities and ways of interconnecting.

An autoethnographic analysis can also help indicate how zines promote interconnectivity. Drawing from experiences as a Latina feminist punk zinester in a primarily white culture, I demonstrate various ways that trading and reading zines by other women of color, who have also written about navigating their gender, race, ethnicity, and culture, creates empathy among us and alleviates feelings of isolation. This,

in turn, promotes interconnectivity among one another. For instance, the vulnerable, uncensored, and fierce subversive writing style of zines can make a zine feel like a letter from a friend. This causes a unique and intimate interconnection between the zine writer and zine reader. At times, the writer may even receive an actual letter, email, or informal review from the reader where both writer and reader stay in communication. The 2013 zine release event I organized "Brown Queen: Our Voz Our Arte," and the zine which was released, *Muchacha's* fifth issue "Brown Queen: Latina Voices of the 21st Century," serve as examples in which interconnectivity among women of color took place on both local and global levels. Reading, trading, selling, and supporting zines with other women of color has contributed to a shared struggle among us which results in community building. Hence, women of color zinesters are expressing their identities and healing themselves alongside other women of color zinesters who share similar experiences, and as a result of this process, are participating within a global interconnectivity.

CHAPTER II

INVITING ZINE READERS

In reading zines created by women of color between 2011 and 2014, I began to notice a prevailing theme, specifically the personal nature in which many of the zinesters discuss their struggles with navigating their multifaceted identities. Out of the several zines that I have read that contain this common theme, three stood out to me: *Mxd Zine! True Stories By Mixed Race Writers*, *The First 7-inch Was Better: How I Became an Ex-Punk*, and *Skinned Heart*. Within self-to-community collaborations, which I described in the introduction and will illustrate throughout this thesis, the process of self-healing is taking place through zine creation. Many women of color zinesters write and create zines as a self-healing process. By expressing their complicated identities and struggles with racism, sexism, and culture, the process of self healing begins. In this process, the zinester is consciously deciding to send their zine out into the world for others to see. This chapter will provide descriptions of these three zines in order to demonstrate how the combination of zine aesthetics, including images and format, along with content, are a significant component that invites zine readers to learn about the zinester's identity and be part of a zine community.

Nia King's compilation zine *Mxd Zine!* is a collection of essays and stories by five mixed race individuals chronicling their experiences with racism, gender, sexuality, and

culture. This zine's production incorporates DIY (do-it-yourself) ethics, which involves the idea that anyone has the capability to perform various tasks, including the creation of one's own culture. DIY zines are not only a way to produce culture, but they are a way to “critique the dominant mode of passive consumer culture” (Duncombe 117). I would add that zinesters critique the mainstream culture by the content of their zines as well as the zine aesthetics. Using a cut-and-paste style, images, collage art, and more symbolize a resistance to dominant culture, specifically to the norms associated with publishing.

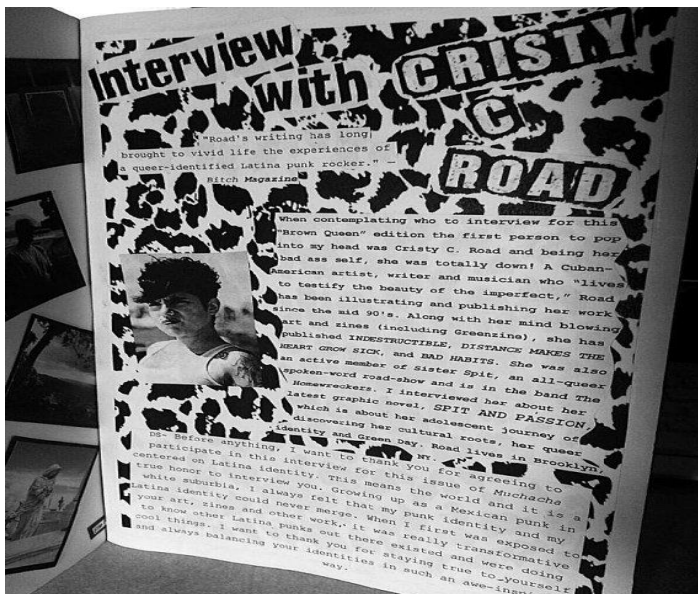


Fig. 1. *Muchacha* “Brown Queen”

Zine aesthetics can be observed through the cut-and-paste technique in which images, words, and designs are cut out from a variety of sources such as magazines, fliers, newspapers, internet images, and are then creatively compiled onto a zine page. The text can be handwritten, typed on a typewriter, or typed on a computer. For example, page 17 of “Brown Queen” demonstrates the use of a cut-and-paste technique (see fig. 1). I found the leopard print background, the font title, the image of artist Cristy C Road on

the internet and were printed from a computer. Although many zinesters, including myself, usually type their content on computers, we also sometimes use typewriter font and the cut-and-paste technique to cover up evidence that a computer was used in order to mirror the zine aesthetic that was and still is accomplished through the use of typewriters. Zine aesthetics, such as cut-and-paste style and typewriter font, continue to reflect older zine styles as a way for zinesters to reminisce of a time before the digital age where internet blogs, in many ways, overpowered zine subcultures. In this way, many zinesters continue to foster particular zine aesthetics in order to keep DIY zines and zine communities alive and thriving in the 21st century.

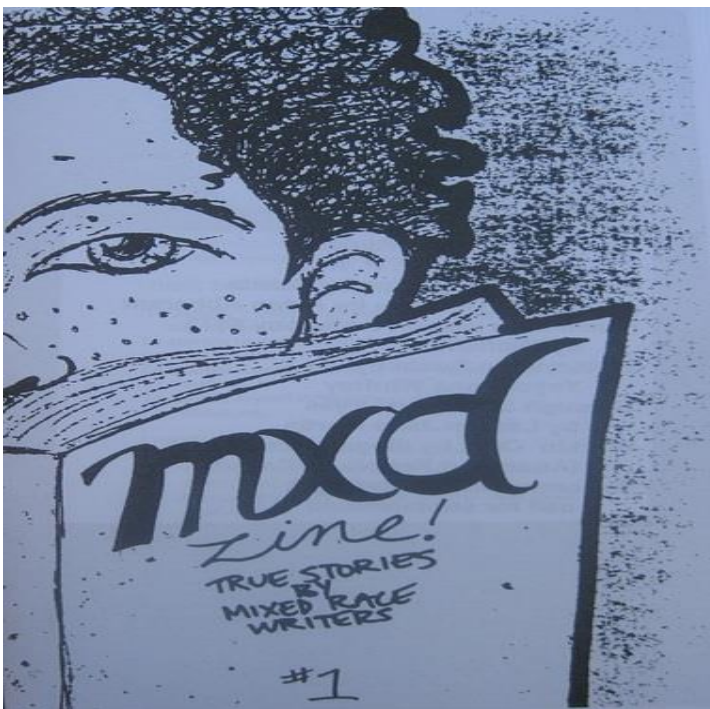


Fig. 2. *Front Cover of Mxd Zine!*

An important factor that helps build a community among women of color zinesters are the aesthetics found within each zine. Although *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch*

Was Better, and *Skinned Heart* contain different aesthetic qualities, they all, nevertheless, contribute to community building among zinesters in distinct ways. The aesthetic qualities found in these zines come in the form of images, format, and content. By describing the aesthetic qualities of the following zines, I show ways in which women of color zinesters deepen our understandings of the interconnectivity that exists among zine writers and readers.

As the only illustration in King's *Mxd Zine!*, the cover (see fig. 2) presents a deeper meaning for the zine reader. The cover portrays a sketch of the right side of an ambiguously raced person's face, the bottom half of which is covered with a book. The racial ambiguity is depicted by the distinct facial features, such as the narrow eyes and freckles, along with the hair, which consists of a small black afro. Like many mixed race individuals, their racial identity, like the cover image, is one that cannot be easily deciphered. Seeing an illustration of a racially-mixed person on the cover of a zine can help create a sense of familiarity for any mixed race zine reader who may feel that they do not see enough representations of multiracial individuals in the mainstream media or in other aspects of their culture. King's cover illustration could also be universal in a less literal manner to any zine reader who encompasses multiple identities. Altogether, this eye-catching cover illustration sets the tone of the zine for any reader interested in mixed-racial identity or the ways different individuals go about navigating their multiple identities.

King's cover title and issue number is handwritten. Although the handwritten style may seem trivial, it contributes to the zine presentation by making it known that the zine

is a handmade publication. Details as these can present a zine as personalized and intimate for the zine reader, as if s/he are receiving a letter from a friend. Librarian and author Jenna Freedman examines the connection between the zinester and zine reader by differentiating zines from other writing forms such as diaries and blogs. She notes, “Unlike diaries, they are written to be shared and are more likely to be shared in the author’s lifetime. Unlike that of blog posts, the distribution of zines is somewhat controlled, reflecting an intimate connection between author and reader” (53). Because zines are intended to be shared, it is important to examine how the different components of a zine, including zine aesthetics, hold a deeper meaning. For example, the personalized nature of *Mxd Zine!* continues on the first page, the "Table of Contents" page. The background is black and the list of contributors and titles of their pieces are placed in rectangular shapes with a white background styled in cut-and-paste layout, demonstrating the handcrafted work that was put into the zine. As a zinester who has created over ten zines, I have spent countless hours cutting and pasting words and images. As I cannot make a considerable profit from my \$2.00 zine *Muchacha*, the physical labor I put into constructing my zines is not done for economic gain. Rather, I do this work to make my zines personalized and interesting for the reader. Therefore, the labor it takes to make a zine is another element of zines that make it seem as if the zinester is reaching out and intimately inviting the reader to read their zine.

