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Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza by Gloria Anzaldúa:
Self-Determination vs. Cultural Identity

Cultural identity contributes hugely to how one interacts with the world. Whether they are in the majority, minority, or both, one keeps their relationship with their identity and the world always in mind. However, a rift is created when one's self-determination clashes with the dominant ideas within their cultural community; Gloria Anzaldúa explores this dichotomy in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

Blossoming into adulthood as a queer person, I too have struggled to balance my identity with those I share in my culture. Growing up in a white household and community, heteronormativity was pervasive. Regardless of where one was in life, it was expected they would accept their assigned gender roles and expectations. Obviously, I struggled greatly with this, and had trouble relating to others because I was not a "typical boy." Growing up I would lean into my femininity: playing with dolls, befriending mostly girls, and dressing differently from my male peers. Although I was unaware of the LGBTQ+, I was acutely aware of the fact that I was different. This awareness of being an "other" comes with a heavy burden of shame. Shame that is not just cast by those in one's life, who are unaware of the situation, but shame that has been internalized into self-hatred and depression. Anzaldúa explains this concept beautifully when describing homophobia as a "fear of going home": "[w]e're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/ culture/ race will totally reject us" (Anzaldúa 20). For all queer people, there comes a point in their lives in which they must consider that everyone, even the closest of friends and family, will totally abandon them due to something they have no control over. This feeling is incredibly isolating and, if not dealt with, can lead to destructive behaviors and actions. Yet, as with all queer people, there was a fire within, a passion to not live by others' rules. Of course, coming out was always the decision. The desire to live authentically is both overwhelming and terrifying. Anzaldúa echoes this idea, writing, "[t]here is a rebel in me—the Shadow-Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities ... At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts" (Anzaldúa 16). This fire, Shadow-Beast, exists within everyone, as no one wants to be completely submissive to the world. But I believe in queer people especially, it has been fostered to such a tangible level, and because of this, we are able to live truly.

The ability to live and love freely carries over in every other aspect of life. If we are able to accept ourselves we can help others along their path. By instilling a sense of self-love we can work outwardly until everyone's existence is not burdened by shame or limitations.

Works Cited

Anzaldúa Gloria, et al. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 2021.