

Link: <https://soundcloud.com/marley-talvitie/exploring-the-borderlands-of-mexican-american-identity-with-aspen-florez>

Podcast: 12 minutes

A: My name is Aspen Florez. I live in Salt Lake City. I am a Mexican-American gay woman.

A: I feel like the first time I like said that outload was actually probably pretty recently, maybe like a year ago. A year- yeah its interesting. I used to, you know, when I was pissed off or something I'd be like, you know, "who's got love for gay, like, gay women in SLC?" And then that somehow that morphed into being a gay Mexican woman.

M: When was the first time you heard the word Chicana?

A: Yeah, I had to think about this for a minute. And, I think that the first time that I heard this term was actually when I was older. Um, if I can remember correctly, the first time I heard the term was when I was taking a college class in high school, right. It was an art history class and we were learning about Frida Kahlo. I don't think at that point I identified with that term, and like, saw myself as like- oh there are look at all these like Mexican American women and look at what they're doing and, you know, and I identify with that and that's me or that can be me or that should be me here in high school in Utah. It's interesting because I grew up in a family that is extremely American. My father grew up in a small teeny tiny little town in Carlsbad, New Mexico, and I only went to visit his- where he grew up- 2 or 3 times in my life. He- My father- is like the most successful person in his family. And he left- he dealt with like a bunch of abuse and alcoholism and all of these things. And so I think for him to leave his identity and culture as a kid, like, was extremely important for him. Right, like he just left, never came back- his whole family still lives in that teeny tiny town. And I didn't grow up understanding Mexican culture. Like, I didn't grow up understanding that that was my culture and that was my family. It was like this family that I saw, you know, twice when I can remember I was growing up, and then my grandma came to visit when I graduated high school and I didn't even know her. I definitely learned from a young age from my father that, like, it wasn't a proud thing to be Mexican. You know, he never talked about his culture. He spoke only Spanish in his house growing up. Never taught us Spanish. He doesn't know how to speak Spanish now. So, yeah, for me I think that it had a negative connotation to it. So, as a kid I remember being confused and sort of ashamed of, like, being Mexican, right. It wasn't a thing. Everyone in my family is white that I know, you know.

M: So when did that change?

A: Um, I can't think of a specific moment; I think it happened slowly over time as I distanced myself from the dysfunction I grew up in with my family. And sort of, you know, I came to the point that I ended up leaving my homely and worldly comforts that I had. I think once I left that and sort of started relying on myself, and realizing what an amazing woman I am- That is sort of when I realized "wow, why was I ashamed of saying- of telling- telling people I'm Mexican?" Because not a lot of people assume I guess because my skin isn't extremely dark. And my mom's a red head, right, which is where all my freckles come from, too, so people get like super

confused about where I come from. It's like "Where did that come from?" you know. So, anyway I just think that its happened over the course of the last few years, as I've just like come into myself, and been like, there's no need to be ashamed by my ethnicity and there's no need to be ashamed of, you know, my sexuality or my gender.

M: Borders are both physical and psychological. They solidify colonial practices that situate people in positions of power based on ideas of race class gender sexuality and ability. Can you identify one of the borders in your life, in either your professional or personal life?

A: I mean I do see- I can identify borders that I feel in my professional life.

M: Let's talk about one of those!

A: I work at a nonprofit. It's called CTA community supports. And I am a provider of service. I'm an employment specialist, and I help people with disabilities get jobs, right, and there are, I mean just that alone there are so many borders that I can think of. Not only for myself but for the people I'm trying to support. I can call 20 businesses in a day and have 2, maybe 2 if I'm lucky, real conversations about employing people with disabilities. It's such a- It can be frustrating, but It can be extremely beautiful. You know, I'm the type of person who loves a challenge. And I've just been kicking ass, like getting- can I swear?

M: I I- think, yeah I'm gonna make an executive decision. I don't actually know, but yes, it's fine... so you've been kicking ass!

A: I have been, yes! I was actually just certified in customized employment last Friday. So, you know, I've only just barely gotten my certification and I've already employed three people. Gotten three people part time to full time jobs, with full time benefits. One of the women that I found a job for has better benefits then I do!

M: Wow- nice!

A: Yes! I was like SO happy. Actually its cool, once she's employed for a year where she's working she'll get two weeks paid vacation just straight up. I'm like, I've been working for this company for five years, and I've never seen that (laughter)

A: In your school or work life do you agitate or break spiritual borderlands?

A: In general, what I've experienced in my professional life is that I do agitate those borders. Being a strong, independent, woman. It's not this position that I'm in solely- it's been a theme that's been in my life for the last five years since I've been out and been myself. Where, I have a lot to say, I have a lot to bring to the table- but in a lot of cases, especially when I'm working in close proximity with men, they are immediately shook. Right, they're immediately, like, offended somehow by me existing and being there and having something to say. Asking questions, and, like, wanting to be in the conversation, you know? It's- it's happened to me a few times in the last few months. And I've written a few of my experiences down because I'm like "This actually happened?! Like- did this really just happen? Did he just ask me that, did he just

say that to my face?” Like, you know, so I think that just me existing, living in Utah, like those borders are all sorts of agitated, you know. And it’s interesting, like, just trying to navigate that. Not getting offended myself, trying to stay professional, um, trying to advocate for not only myself but the people I’m also working with. It-it can be challenging, for sure, like, in those moments, those are the times, the only times, really, in my professional career, that I feel completely overwhelmed. And am just like: “Where is my space? Why can I not have a voice at the table? Why is it not ok for me to speak up when I have something to say?” And when I could, like, be doing, like I do good work.... You know what I mean...

M: Absolutely! You do great work! You just got certified and found three people jobs already!

A: thank you- thank you

M: this is where I insert the applause in the background- yeah I can do that...

A: can you? do you know how? no?

(laughter)

M: alright, so we made it to our last question; do you identify with the feminist movement in SLC?

A: Um, I would say that I do identify with the feminist movement in, you know, SLC and throughout the whole united states. Um- I would say that its bigger than just white women problems, right, it *needs* to be bigger. And I think in a lot of ways, it is, you know, it sort of goes back to everything we’ve talked about- where I see a lot of oppression of women in my day to day. I live with that every single day, living here and being a strong independent woman. And, you know, wearing clothes that a lot of people would traditionally say belong to men, you know, and taking a space that belong to men, you know. Um, so yeah I would say that I do identity with it. Um, at the same time, I do see how the feminist movement has been coined sort of like ‘the movement of white women’- definitely. They need to be open, right, to other women sharing this platform. Sharing their story, sharing their struggles. And being empathetic to say “yes that is my struggle too” and “yes I see that your struggle is greater than mine, because of circumstance and because of chance.” And I think that in a big way my identity as a white woman has trumped my identity as a Mexican woman. Right, like, they are blended but at the same time, um, I don’t get the flack that a lot of predominantly Mexican American women get, you know, because my skin is a little bit lighter. I do think that in a way, I have been able to sort of navigate space, navigate my spaces, just like, very easily.

## Work Consulted Page

1. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* by Emma Perez
2. *Chicana Feminist Thought* by Alma M. García
3. *Early Chicana Feminist Thought* by Daphne V. Taylor-Garcia
4. *Atravesando Fronteras | Crossing Borders: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa
5. “Monstrosities in Everyday Life: Nepantleras, Theories in the Flesh, Transformational Politics” by Robert Gutierrez-Perez
6. *Voices of Chicana Feminists: An Emerging Consciousness “La Visión Chicana”* by Adelaida R. Del Castillo