Nia King's other zine *The First 7-inch Was Better* is very minimalist in its display, yet it also demonstrates the labor put into creating a zine. While *Mxd Zine!* presents a captivating cover page, *The First 7-inch Was Better* does not include any images and is

entirely made up of text from beginning to end. Nevertheless, aesthetic qualities, including the cut-and-paste layout, DIY ethics, along with the content, contribute to community building aspects between women of color zinesters and readers. Measuring 4.25" by 5.5" inches in height and width, King's zine can easily fit in a pocket or be passed out like a flyer at a local concert or community event. Despite its small appearance, the cut-and-paste layout demonstrates the labor put into the zine. Like *Mxd Zine!*, King's aesthetics are personable for any zine reader, because of the labor put into the zine is detected in small yet relevant ways. For example, the scanned appearance of the tape that King uses to paste the blocks of texts can be seen on the corners of each page. This indicates the handcrafted nature and necessary labor needed to create the zine. Similar to *Mxd Zine!*, the work put into *The First 7-inch Was Better* intimately invites the zine reader to share the fruit of the zinester's labor.

Alongside the zine reader noticing the labor produced by the zinester, zine aesthetics also help build community among zinesters and zine readers, because zines can encourage the zine reader that they can also create a zine themselves. Feminist punk zines, for instance, show how easy it is for anyone to make a zine. DIY zine aesthetic qualities such as a handwritten style, tape, and white out, have the effect of inspiring others that making a zine is relatively easy and something that is possible for them to also produce. When I first began reading Riot Grrrl zines, for instance, the cut-and-paste technique, handwritten style, the doodles, the spelling errors, and the random arrangements of images and words made me feel that I had the ability to also produce a zine and be part of a zine community. I did not have to produce something that looked

aesthetically perfect or sounded perfect, but rather, something that I could spontaneously create in the moment. According to scholar and zinester Stephen Duncombe, zinesters "privilege the ethic of DIY, do-it-yourself" which means to "make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you" (7). The accessible qualities of DIY zines, then, encourage many zine readers to embrace a DIY ethic and also become active producers of their own culture.

Producing a particular DIY zine aesthetic that readers often expect is part of why the visibility of zine aesthetics helps foster community. The community-building aspects of DIY ethics found in zines is noted by Teal Triggs who argues that cut-and-paste zine graphics are "normally 'shared' and in the process provide a 'focal point' and help to establish a community of like-minded individuals" (73). These "like-minded individuals" within zine communities actively seek out a particular zine aesthetic and content that is not regularly accessible within the mainstream. For instance, the appearance and content of a zine is not something that can be stumbled upon when looking through stacks of glossy magazines at a local convenient store. Rather, it is something that is looked for at a zine distro, a website, a zine festival, or a show, among other settings. A zine's visibility accommodates a specific community in mind, whether that be punks, feminists, people of color, queers, disabled people, environmentalists, bike enthusiasts, cat lovers, visual artists, a combination of these, and more. DIY zines are not created to gain much profit, but rather to spark the interest of particular communities who actively seek out a particular zine aesthetic and content that is not always accessible. Therefore, the visibility

of the aesthetics present within a zine are sought out by zine readers, which contributes to a zine community.



Fig. 3. *Front cover of Skinned Heart #4*

Like *Mxd Zine!* and *The First 7-inch Was Better*, Nyky Gomez's zine *Skinned Heart* also contains aesthetic qualities that contribute to community building. Compared to Gomez's three other zines, her fourth issue spoke to me in that it discusses cultural assimilation and how this can effect the navigation of one's identity. Distinctive from both *Mxd Zine!* and *The First 7-inch Was Better*, *Skinned Heart* is heavily collaged with art, patterns, and photographs which usually serve as the backgrounds for cut and pasted pieces of texts. The cover collage (see fig. 3) is placed sideways so that the reader must

turn it clockwise in order to decipher it. When looking at the cover, one can instantly recognize the personalized nature of the design. Gomez has physically cut and pasted various images to convey the zine subject matter, which involves her desire to remain close to her cultural roots. This is represented through the striking photograph of an indigenous person, staring straight at the zine reader. Wearing what appears to be indigenous attire, beads, and a hat, the indigenous individual also appears with nine cut-and-pasted feathers to their right which appear to be sticking out like a headdress. On the left side of the figure, Gomez places what appears to be a black starry sky with smoke floating upwards past the individual's face. The interesting placement of images can leave any reader intrigued when looking at Gomez's cover collage.

Gomez's cover collage is a manifestation of her desire to retain her cultural roots. Though I have not yet engaged with the content of *Mxd Zine!* or *The First 7-inch Was Better*, I want to take a look at Gomez's content, because it is closely related with her aesthetics. As a fourth generation Mexican-American of Apache and Comanche descent, Gomez's final piece in her zine, "Chasing the Dream: Assimilation and Resistance," is about her struggles to maintain her Mestiza identity. When opening the zine, the inside cover continues to emanate an indigenous motif in its display of a desert landscape of cacti that covers the entire page. Further, the back inside cover also presents a similar image of cacti. Gomez references cacti when describing the pain of moving away from home: "I wonder if I struggle here because the dry, cactus ridden Sonoran Desert is calling me home" (25). Gomez's cover image, inside cover image, and back inside cover image demonstrate ways in which she is presenting her struggle to restore her cultural

roots when living far from home. The powerful ways in which she reclaims her racial identity are emulated throughout the zine by her use of indigenous art, photography, and patterns.

Thus, as I have discussed deeper meaning behind *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better*, and *Skinned Heart's* aesthetics, including images, writing style, and format, it is important to note that these elements combine in a way where the zinester is intentionally inviting the reader along to read their stories. Self-to-community collaborations, which I will discuss in more depth throughout this thesis, involve the process of building a community that is grounded in empathy and shared experience. Now that we have discussed the aesthetic qualities, including images, writing styles and format, of zines, let us look at a dominant theme found within the content of *Mxd Zine!* and *The First 7-inch Was Better*: mixed-race identity.

In this thesis, I explore the healing that is taking place when women of color zinesters navigate their multiple identities. *Mxd Zine!* contains short essays and stories by five mixed race writers about how they negotiate their mixed-racial identities. As this thesis centers on women of color zinesters, I have chosen to explore one piece in this zine written by Oxette. In order to catch a glimpse of what navigating identity might look like for a mixed race individual, I will briefly describe *Mxd Zine's!* first piece, "Ethnic, or something," by Oxette, who describes herself as a "queer feminist zinester" (6). To begin her essay, Oxette characterizes herself as "light-skinned, Black, white, Middle Eastern and Jewish" (4). Being multiracial, Oxette faces several struggles with claiming her racial identity. Being half black causes her to want to claim her blackness and be part of black

spaces, but she feels that others will mistake her as being intrusive or culturally appropriative of black culture. Her alienation does not end there as she also experiences white communities constantly asking her questions concerning her ethnicity and heritage. She goes on to provide the reader with family stories and experiences in school as examples of how she has faced and dealt with racism. Oxette's unique experiences of navigating her mixed race identity thoroughly sets the theme for *Mxd Zine!*

As Oxette struggles to find acceptance in both black and white communities, in *The First 7-inch Was Better*, King begins to recognize issues of exclusion in Boston's punk and anarchist community. She writes, "No one seemed to be putting the issues which effect women, people of color and queers the most first, and thus people with marginalized identities were further marginalized within this counterculture" (13). As a queer, mixed-race individual, King faces discrimination against both her sexuality and mixed-race. Different from Oxette, King faces discrimination against her mixed race from one specific community, the Boston punk community. Frustrated with the hypocritical punk scene in which she once thought she belonged, King goes on to criticize how exclusionary the scene is. This causes her to feel as if her punk identity can no longer coincide with her racial and queer identities. As a result, King leaves this punk community and discovers a home within the queer activist community of Denver. King's experience demonstrates how many mixed-race individuals must make the decision to either change a problematic community or find solace in a new, more productive community that accepts their identity.

The struggles that Oxette and King face as mixed-race individuals cause them to discover community in diverse ways. Oxette, for example, notes what encouraged her to write her essay "Ethnic, or something": "Recently, for the first time, I met a number of mixed race folks who have the context to understand where I am coming from and don't require me to explain and justify my emotional responses to racism. Finding such a community fueled the surge of mixed race pride which inspired this essay" (6). By meeting other mixed race people, Oxette was inspired to write about the pain and isolation she has felt as a result of her mixed identity. In the context of self-to-community collaborations, healing can be a cyclical experience. For Oxette, a mixed race community helps heal her pain by encouraging her to be proud of who she is. This inspires her to continue to self heal through writing about her painful experiences of racism and alienation. In turn, she consciously decides to move beyond the self to the community by submitting her essay to *Mxd Zine!* and inviting others to read her story. Ultimately this may build an interconnectivity rooted in empathy and shared experience among other mixed race individuals and/or other women of color. Therefore, healing may stem from various factors for women of color zinesters who struggle with navigating their multiple identities.

