Under the Skin

Pacific Northwest Center for Mestizo and Indigenous Research and Engagement

An Introspective Look at the Self

One of the goals of the Pacific Northwest Center for Mestizo and Indigenous Research and Engagement is to generate service/outreach programs gearing towards portraying the health, social, economic, educational, and political conditions of Latin@/Mestiz@ and Indigenous communities. This special edition focuses on one of those programs: “Under the Skin: An Introspective Look at the Self”.

In this edition some of the motivations behind this initiative will be described, and some of the voices that participated in the event will be heard.

You are invited to navigate these pages and establish relationships with the experiences shared. Welcome to the Under the Skin community.

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The issue edited by Nancy Carvajal
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Dismantling Borders within Borders

A dialogue with the creator of
Under the Skin

Nancy Carvajal Medina

What is Under the Skin: An Introspective Look at the Self?

It was, originally, a space offered for the community in the Palouse to gather and critically discuss about the politics of identity. Now, Under the Skin is growing as a community of individuals who reclaim our right to tell the real stories of who we are.

How did the idea of Under the Skin emerge?

Being immersed in a convoluted socio-political environment where discourses of hatred and discrimination have affected educational and societal daily interactions I felt the need to offer a space to be safe and heal. As an international student I have been labeled and misunderstood due to stereotypes. I have been framed within constraining labels that denigrate and put in the shadows different angles of my humanity. Therefore, Under the skin emerged from the desire to create a space where individuals from different ethnic backgrounds gathered to tell real stories of who we are through the arts.

What are the possibilities beyond Under the Skin?

Under the Skin is a community where critical dialogues about identity and action take place. Conceptual borders, that is pre-conceived ideas and assumptions on the other, divide, isolate, and fragment. Under the skin is a community that challenges and dismantles conceptual borders that encapsulate and constrain people’s identities within specific categories. As Tania Willard used to say “Fences and borders can’t stop the flow of rivers, migration of butterflies, or the movement of people, and won’t stop the spirit of freedom”. Under the Skin is an open invitation to name ourselves, to create spaces to be, feel and belong, and to move beyond labels. It is an opportunity to develop deeper layers of understanding about the fluidity and complexity of being. Dialoguing about our multiple identities and how we perform them in different contexts and times will always be a complex task, but a hopeful one. We have the opportunity to understand that the similarities that bring us together are more abundant than the differences that set us apart.

Anyone to be thankful to?

My gratitude to every one of the members of the community of Under the Skin. Your presence, lives and stories are inspiring and the drive to keep on taking action while dreaming. Thank you, Anna, Armando, Danica, and Zoe for believing in the possibilities of this space and for inspiring all of those who listened and cared. Thank you, Dr. Brian McNeill, Dr. Paula Groves Price, Dr. Francene Watson, Faith Price, Dr. Ken Lokensgard, Student Entertainment Board, colleagues and friends from Cultural Studies program, and Crimson Group for the unconditional support. Thank you Jielmei Lin, Alex Garcia, Mathew Vaughan, and Brandon Chapman for the technical support. Thank you to the readers for the love and interest.
**Workshop Collaborators**

**ANNA PLEMONS**

Anna Plemons is the director of the Critical Literacies Achievement and Success Program at WSU and is also a faculty member in the Department of English. Since 2009, she has also taught personal narrative through the Arts in Corrections Program at California State Prison-Sacramento. Anna is very interested in how people write and tell their stories and how those stories help people understand themselves and others in powerful ways.

**ARMANDO MEDINACELI**

“I am a Bolivian ethnobiologist, extremely curious about learning from different cultures (mostly indigenous peoples). I have a passion to learn from people through my research and through playing and enjoying life. I feel very committed to the ethics of working/collaborating with people. Through the years I have learned to listen and also to share knowledge, experiences, games and more. This understanding of the importance of sharing is what I use in my research while facilitating the communication between group of people in Latin America, my cultural home.”

**ZOE HIGHEAGLE STRONG**

My Name is Zoe Higheagle Strong, a Nez Perce tribal member and faculty in Educational Psychology at Washington State University. My Indian name is ‘Hookoo,’ which was the name of my great, great, great, great grandma who was a prisoner of war in Oklahoma because she refused to give up her Indians ways and religion. This naming ceremony strengthened my identity as a Nez Perce woman and as person who could continue to face and overcome obstacles in the future. This is an important aspect of my identity, and carrying these learning experiences into my academic work and research.

**NANCY CARVAJAL & DANICA WIXOM**

**Our story:** We met on a Sketch Wednesday back in 2014. We listened to one another and learned from Danica’s art stories and Nancy’s involvement with the community. A year passed by. On a sketch Wednesday in August 2015 we recognized and started dialoguing. Since then, our common interest in supporting and creating communities and our love for art has allowed us not only to stay connected but also to become friends. We are glad that we did not have to wait for another year to pass in order to value, learn and appreciate one another’s presence and story.
Some Participants' insights

Phill Allen

What did you find in “Under the Skin”? A lot of new friendships. I’m thinking to be able to express myself, a space where I can be cause normally I don’t talk about my background too often just because I know a lot of non-native people get offended by “you are just telling us this is your land”. Well, it is, technically. And being able to meet and mix in particular with undergraduates and just make it a safe place.

If you could give a message to anyone out there, what would it be? Identity is such an important aspect for students’ success. People think identity is for people of color. It is not, it is for white people as well. With the election coming on, my message for people is that we have to still be open mind, still be accepting of people.

Elsie Cree

What was “Under the Skin”? We learned about different ways to view ourselves. When it first began I didn’t really know how to identify and how to tell my story. One of the things that “Under the Skin” taught me is that it is ok to tell my story and it is ok to identify the way that I do. One of the first thing that I learned is that people tell their stories differently.

If you could give a message to anyone out there, what would it be? I want people to realize that being a student and being a mother isn’t abnormal. A message to my kids is just thank you for staying by me through it all. You are so little and you are always so supportive and so strong standing by me. Thank you.

Maribel Bustos

What did you find in “Under the Skin”? It is in our human nature, especially here in the United States where people come from so many different backgrounds, to label ourselves and find out where we belong. So, “Under the Skin” was a series of workshops to help us go beyond those labels and try to understand all the common experiences we all have as human beings. It was a safe place to talk about stuff without being prosecuted or judged. And me trying to understand how I label myself and how it has hurt me in the past. And I learned that I do not have to define myself by stereotypes and labels. And the workshops have helped me become a lot more aware and open minded about what is going on in the world.

If you could give a message to anyone out there, what would it be? I guess instead of learning about people based on stereotypes, try to interact with people of different backgrounds and get to know them on a level that is beyond what you learn from stereotypes because people are more than stereotypes.

Faith Price

What was “Under the Skin”? Under the skin provided a safe space on campus to talk about identity which is something that college students are working on. And I think all of us has something we think about on a regular basis. I know I do. Growing up especially with a multicultural background, that is something I am always aware of… my mixed identity. I feel like “Under the Skin” gave us an opportunity to talk and share about who we are on a deeper level and in a safe space when at this time, the current climate in our country doesn’t always feel safe. So, I really appreciated that when getting to attend.

If you could give a message to anyone out there, what would it be? I feel like it is so important to get to know people on more than just a surface level. I think that we make a lot of assumptions just by how people look. Getting to know them, know their story breaks down a lot of barriers and stereotypes and makes hate a lot harder. You can’t hate someone once you truly know them as a human being.

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