As Oxette found solace among other mixed race individuals, King's process of creating community involves breaking away from one community and joining another. *The First 7-inch Was Better* contributes to an interconnected community of zinesters and zine readers in various ways. To begin, King's decision to leave one community and join another demonstrates the struggle of finding a community that best coexists with one's

identity. As a mixed race queer woman, it is exhausting for King to try to create a space for people of color and queers within a predominately straight white male punk scene. King's story shows that everyone deserves a space where one can bring their entire identity to the table. It can also inform zine readers of the struggle it takes to find a community that corresponds with the complexity of one's identity. For King, discovering and building a new community with queer activists that embrace her multiple identities is more useful than attempting to change an exclusionary punk community.

In the context of self-to-community collaborations, *The First 7-inch Was Better* is not only concerned with King discovering a community, but it can also encourage community building between zinesters and zine readers. Because many subcultures, including but not limited to punk culture, are predominately white, male, and heterosexual spaces, many people of color, women, and queers, also feel excluded and under-represented. King's story can inspire zine readers that, they too, can potentially find a community where their identities can be embraced and validated. By selling and trading her zine, King is participating in building another community, a community of zinesters and zine readers who might share similar experiences. Feeling excluded from white, heterosexual, and male spaces, marginalized zine readers can be inspired by King's story to also share their experiences. Having conversations about how creating and joining new spaces where one's entire identity can be accepted is a way to begin healing from communities that have marginalized us. *The First 7-inch Was Better*, then, encourages community building among zinesters and zine readers, because it promotes the critical

importance of finding a community that accepts you, even if this means having to leave a community behind (14).

As Oxette acknowledges how other mixed race people inspired her to write her essay, Gomez is also inspired by others within her community. In her introduction of her zine *Skinned Heart*, she is eager to continue working on projects stating, "I am looking forward to the future. Looking forward to new projects, new friends, and new times with old friends. Thank you for taking the time to read these thoughts and stories that are my life, it means a lot to me. Besos y Abrazos! (hugs and kisses) (1). Setting up her zine with this introduction indicates the personal nature of *Skinned Heart*. Not only is she intimately inviting the zine reader to read her stories, she is also inviting them to even become acquaintances or friends. Her friendly personality, depicted by how she says "Besos y Abrazos," establishes a sense of intimacy that a reader may not otherwise feel when reading a publication.

Within self-to-community collaborations, one is in the process of healing the self. Self healing is the underlining subject matter of *Skinned Heart* and this can be identified from the images, content, and even the title itself. Through her struggles of identity and abuse, Gomez's zine title paints a picture in our minds of a heart that is skinned. Despite her emotional and fractured heart, Gomez's subject matter is about how we can heal from bad experiences. However, she not only wants to heal herself, but she encourages the zine reader to heal and take care of themselves. After the introduction and before the first written piece in the zine, *Skinned Heart* includes a trigger warning page. The page features an illustration of a woman kneeling in the middle with an illustrated page border

of different plants containing thorns and leaves. Over this image, Gomez has cut out and arranged a hand written text expressing, "This issue deals with sensitive and triggering subjects. Please take care of yourself" (3). The juxtaposition of a kneeling woman, which can represent sorrow, with the plants, which can represent growth, mirror Gomez's words of concern that even when dealing with painful material, we need to take care of ourselves and grow. In this way, Gomez is not only healing herself through expressing her painful navigation of multiple identities, but she is encouraging the zine reader to also heal themselves in the process. Therefore, through her combination of zine images, format, and content, Gomez represents a woman of color zinester who is healing herself while also building an interconnected community of individuals who can collaborate and heal together.

Consequently, *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better*, and *Skinned Heart* are zines that indicate ways in which women of color use zines to navigate their multiple identities. Further, distributing their zines for others to read, women of color zinesters are intimately inviting the zine reader to read their stories, share pain, and begin the process of healing together. Within self-to-community collaborations, zine aesthetics, including zine images and format, along with content, indicate how women of color zinesters are building an interconnected zine community rooted in shared experience and empathy.

CHAPTER III

WOMEN OF COLOR ZINESTERS REOPENING WOUNDS

“Isolation brought about by racism, homophobia and social exclusion often forms the impetus for starting a zine.”

Anita Harris

The writers of *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better*, and *Skinny Heart* express their struggles navigating their complicated identities with racism, sexism, and culture. Using zines as a medium to express one's struggle with identity is a way for many women of color zinesters to share their pain. In this way, the pain expressed through zines becomes a therapeutic way to heal. Regarding the process of healing, Eden Torres notes that "if we can learn to heal- to make good use of our pain, memory and rage- the potential for long and lasting alliances in various political struggles may well become a reality" (46). Women of color zinesters are participating in healing practices as they create and share their zines with others. Such collaborations often begin by verbalizing and coming to terms with the oppression one faces. This chapter examines the theoretical frameworks of third space theory and identity politics in order to demonstrate a deeper understanding of how women of color zinesters are reopening up wounds and encouraging interconnectivity.

For many women of color zinesters, writing about identity can be challenging, because it involves reopening up old wounds. The phrase "reopening up old wounds"

means to cause one to remember painful experiences that have occurred in the past. Women of color zinesters frequently do this when they navigate identity, because it often involves recollecting the painful memories and experiences of racism, sexism, homophobia, and colonialism. Using this phrase as related to women of color zinesters is useful in that it paints a metaphoric picture in our minds. In the literal sense, the reopening of a wound on the physical body occurs when damage is caused to an already injured area of the body. In a metaphoric sense, the reopening of a wound is caused by remembering, and often reliving, difficult past lived experiences. In both the physical and metaphoric contexts, a reopening of a wound is painful yet often necessary in order to heal. The zinesters of *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better*, and *Skinned Heart* open up wounds in their navigation of identity in different ways. In *Mxd Zine!*, Oxette recalls an unwelcoming black community and a racially discriminatory white community. King opens up old wounds in *The First 7-inch Was Better* when she recollects the alienation she felt in a racially exclusive punk scene. Moreover, in *Skinned Heart*, Gomez digs into the hardships of facing her colonized self. This chapter reveals the various processes of opening up old wounds and the interconnective possibilities that can emerge from doing so. Navigating identity, facing pain, and discovering who one is can be painful but are essential within the process of healing.

While opening up old wounds happens in distinct ways for Oxette, King, and Gomez, a commonality they share is the way they each fall into what Adela C. Licona calls "the third space." The third space involves being "in-between" and is an "interstitial space of intersection and overlap, ambiguity and contradiction, that materializes a

subversion to either/or ways of being and reproducing knowledge” (11). Licona also takes the geographic meaning of “borderlands” as living between two countries and applies it to the embodied self. For instance, she draws upon Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands rhetoric to promote an embodied ambiguity so that binary ways of thinking can be rejected (14). The third space also involves one's struggle to balance multiple forms of identity and the process of producing new identities which may not fit into any finite category. In this way, Licona situates zines as "third-space sites" for she believes that "zinesters explicitly engage their lived contradictions and ambiguities in terms of racialized identities, gender identification and sexuality (9). Licona's ideas regarding the third space are useful to my analysis, because women of color zinesters often embody third space characteristics such as possessing ambiguous and contradictory identities.

While I find Licona's idea of third space beneficial to my examination of women of color zinesters, her ideas about interconnectivity differ from mine. While Licona does discuss communities that zines can create, her discussion of community is primarily centered within the context of zinesters alternative knowledge production. She says, "Zines are producing coalitions across borders of knowledge production and consumption as well as participating in meaning-making practices often based on lived experience" (104). Her ideas of community building are centered around the legitimation of lived experience as knowledge. Though this is important, my analysis of interconnectivity adds that zines are a valuable way for women of color zinesters to heal and interconnect across difference. In other words, my ideas concerning interconnectivity are based on the results of producing knowledge rooted in lived experience. Once one produces knowledge

based on lived experience, what can be gained other than arguing for legitimacy? I attempt to explore how producing knowledge based on lived experience, particularly the experience of navigating multiple identities, becomes a way to reopen wounds, share pain, heal, and interconnect with one another. The process of interconnectivity, as I describe, will be explored further in chapter four.

In revisiting the third space, let us look at Oxette's essay "Ethnic, or something," which is the first piece to appear in King's edition of *Mxd Zine!*. Oxette's identity as a mixed race queer causes her to live in an "in-between" space of "overlap, ambiguity and contradiction" (Licona, 11). Reflecting upon her experiences, Oxette reveals the struggles she faces in claiming her blackness and disassociating from whiteness. When speaking of blackness, she says, "Claiming any part of Blackness now feels to me like the cultural appropriation it appears as to others" (4). Because of her light skin, she is perceived by many blacks as not being "black enough" and/or culturally appropriating blackness. This causes Oxette to feel unwelcome among black communities regardless of the fact that her black father instills a sense of black pride into her from an early age (4). In addition, she expresses that her desire to break association with the history of white oppression is not possible for she acknowledges "the privilege of being seen and treated as white" (4). Oxette is aware of how privilege and oppression work and understands the unearned white privilege she receives for being born half white with light skin. How can Oxette claim her black identity without feeling intrusive or culturally appropriative of black culture? At the same time, how can she dissociate herself from whiteness, when she is half white and feels she must navigate and be accountable of her own privilege? These

questions are not easy to answer because they fall within the "overlap, ambiguity and contradiction" that defines the third space (Licona, 11).

Third space theory establishes an examination of the self in a way that allows zinesters to tolerate a non-binary space where they can share their struggles of identity, but also accept and embrace who they are. Tolerating a non-binary space can be challenging when one feels alienation from certain identity groups to which one, otherwise, desires to belong. Although Oxette may feel unwelcome among blacks and has difficulty identifying with whiteness, she does, however, benefit from sharing her personal experiences. Rather than finding herself alone in a non-binary space, she learns that other mixed race individuals share similar struggles: "I met a number of mixed race folks who have the context to understand where I'm coming from and don't require me to explain and justify my emotional responses to racism." (6). Oxette's experience can be an example of self-to-community collaborations because she shows how sharing our experiences can cause us to potentially connect with others who also struggle with negotiating their complicated identities. If finding community was important to Oxette, then it's likely to be important to other zinesters as well. Though Oxette "met a number of mixed race folks" face to face, zinesters can meet one another in various ways including meeting each other virtually, exchanging letters, and by getting to know each other through zines themselves. In this way, reopening our past and present wounds does not have to be an isolated process for there are often others who share similar wounds.

While Oxette struggles to navigate her racial identity between black and white communities, King describes the issues she faces while navigating Boston's punk

community in her zine *The First 7-inch Was Better*. When King first joins the Boston anarchist punk scene, she feels that she has found her home. This did not last long as she soon begins to realize how exclusionary individuals within this subculture are. For instance, the anarchist punks she knows privilege issues relating to class over other forms of oppression as they tell her that racism and sexism are products of capitalism (11). As a queer, mixed race individual, this indicates that the issues effecting King, such as homophobia and racism, come second to capitalism. She writes, "No one seemed to be putting the issues which effect women, people of color and queers the most first, and thus people with marginalized identities were further marginalized within this counterculture" (13). King's story demonstrates that the supposed liberatory subcultures we might identify with can be limiting.

King's multiple identities could be understood as what Leslie McCall refers to as intercategory complexity, an approach of intersectionality. Intersectionality refers to how multiple systems of oppression and privilege interact. Intercategory complexity is a way to examine social categories as "misleading constructs that do not readily allow for the diversity and heterogeneity of experience" (1783). In other words, we must be careful to not essentialize identities when using intersectionality as a framework. In King's experience, for example, I consider punk as an identity category that is characterized by promoting one's individual freedom, being anti-establishment, and being accepting of marginalized people and outcasts. However, the idea of intercategory complexity would have us question if every punk reflects these characteristics. King's experience with the Boston punk community suggests that every punk does not fit the definition of

being accepting of marginalized people. In this way, King's punk identity is at odds with her queerness and racial identity, which several members of Boston's anarchist punk community do not embrace or politically represent. By remaining in the punk scene, King would have to tirelessly demand a space for people of color and queers. This demonstrates that an identity category, such as punk, can be made up of certain characteristics yet not necessarily reflect a person's particular experience with that specific identity category.

As various issues arise within a scene she thought was home, King reaches what I call a "third space crossroads of identity," which is the sorting out process of choosing to identify with or reject a particular identity. Within the third space crossroads of identity, King, instead, discovers the road of a new, more productive community among queer activists in Denver who embrace all parts of her identity. Inside this new community, King does not have to change who she is nor try to change those around her. The third space crossroads of identity does not operate within an either/or binary where one has to choose what identity to reject or embrace, because identities exist despite contradiction. For example, in *Borderlands* Gloria Anzaldúa discusses her complicated experiences of being a feminist lesbian mestiza: "As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out... As a lesbian I have no race, my people disclaim me... I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos" (102). Feeling countryless, raceless, and cultureless is a painful consequence of navigating and sorting through one's identities. However, it is essential to navigate one's identities in order to realize that one can create or engage in a culture or

community that is new, and often better: "I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet" (103). Anzaldúa makes meaning out of her contradictory identities by happening upon the potential for a new participatory community. Experiencing a third space crossroads of identity, then, is often necessary in order to recognize the significance of a new community in which one can identify with.

As Oxette and King's experiences embody third space characteristics in terms of the contradictory and ambiguous identities they navigate, Gomez also embodies contradiction and ambiguity as she navigates her and her family's colonized selves. Along with embodying contradiction and ambiguity, Licona also describes the third space as "ways of knowing and being [that] defy the values that are implicated in the 'authentic,' the 'proper,' and the 'pure'" (11). In other words, the third space challenges representations of identity that might be seen as more real than other forms of identity. In *Skinny Heart*, Gomez's embodied racial ambiguity confirms that her lived experiences are legitimate realities for many women of color. Gomez's final piece in her zine "Chasing the Dream: Assimilation and Resistance," examines her own identity as a fourth generation Mexican-American of Apache and Comanche descent that is attempting to maintain her cultural roots.

Gomez begins her navigation of her racial identity by expressing the alienation she feels from living far from home. As a result of moving from west Texas to Seattle, Washington, Gomez states, "I long for mi familia de mi sangre, long for cultural roots,

long for knowledge that can only be taught by being geographically close to the border, close to people with dark skin like mine" (21). At the same time that she misses her family, Gomez recognizes that the culture she connects with is a "colonized assimilated one" in where her family was conditioned to assimilate to an "american lifestyle" (24, 22). Nevertheless, these concerns bring her closer towards accepting her multiple, and contradictory, cultural identities: "This is where those cracks in my identity began, where there was a Mexican me and an assimilated me, where I began and learned to tolerate a life of duality" (22).

Anzaldúa's theory of *nepantla* is useful when looking at Gomez's attempt to "tolerate a life of duality." In "now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts," Anzaldúa invites the reader through a process she calls "*conocimiento*" (knowledge) which involves seven stages and has no beginning or end. After the first stage, which involves an unsettling awareness, she takes us to the second stage, *nepantla*. *Nepantla* is a Nahuatl word which means "in-between," and she uses the term to describe a transformative place where various conflicting viewpoints make one question the epistemologies and ontologies that one has been taught (548). In attempting to figure out her Mexican self and colonized self, Gomez is in a *nepantla* space. A *nepantla* space is similar to third space in that it tolerates an in-between non-binary space of identity. *Nepantla* is different in that it involves what Anzaldúa describes as "seeing double," meaning having two perspectives which are a result of living between two cultures. Seeing double can be conflicting: "... the conflict in your mind makes your body a battlefield where beliefs fight each other" (549). In this way, *nepantla* can be a useful

way to understand Gomez's identity, because she is "seeing double" and her beliefs are at odds with one another.

Self-to-community collaborations involves the process of pain that is felt when attempting to navigate one's multiple and often, contradictory, identities. It often involves tolerating a life of duality, as Gomez put it. Now that I have demonstrated ways in which Oxette, King, and Gomez navigate their identities and reopen their past and present wounds within the third space, it is important to explore the potential repercussions of doing so. Why is learning about the identities of women of color zinesters significant? Licona's analysis of zines as third-space sites helps to challenge dominant society about what is legitimate knowledge. Another possible outcome of analyzing the multiple identities of women of color zinesters is to discover the healing potential of zines. As stated earlier, my project differs from Licona's in that my methodology includes my personal lived experiences of being a zinester. Personally participating within a zine subculture allows me to witness ways in which zines can be sites for healing. Within the context of self-to-community collaborations, navigating identity is great for healing purposes. Reading and trading zines is a way to share identity, pain, and experiences in order to pursue a more global interconnectivity. Hence, women of color zinesters are moving from the self and towards the collective.

Shifting from exploring the third space, I will now use the theory of identity politics to analyze *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better*, and *Skinny Heart* in order to demonstrate how identity can be useful to share experience and collaborate across differences. Scholars have defined identity politics in diverse ways. For instance, Susan

Bickford states that identity politics can mean "articulating a claim in the name of a particular group," "being concerned with cultural specificity," or "acting as though group membership necessitates a certain political stance" (112). Bickford's indication that identity politics can hold several different meanings has resulted in various degrees of criticism among scholars. One includes the idea that the term promotes resentment from members of a particular identity group towards the oppressor and it "prompts a focus on victimhood and powerlessness, and an obsessive demand for recognition" (113). Criticisms as these are problematic because they presume that identity politics encourages oppositionality and, thus, leaves little room for relationality.

Identity politics can be used to not only focus on differences, but it can create relational spaces. In "Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics," Allison Weir presents us with a model for transformative identity politics that requires a reevaluation of identity politics with a shift from identity as a category to an "identification with" (111). Identification with is a ground for solidarity, because it encourages us to foster ways in which we can establish connections. Identification with does not, however, disregard difference and historical realities or encourage essentialized notions of a global sisterhood. My definition of identity politics is similar to Weir's in that it discourages identity from being insular, divisive, and oppositional. Within the context of self-to-community collaborations, this theory of identity politics can help us understand ways in which navigating identity can extend beyond identity categories. Further, it can be useful in that it recognizes differences all while promoting relationality and global interconnectivity. In short, identity politics encourages us to freely organize

behind labels with which we identify while simultaneously participating within transformational movements that transcend categories which can restrict interconnectivity.

Weir's idea of an identification with is useful when exploring women of color zinesters (111). For Oxette, King, and Gomez, the identity categories they share are their gender, queer, and of-color identities. In terms of their race, Oxette and King are mixed race in that they are part black and part white, while Gomez is a Mexican-American of Apache and Comanche descent. As queer women of color, they fall within similar identity categories, but their experiences still differ depending on their class, religion, location, age, size, family, etc. In addition, Oxette, King, and Gomez's experiences can differ in terms of their interests and ideals due to the fact that their complicated realities extend beyond their social categories. Though this thesis is centered around women of color zinesters, this is not to say that interconnection is only limited to women of color for readers of any identity can potentially relate to women of color zinesters in diverse ways. As I have explored ways in which Oxette, King, and Gomez navigate their identities within the third space, it is important to note that their navigation of identity promotes a nonoppositional identity politics that encourages relationality among zinesters and zine readers. In this way, the process of relating pain moves beyond the self and towards the community.

Oxette's essay may read as if it only relates to mixed raced individuals, but many of the themes in her work are shared by readers who are not mixed race, including ideas regarding privilege. While Oxette's race, gender, and sexuality cause her to endure

oppression throughout her life, she also experiences privilege. For instance, she mentions that she grew up Catholic and was middle-class (4). As specified earlier, she is also part white and light skinned, and, thus, acknowledges her white privilege: "I want to disassociate myself from whiteness and the history of white oppression but have the privilege of being seen and treated as white and need to be accountable for my own racism" (4). Oxette's religious upbringing, middle class background, and light skinned privilege disrupts the stereotypical idea that every woman of color is a poster girl for oppression. While women of color do experience oppression on the basis of their gender and race, there are many privileges that women of color can possess. In this way, women of color zines are not limited only to women who have been oppressed in the same way as them. Rather, they can be read and enjoyed by anyone, whether their identity categories mark them as oppressed, privileged or a combination of both.

The concept that zine readers of any identity can read, enjoy, and relate to a woman of color zine does not suggest for the masking of social differences. Rather, an identification with acknowledges differences in terms of power and privilege. Weir writes, "Because a transformative identity politics involves identifications across power divides, it needs to be grounded in a complex, relational model of identity that can incorporate recognition of relations of power, as well as relations of identification" (125). Therefore, identification with means that one can identify with others, while also being thoroughly mindful of how power functions. With recognizing differences of oppression and power, identity can then be more than simply a category for our identities can also

focus "on what matters, what is meaningful to us-our desires, relationships, commitments, ideals" (111).

In *The First 7-inch Was Better*, King conceptualizes ways to relate or not relate to others across identity categories. In doing so, she discovers a "politically active and racially diverse" community of queer individuals in Denver (14). As illustrated earlier, within the third space crossroads of identity and intercategorical complexity, her punk identity did not reflect her needs. When addressing several reasons for why she leaves the punk community, King states:

"I couldn't get ahead in a scene where one's worth was proven by hopping trains, not showering, and being seen at the right shows, so I stopped trying. I no longer have the desire to be accepted by people who hide behind their "radical" lifestyle politics and aren't able to work with people who don't eat out of dumpsters and can't afford to get arrested to make a point, to make real change happen" (16).

I quote King at length to demonstrate identifying with someone is not always based on an identity category. Identifying with another can be based on one's "desires, relationships, commitments" and "ideals" (Weir, 111). King's ideals, along with her race and queer identity, can be related and shared with the queer community that she now participates in. Different from the punks she knew, the Denver community does not make her feel that she has to prove her punkness, radicalness, or coolness and allows her to openly be herself without restriction. By finding a community with members that share similar interests and ideals, King's experience indicates that our interconnectivity can be rooted in more than our social identities.

To continue exploring a notion of identity politics that encourages relationality and promotes interconnectivity, let us look at Gomez's *Skinned Heart*. While King expresses her personal experience of finding a queer community with which she identifies, the diverse topics that Gomez addresses in her zine can inspire interconnection among diverse female zine readers. In the second piece of her zine, Gomez tells her painful story of the abuse she experiences from a former partner. Because love clouds her perception, Gomez endures several years of emotional and sexual abuse from her boyfriend (13). She does not come to terms with the reality of the situation until a good friend of hers is assaulted by him. In reflecting on her decision to publish this traumatic experience, Gomez says, "I wanted to tuck these feelings and memories away in the back of my mind, but they just kept coming up...I was afraid people wouldn't believe me and would question me. I was ashamed of what I had allowed myself to become. I decided that I didn't care. I've never been one to be quiet and I decided I am not gonna start now" (12). Gomez not only experiences fear and shame within her relationship, but also when hesitating to share her experience. Her story is an example of how painful experiences, such as sexual abuse, can relate to any reader, regardless of gender, race, and sexuality.

Oxette, King and Gomez navigate racism, sexism, homophobia, and colonialism. As I have argued, their painful experiences with navigating identity caused them to find meaning, which often comes in the form of moving beyond the self and towards the community. By analyzing their work with a nonoppositional lens, interconnection can transcend identity categories. This does not mean that one can not organize behind certain labels for categories are important for representational purposes. For example,

marginalized groups, such as queers or women of color, are often under-represented within a variety of institutions and face discrimination on the basis of their sexuality or race. Organizing together through different means is vital in order to shine a light on the inequalities they face. At the same time, however, our identities can mean more than our social categories. In this way, identifying with others whose social identities match ours and with others we might identify with through other experiences or ideals are both helpful ways to build coalitions.

Consequently, this chapter shows ways in which women of color zinesters live within third spaces that are characterized by ambiguity and contradiction. By articulating the struggles with identity, sharing zines becomes a way to share pain. While pain travels through zines, it is significant to foster various ways to grow from our struggles. Oxette, King, and Gomez's navigation of multiple identities demonstrates how we can create meaning out of the reopening of our wounds. In this process, we are moving from the self and towards the community. Experiencing pain can cause us to make something happen and the next chapter will explore the possibilities of interconnected healing.

CHAPTER IV

MOVING BEYOND THE SELF AND TOWARDS THE COMMUNITY

"Hey, guess whose zine I saw at a distro in the Netherlands?" asked my friend as she was studying abroad in Amsterdam in January of 2014 and saw my zine *Muchacha* featured at ZsaZsa Zine, a queer feminist distro. I knew that I had donated zines to ZsaZsa zine but I was, nevertheless, still amazed at the fact that something I created could fall into anyone's hands, whether within the United States or transnationally. Now that I have explored ways in which women of color zinesters process the pain felt when attempting to navigate one's multiple and often, contradictory, identities, I will examine the question, "in what ways does distributing zines with others contribute to community building among women of color?" Through autoethnographic analysis, along with examining ideas such as bedroom culture, and *conocimiento*, this chapter will explore this question in order to demonstrate how zines created by women of color promote global interconnectivity.

Chapter one's description of *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better*, and *Skinned Heart*, show how the combination of zine aesthetics, including images and format, along with content, are an integral part of what invites readers to be part of a community of zinesters and zine readers. Chapter two delves within the content of zines by exploring ways in which Oxette, King, and Gomez reopen wounds in their navigation of their

multiple identities. In turn, this causes them to create meaning from painful experiences including but not limited to racism, sexism, homophobia, and colonialism. This meaning comes in the form of moving beyond the self and towards the community. This chapter demonstrates how the distributive process of zines contributes to a community of like-minded women of color zinesters.

I have created zines, organized zine release benefit concerts, traded zines, and supported zine spaces, such as zine distros and zine libraries, between 2011 and 2014. Within these years, I have come to notice ways in which zines are artistic and activist tools to not only fight for social justice, but to build interconnected communities on both local and global scales. Trading and reading zines with other women of color worldwide, who have also written about navigating their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and culture, contributes to a transnational community rooted in a shared empathy and struggle. Beginning in the 1970's, zine distribution often occurred on local levels such as at concerts and grassroots activist events. Although zines are still distributed in these ways, the internet has helped popularize zines and individuals now have wider access to learn about zines and to sell/buy zines. Regarding global mass culture, Nayereh Tohidi notes that "the emergence and expansion of new communication technology, the Internet in particular... paved the way to the emergence of transnational feminism" (4). In other words, in previous decades feminist activism often occurred at a local level, but with the help of the internet, women are now able to build coalitions across nations in diverse ways and one of these ways is through zines.

To illustrate the coalition building aspects of reading and trading zines on a transnational level, it is important to be familiar with the zine distributive process. To begin, distribution can be accomplished through selling or trading one's zine on social networking websites such as *Tumblr*, *Facebook*, *Wemakezines*, and *Twitter*. Zines can also be sold through *Etsy*, *Ebay*, or one's personal website. Furthermore, they can be distributed through zine distros, where distributors collect and sell zines, as demonstrated with my zine featured at ZsaZsa Zine. Zines are also distributed through zine libraries, where librarians collect zines for others to borrow, and zine fests, where zinesters organize festivals to showcase their zines. Many women of color zinesters living in and out of the U.S. sell and trade their zines online to transnational audiences. For instance, zine readers outside of the United States can purchase Gomez's zine *Skinned Heart* on her website Brown Recluse Zine Distro, along with dozens of other zines created by people of color. Further, the readers of my zine *Muchacha* expand from countries closer to home such as Mexico and Canada to those across the globe to include Spain, Australia, and Sweden, among others. In addition to ZsaZsa Zine, a distro and zine archive in Amsterdam, *Muchacha* is also featured in Dead Trees and Dye Zine Distro in London, England, Read Army Press Distro in Toronto, Ontario, and a zine library in Luzon, Philippines. In the context of many women of color zinesters who sell and trade their zines on international levels, zines are a way to share struggles associated with but not limited to racism, sexism, abuse, culture, and colonialism in order to begin healing from our oppression together, rather than alone.

Within self-to-community collaborations, zinesters and zine readers interconnect through the distributive zine process in diverse ways. One way zinesters interconnect is through what Red Chidgey refers to as a "gift economy". While some zinesters have resources, such as access to photocopiers, others have expenses ranging from supplies, printing and ink costs, postage, shipping, and the unpaid labor it takes to create a zine. Because zines can be costly yet are usually freely distributed or sold at low costs, how are zinesters compensated for their work? According to Chidgey, "In gift economies, reciprocity is expected for products freely shared, either through direct gifts or feedback or through intangible rewards such as self-esteem, reputation, mutual aid, recognition from the community, or the expectation that the community as a whole will produce more goods to share" (32). As a result of zines being freely distributed, traded, donated, or sold at low costs, zinesters interconnect through their zines by compensating one another in ways that do not necessarily involve monetary exchange.

Zinesters can be compensated for their work when a zine reader, who might also be a zinester, reaches out to a zinester via a social networking website or email. Reaching out to one another through the internet is a way for zinesters to meet other zinesters, trade zines, review each other's zine, and potentially collaborate on future projects. For example, in June of 2013 Gomez wrote me an email asking if I would trade zines with her. When I agreed, she also mentioned the new distro she was starting up, Brown Recluse Zine Distro. Like her, I believed that people of color zines were under-represented, and I was excited about the idea of a distro specifically featuring zines created by people of color. As a result of this exchange, we not only traded zines, but I

gave her positive feedback on her distro and donated several zines. As a result, people of color zinesters bought my zines through her distro, and a few even contacted me to provide me with positive feedback on my zine. The hard work put into making zines, then, is compensated by interconnecting with other zinesters in diverse ways. Gomez benefited from our exchange through the zine donations I provided for her distro, while I benefited through the positive feedback I received about my zine, as well as networking with other zinesters.

When exchanging zines, community collaborations can occur when zinesters attach notes to their zines. Upon receiving issue #5 of Gomez' zine *Skinned Heart*, I found a friendly note attached in which she expressed part of the reasoning behind writing her zine. The nature of this exchange felt as if I was receiving a letter from a friend. Allison Piepmeier would describe this exchange as an embodied community, which occurs when the materiality of the zine medium "reconnect(s) us to our bodies and to other human beings" (58). As a woman of color zinester, I have personally felt part of an "embodied community" through the exchange of zines and notes attached with zines. The unique interconnection between Gomez and I has continued as I have continuously donated and traded several zines with her and her distro.

Embodied connections between zinesters and zine readers are not limited to zine exchanges via direct mail as social media also contributes to interconnectivity among women of color zinesters. For instance, Gomez created the facebook group "P.O.C. Zine Writers Unite" in March of 2014. In the description portion of the group, she writes: "This page is for POC zine writers. Please add other POC zine writers! Please share your

zine related projects! Collaborate and support! This is a POC (People of Color) only space" (*Facebook*). At 343 members, as of November 2014, this facebook page has created an online space where people of color zinesters can share their work, collaborate, and interconnect with other people of color. Embodied communities occurring through the mail, virtually, or in person are ways in which zinesters are moving beyond the self and towards an interconnected community of zinesters.

As I have described aspects of the zine distributive process, including an embodied community via direct mail and social networking, it is also important to note that one way women of color zinesters promote community is through creating zine editions in where other women of color can feature their work. My unique lived experiences as a woman of color zinester cause me to observe interconnections among women of color zine communities in insightful ways. The decision to create the Latina-based issue of my zine, "Brown Queen," stemmed from a desire to interconnect with other Latinas on a local, national, and global level. I created it also because I felt that Latinas, as well as other women of color, are under-represented within artistic communities, such as those involving publication, visual art, and music. "Brown Queen," could serve as an opportunity for Latinas to represent themselves. As a Latina of Mexican descent who has self-published work regarding experiences such as racism, sexism and colonialism, I felt it was urgent to create an opportunity where other Latinas could self-publish their experiences. By compiling a collection of diverse work, "Brown Queen" gave Latinas a space where they could come together and share their stories. In this way,

creating "Brown Queen" was not simply about creating something for myself. Rather, it was about creating something with the Latina community in mind.



Fig 4. Submission Call Out Flyer For Brown Queen

To further examine ways in which sharing zines contribute to community building among women of color, I will discuss the process of creating "Brown Queen" along with significant content within the zine. Further, I will explore how the zine release benefit concert, "Brown Queen: Our Voz, Our Arte" strengthened women of color interconnectivity within the context of self-to-community collaborations. In my "call for submission" flyer (see fig. 4), which I created in January of 2013 and promoted through various social networking websites, such as *Tumblr*, *Facebook*, and *WeMakeZines*, I asked Latina, Chicana or Hispanic-identified women to contribute their voices through an array of mediums including but not limited to poetry, essays, visual art, comics and

photography. In March of the same year, I received 24 submissions and with my own contributions, the edition turned out to be 49 pages. The locations of the contributors ranged from U.S. cities such as San Antonio, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, New York City and the Mexican city, Ciudad Juárez. By including a contributor with a Mexican nationality, "Brown Queen," offered interconnections through not only local and national levels, but through a transnational level as well.

In the process of creating "Brown Queen," several individuals enthusiastically expressed interest in contributing their work. For example, a Chicana named Joanna Villegas from Davis, California contacted me via email with questions about the zine edition and sent me her personal reflection piece entitled "You Cannot Deny I Am Here". In her piece, Villegas shares her struggles of feeling excluded from her English department due to her race and sexual orientation. Relating to her struggle and finding her story powerful, I responded with positive feedback and explained a purpose of creating "Brown Queen": "This is why I am creating this issue, for us to come together en la lucha [in the struggle]. I am so grateful that you are interested in contributing!" (Salinas). In my email to her, I was attempting to relay to her the importance of uniting with other Latinas and how my zine edition was an opportunity to do so. In her reply, Villegas said, "I truly appreciate you. Thank you for making the zine! Your feedback on my piece made me extremely happy. I am glad you're receiving so many submissions! That just means we need more zines focused on Chicanas" (Villegas).

The exchange between Villagas was important, because we both communicated a desire to join together on behalf of the Latina community. "Brown Queen" provided a

medium where Latinas could express their own personal struggles, so that we could all unite "in the struggle" together. Further, Villegas acknowledgment of the lack of Chicana-focused zines demonstrates an urgency for a project like "Brown Queen" to exist. The necessity of a Latina zine edition reflects the desire for individual Latinas, such as Villegas and me, to participate within self-to-community collaborations. In this case, self-to-community collaborations meant moving beyond our own personal struggles and towards a collective Latina struggle where we could heal our wounds of racism, sexism, homophobia, and abuse together, instead of alone.

The "Brown Queen" contributors and I had a chance to come together and build a community through our collaborative work in ways we may not have done otherwise. In regards to what community might look like, Layli Maparyan states,

"From a Womanist perspective, community is conceived as a field of overlapping circles of varying scales—from family to a group of friends to all people who share a certain identity or affinity to all humanity, conceptually centered at the level of humanity as a whole but which may actually function in smaller or larger units" (45).

By viewing community through the lens of Womanism, Maparyan is expanding the definition of community to encompass a myriad of factors, including a community based on microlevel or macrolevel interactions. An example of a microlevel interaction is the short email exchange between me and Villegas. While our exchange was short, it inspired community between us. A macrolevel interaction that can be applied to "Brown Queen," could be the several dozen Latina contributors and readers who felt connected through a

shared identity. Maparyan's idea of community is useful when discussing community among women of color zinesters, because it gives agency to women of color zinesters, zine contributors, and readers to consider themselves as being part of a community, despite the micro or macrolevel interactions that make up the community. In this way, "Brown Queen" served as a bridge for Latinas to have small and larger scale connections in diverse ways.

The interactions between women of color zinesters are relevant to the idea of bedroom culture. Sociologists Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber coined the phrase 'bedroom culture' in their 1976 essay "Girls and Subcultures". While many youth culture scholars at the time were conducting research on the leisure activities of young males, McRobbie and Garber were interested in highlighting the subcultural space of girl bedrooms. These spaces were characterized as private and involved girlhood interests in romance, fashion, and popular music (94). Twenty five years later, Sian Lincoln points out limitations of McRobbie and Garber's bedroom culture framework, including the way they posit girl's means of resistance as being passive. In her book *Youth Culture and Private Space*, Lincoln states, "Bedroom spaces... are by no means static... and are spaces within which objects are moved, placed, displaced, and replaced, capturing the often very rapid changes in tastes, interests, and lifestyles of a young person engaging in youth culture" (112). Girls lives and interests, then, are always changing, making bedrooms a space where girls can engage in multiple means of resistance beyond the pursuit of and/or interest in romance, fashion, and popular music.

With the emergence of social media, the girl bedroom culture framework can invite contemporary girls and women to have access to a variety of meaningful activities, one of these being creating zines. In her article, “gURL Scenes and Grrrl Zines,” Anita Harris explores the resistant components that grrrl zines offer young women and girls. Grrrl zines are created by girl writers who associate with Riot Grrrl, feminism, and/or punk culture. She notes, “Whereas once the emancipatory potential of girls' bedroom culture was considered limited by its focus on idolization of pop stars and fantasies of adult heterosexual femininity, the overtly feminist politics of grrrl/gURL scenes seem to offer much more” (47). Harris' idea that the feminist politics evident within grrrl zines offers bedroom culture more is relevant to my own analysis of women of color zinesters. What I would add to Harris' research is how the politics behind women of color zines fit within the bedroom culture framework. As I pointed out in the introduction, Riot Grrrl was a predominately white movement, and though Grrrl zinesters of color exist, most are white and their zines are primarily focused on gender issues. As a result, many Grrrl zinesters fail to consider how race, sexuality, and other identities other than gender might fit in the lives of women.

Considering that many women of color often experience sexism and racism simultaneously, zines can serve as a medium to express their pain. As noted before, self-to-community collaborations often begins by sharing one's struggle with racism, sexism, homophobia, colonialism, abuse, etc. Zines are a way for women of color to create a space for themselves to share their pain. These spaces can sometimes exist in the form of a bedroom, but the isolating circumstance is that bedrooms are separated from each other.

In the documentary *The Punk Singer* about Riot Grrrl leader Kathleen Hanna, she refers to girl bedroom culture when describing her solo album Julie Ruin:

It sounds like bedroom culture. It sounds like something a girl made in her bedroom. The problem is, is that these bedrooms are all cut off from each other. So how do you take that bedroom that your cut off from all the other girls that were secretly in their bedroom writing secret things or making secret songs. I wanted the Julie Ruin record to sound like a girl from her bedroom that made this record, but didn't just throw it away or it just wasn't in her diary. She took it out and shared it with people.

While I have been critical of the Riot Grrrl movement, this quote by Hanna is significant to my project, because it demonstrates the interconnective possibilities that zines offer. Like her album, zines are commonly created in the private space of someone's home, including a bedroom. In the context of women of color zinesters, such as Oxette, King, Gomez, and myself, our pain and navigation of identity can be experienced secretly in private physical spaces, such as bedrooms. Subsequently, the process of writing our pain in a zine reflects our urge to want to find and connect with others who might share similar experiences. Rather than experiencing pain in our private spaces by ourselves, women of color can share their pain beyond their private spaces in order to take part in an interconnected community of women of color zinesters where the transformative power of healing can take place. In these ways, the bedroom culture framework can benefit from looking at ways that women of color zinesters are interconnecting with one another and with the world.



Fig. 5. *Brown Queen: Our Voz, Our Arte* Flyer

Muchacha's “Brown Queen” zine edition created an opportunity for Latinas to interconnect beyond the private space. These microlevel and macrolevel interconnections took place between myself (the zine editor), and the contributors, along with interconnections among the contributor's work and the zine readers. This process carved out a space for Latinas to come together and share their stories on a national and transnational level. When creating “Brown Queen,” I also wanted to cultivate a space where Latinas could interconnect on a local level. This desire led me to organize a zine release event, which serves as an example of another way that zines can create interconnectivity among women of color. Zine release events occur when a zinester publically releases their new zine. These events can range from zine release musical concerts, art shows, political demonstrations, and more. A zine release event gives the zine writer or editor a space where they can publically release their zine to their

community. This encourages interconnection between the zinester and the event attendees in a way that cannot always be accomplished online. While social media gives zinesters the opportunity to interconnect with other zinesters on both micro and macro levels, zine release events can create, at times, a more intimate interaction between the zinester and local community members. In zine release spaces, zinesters can personally speak with and educate others about zines face to face. For example, at the Cinco de Mayo zine release event “Brown Queen: Our Voz Our Arte” I set up a table that featured *Muchacha’s* “Brown Queen,” and several attendees curiously approached me asking questions about my specific zine or about zines in general. This sparked several engaging conversations with people who had never heard of a zine and with others who often submit their work to zines or buy zines. Acting as the master of ceremonies, I also reminded attendees about my zine, and read excerpts of the zine between introducing each act. This would keep attendees interested to come over and engage in meaningful discussion and or support me in purchasing a zine.

Creatively putting a zine out into the world, such as through a zine release event, is a significant component in creating interconnection because it provides an opportunity for a zinester to unite with other artists who engage in social justice through diverse mediums such as those including but not limited to poetry, music, comedy, visual art, dance, and more. The following will describe both the process and purpose of the "Brown Queen: Our Voz Our Arte" zine release event that was organized. Erica GDLR, a Latina spoken word artist and co-founder of the Wounded Healer's Collective, an initiative interested in engaging with women of color artists, was interested in creating a space

where Latinas could come together to express and heal themselves through various artistic mediums. Feeling similarly, I collaborated with Erica in the creation of the Cinco de Mayo zine release concert and silent art auction "Brown Queen". Hosted by *Muchacha* and The Wounded Healer's Collective, as shown in the flyer (see fig. 5), our event was held on Sunday, May 5th, 2013 from 7PM to 12AM at The Abbey Underground in Denton, Texas. The "Brown Queen" zine release event featured Latina performances including ballet folklórico dance, comedy, spoken word, ranchera music, hip hop, folk, punk, native drumming, and more. *Muchacha's* "Brown Queen: Latina Voices of the 21st Century" was released and sold at the event; and a silent art auction, featuring visual art by local Latina artists, was held concurrently with the performances while all proceeds benefited Latina artists within the community.

The purpose of "Brown Queen: Our Voz Our Arte" was to honor, celebrate and promote the artistic visions of Latinas and other women of color by providing a medium in which they could share their own unique voices and build a community of like-minded sisters of color. "Brown Queen" was diverse in that there were musicians, visual artists, a zinester, a dancer, a comedian, a spoken word artist, and a filmmaker that came together. The idea of uniting through our creative engagements relates to self-to-community collaborations. Rather than separately creating art by ourselves, Latina artists and other women of color artists, along with allies, could come together in solidarity to produce their own culture and artistic community.

The zine-release event conveys one way that women of color artists and zinesters can creatively move from the self and towards the community. Gloria Anzaldúa considers

creativity as vital in achieving *conocimiento*, a concept that involves seven stages without a beginning or end that brings individuals towards consciousness. She writes,

"*Conocimiento* is reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism... Through creative engagements, you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself" (542).

Embedding experience within a larger frame of reference is important, because one is realizing that one's struggle is rooted in a collective struggle. Creating a space for other Latinas to share their stories, learn other stories, and in the process gain awareness and take action is what achieving *Conocimiento* can look like.

Conocimiento is also helpful in giving us a deeper understanding of the challenging process of enacting self-to-community collaborations. Self-to-community collaborations occur, for instance, through microlevel interactions, such as an email exchange, or macrolevel interactions, such as several dozen artists interconnecting through a shared identity. The process of enacting microlevel and macrolevel interactions can be difficult. For example, Oxette, King, and Gomez form interactions with zine readers through reopening their wounds of oppression and sharing their pain with others. Incorporating self-to-community collaborations through a zine-release event also involves pain via the stressful organizing process. Whether through zines or zine-release events, self-to-community collaborations is worthwhile once one embeds their experiences and struggles through a "larger frame of reference," that is the community (Anzaldúa 542).

As someone who has experienced the struggle of writing about multiple identities via a zine, or spending several months organizing zine release events, the stages of *conocimiento* have value in that they can demonstrate the challenges of accomplishing self-to-community collaborations. The stages of *conocimiento* are not a linear model, and instead are circular and a continuous process which we can often return to gain awareness. A couple of the stages of *conocimiento* as applied to my experience as the co-organizer of “Brown Queen” can help us to see how my experience creating a space to interconnect with others is not an easy task for it takes great deal of dedication to plan and coordinate every detail. Let us first take a look at the second stage of *conocimiento* which Anzaldúa describes as *nepantla*, a Nahuatl word which means in-between (548). Anzaldúa uses the term to describe a transformative place where various conflicting viewpoints make one question everything one has learned from family, education, and culture. In the context of “Brown Queen: Our Voz, Our Arte,” I experienced *nepantla* in the confliction on how to go about organizing an 'authentic' Cinco de Mayo cultural event. Being that the co-organizers, performers, and visual artists were all Latinas, Erica and I knew that our event was far more culturally relevant in comparison to other Cinco de Mayo events occurring simultaneously in Denton, which consisted primarily of white individuals wearing sombreros, drinking tequila, and eating tacos. Contrarily, the Cinco de Mayo celebration of Battle of Puebla commemorates many of our ancestors in their victory in a battle against the French.

We were mindful that Cinco de Mayo in the U.S. is directly linked to corporations, specifically alcohol businesses, capitalizing on the holiday. In these ways,

we knew that our event was far more culturally original compared to other events, but we, nevertheless, felt conflicted and ‘in-between’ in regards to our culture throughout the decision making process. The owner of the Abbey Underground venue, for example, was a white male in whom we were paying half of the alcohol proceeds to. Our event, in part, contributed to corporations capitalizing off of 'celebrating' Mexican culture. We also chose to decorate the entire venue with Mexican decorations and provided Mexican candy to the attendees. We wondered what these symbols of our culture mean to us and/or to the those attending our event. We knew that what we created was special, but we were conflicted on how much "Brown Queen: Our Voz Our Arte" reflected what we are living through now. We asked ourselves in what new ways we were producing culture through our art and through our stories. In these ways, we experienced nepantla in that we questioned the relevance of Cindo de Mayo as directly linked to our culture and art.

The nepantla feeling of organizing a relevant cultural event leads me to Anzaldúa's fourth stage of Conocimiento, “the call...el compromiso...the crossing and conversion.” Anzaldúa says, “In the fourth space, a call to action pulls you out of your depression. You break free from you habitual coping strategies of escaping from realities you’re reluctant to face, reconnect with spirit, and undergo a conversion” (545). I was ‘pulled to action’ as a result of reacting to the underrepresentation of women of color artists in the Denton, Texas community and doing something about it. The vast majority of artistic representation, including but not limited to zines, spoken word, music and visual art, is androcentric. Within the mainstream, women of color are not often portrayed as innovative artists or creators. Often times, our art is commodified and sold back to us

through the media and we are continuously made invisible as our art is also culturally appropriated. For these reasons and more, I felt ‘a call to action’ to ‘undergo a conversion’. I did not want to wait around to see and hear art and culture that my community and I could reflect, and I felt the possibility of being an agent of change.

In the spirit of do-it-yourself, Erica and I took it upon ourselves to create a space where we could give local Latina artists exposure and a chance to make connections with other Latina artists and allies. Organizing the event was often stressful and included three months of making hard decisions on the events main goals, meeting with the co-organizer, booking bands, communicating with the venue owner, contacting visual artists, providing transportation, printing zines, creating a flyer, printing flyers, promoting the event, writing and sending off a press release, fundraising money, answering emails, and several other tasks. While completing these laborious and demanding tasks, I enacted the concept of self-to-community collaborations and in that I kept the community in the front of my mind. I had to compromise my time in order to move beyond the self and inspire community-building and artistic representation among Latinas, women of color, and allies.

Enacting self-to-community collaborations at the zine-release event is reflected upon when viewing 13th Village’s four minute documentary film *Brown Queen: Our Voz Our Arte*, which primarily features a conversation among Erica GDLR, Houston-based Hip Hop artist Rainflowa, and other artists and volunteers involved with our event. When the event was ending, the director of the film asked us to gather around in front of the Abbey Underground venue to reflect upon the night. As he filmed us conversing,

Rainflowa connected our event to a spiritual song she sang earlier in the night: "That's what I was saying in the song—creator, self, family, then community—because you can't go out and do anything if you're not right, if you're people aren't right, and you're family ain't right" (*YouTube*). The song that Rainflowa performed reveals the idea behind self-to-community collaborations: reopening wounds and healing in order to interconnect with the community. When discussing the spiritual message of her song, Rainflowa went on to say "We all take place in a circle exactly like we are right now... we are all dancing and drumming and singing and generating her [Madre Tierra's] energy through our wounds and we're connecting with each other and it's really beautiful" (*YouTube*). Considering that healing our wounds through the engagement of art and dance was something that was addressed within the reflection of the event demonstrates that self-to-community collaborations was a valuable concept that night. Sharing wounds and healing pain does not only occur for zinesters, but also for those who express themselves through the mediums of music, visual art, dance, spoken word, and more. Hence, the zine release event was a way to enact self-to-community collaborations among a diverse group of women of color artists, allies, zinesters and zine readers.

Consequently, *Muchacha's* fifth issue "Brown Queen: Latina Voices of the 21st Century," and zine benefit release concert I co-organized "Brown Queen: Our Voz Our Arte," serve as examples of how interconnectivity among women of color takes place on local, national, and transnational levels. Many women of color zinesters are participating in self-to-community collaborations in pursuit of a global interconnectivity. This again, involves sharing one's struggle with navigating identity in order to heal together and build

an interconnected transnational community rooted in shared experience and empathy. Putting a zine out in the world or organizing a zine release event is a vulnerable process but, at the same time, it can be an avenue for women of color zinesters to share their pain. Reading, trading, selling, and supporting zines with other women of color worldwide has contributed to a shared struggle among us which results in transnational community building. In this way, women of color zinesters are expressing their identities and healing themselves alongside other women of color zinesters who share similar experiences. As a result of this process, we are moving from beyond the self and towards a participatory community.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Brown Queen, what does it mean to me? It means pride in my skin, in my people, in my country. Pride in my multiple identities. Brown Queen, knowing that helping one person en la lucha was worth it all.

In this thesis I explore ways in which women of color are navigating their multiple identities through their zines and how this is a way for them to move beyond themselves and towards an interconnected community. By using textual analysis, and autoethnographic analysis, this thesis argues that women of color zinesters incorporate self-to-community collaborations, which is the process of sharing pain and healing with others in order to pursue a more global interconnectivity. In chapter one I introduce my discovery of zines, the zine scholarship that exists, and I establish the structure of my thesis. In chapter two I provide descriptions of *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better* and *Skinned Heart* in order to introduce how zine aesthetics hold a deeper meaning for zine readers. In addition, I suggest that the distribution of zines is a way women of color zinesters invite zinesters and zine readers to read their stories.

In chapter three I use the frameworks of third space and identity politics to frame my examination of women of color zinesters navigating their multiple identities. I offer a critical look at how women of color zinesters are reopening wounds and encouraging interconnectivity by sharing their pain with others. Chapter three is significant because it

suggests that within self-to-community collaborations, one must create meaning from one's most painful experiences including but not limited to racism, sexism, homophobia, and colonialism. This meaning often takes place by moving beyond one's personal pain and towards a collective struggle. In chapter four I explore how the distributive process of zines contributes to a community of like-minded women of color zinesters. I explain how embodied connections through the distribution of zines offer zinesters opportunities to interconnect through their collaborative work. In describing the "Brown Queen" zine release event, I use Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of *conocimiento* to help us understand the challenging process of enacting self-to-community collaborations.

Why does the process of women of color zinesters reopening wounds, sharing pain, and experiencing interconnection matter? How does my research open new ideas or take zine scholarship further? My research contributes to existing zine scholarship by providing a meaningful racial analysis and addressing the significance of creating meaning out of one's oppression. Women of color experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously and it is important to explore ways in which they heal. Healing wounds through sharing pain is a way to self-care, which is necessary within the struggle for social justice. If one is not taking care of oneself, then how can one care for one's community? Poet and scholar Audre Lorde stated, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (*Burst of Light*). The process of healing through writing one's pain via zines is a way for women of color to preserve their stories. Further, sharing one's pain through zines also reflects an urge to want to find others who might share similar experiences. Rather than experiencing pain in

the private space, zines function as an avenue to share our pain with one another and find collaborative ways to work together and create positive meaning from our oppression. As Gloria Anzaldúa suggests: "Through creative engagements, you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet..." (542). Self-to-community collaborations are embodied by women of color zinesters who use zines as a way to connect their struggles with others in the world who might be willing to hear them. In these ways, my scholarship adds to the conversation of zines by exploring how zines are sites for marginalized individuals to share their oppression and form interconnected communities consisting of zinesters and zine readers.

My investment in women of color zines stems from my own lived experience engaging with women of color zinesters and participating within zine subculture. While I have personally witnessed self-to-community collaborations among zinesters, a limitation of this project is that I did not interview the zinesters of the zines I analyzed. Through I provide valuable textual analysis and discuss personal experiences engaging with zinesters an email exchange and a zine release event, personal accounts from the zinesters would have strengthened this project. Having the zinesters explain their reasoning behind their zine aesthetics and content would have provided greater evidence of self-to-community collaborations. I am aware of this limitation, and am interested in conducting in-depth interviews with zinesters in future research.

Along with conducting interviews with zinesters, my possible future directions of study are to investigate ways zinesters of any identity are building coalitions across

difference. While I chose to work specifically with women of color zinesters, it is important to realize that interconnectivity among zinesters is not limited to women of color, for zinesters of all identities can interconnect with one another. For the purposes of this thesis, I chose to analyze *Mxd Zine!*, *The First 7-inch Was Better* and *Skinned Heart*, because Oxette, King, and Gomez discuss topics—such as racism, sexism and colonialism—which relate with my research interests. Choosing to conduct research on women of color zines was also born out of my disappointment at the lack of scholarship that has been conducted on women of color zines, with Licona serving as the main exception. However, women of color zinesters might not experience oppression in terms of being trans*, disabled, fat and/or working class. In this way, the future implications of my research would be to explore the ways in which different kinds of zinesters navigate their identities. Further, I am interested in investigating how zinesters of different identity groups go about building bridges and working together in their social justice goals.

In closing, if one scrolls through distro websites, such as the Brown Recluse Zine Distro's webpage, one can find a myriad of Black, Latina, Asian, Indigenous and mixed race zinesters from all walks of life anxious to share their experiences with others. They share their diverse and multiple identities that range from being working class, queer, punk, fat, bi, genderqueer, transgender to identifying as a sex worker, a riot grrrl, a cook, a bike enthusiast, a sexual assault survivor, a nerd, a vegan, and an environmentalist. Interconnectivity among women of color is taking place through websites as these—through mouse clicks, emails, and zine blogs—through passing out zines at punk shows to

conversing with zinesters at zine festivals. It is happening every time a woman of color picks up a pair of scissors and glue and pours her soul onto a zine page. It is occurring when a woman of color is ready and eager to share her experiences with the world, hoping her zine will fall into the hands of someone out there—hoping it can possibly encourage someone, anyone, to know that they are not alone in their oppression. Self-to-community collaborations among women of color zinesters expands the possibility that their struggle exists beyond themselves. To move beyond themselves and be part of something bigger allows them to connect with themselves, with others, and with the world.

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