

An Unusual Invitation

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At this point, I have three different opening sections for this entry partially-written and staring back at me from a Word document. They each end in an ellipsis, waiting for continuation and resolution. The sentences you are reading now form the fourth beginning.

Each introduction stands poised to take my remaining (unwritten) XPLOR update in a different direction, and each would ultimately offer valid insight into what my lived experience has been so far. However, none of them would be all-encompassing, and this one is no exception.

Reading through my 3.5 introductions in the parlor of FCC in Tucson, I feel the all-too-familiar temptation to leave my submission blank rather than send along a limited account. Yet, I've come to see that these multiple beginnings—these

suspended narratives—are all variations on a theme that has run through much of my XPLOR experience so far. The theme was introduced during our Laboratory week, with Ben Bohren briefly referring to XPLOR as a “pause” period in our life, and Sandhya Jha urging that we “expect and become comfortable with a lack of resolution.” I listened at the time, nodding and agreeing, but now that I've lived for several months within that reality, I've come to see it in a new light.

To me, the theme Ben and Sandhya were riffing off of is the experience of the “liminal” within and throughout the program. Generally, liminality is associated with thresholds—the times, places, practices, things, and ways of being that reside in life's “betweens.” That which is neither here, nor there, but is present nonetheless and affirms the existence of a spectrum between (and beyond) the two. In a way, my three unfinished introductions are echoes of this concept. They yield a sense of mingled uncertainty, possibility, and vulnerability in their simultaneous presence and unresolved suspension. My time in XPLOR, too, stands as an example of this liminality.

Part of this is due to my physical placement. The city of Tucson, Arizona, occupies Tohono O'odham ancestral lands in the Sonoran Desert and resides 60 miles north of the United States/Mexico international boundary. Living here, I have spent the entirety of the program interacting with the multifaceted "thresholds" that inhabit and shape geographic borderlands, experiencing stark division and persistent unity in the same breath. As Gloria Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, "A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (25). While transition tends to be cast as a temporary state of being, in the borderlands, it is a perpetual reality. The sense of liminality is not a brief stage, but a continual, ever-present awareness.

This can come as a shock to the system. In fact, Anzaldúa likens living in this "...state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland" to a "cactus needle embedded in the flesh. It worries itself deeper and deeper, and I keep aggravating it by poking at it" (95). The tensions, contradictions, ambiguity, and dynamism of borderlands touch every aspect of the many lives that are lived and lost within them. Liminality soaks through perceived rigidity, and, like the embedded cactus needle, it can fester in denial, or it can draft the early lines of a call to action. Or, in keeping with its association with the "betweens," it can do a bit of both. This third option is where I find myself right now. Sure, the XPLOR year represents a "pause" of sorts, but within that pause, there is a lot of churning.

Rather than tie any of this into a tidy resolution, I'm inviting you to bring your own thoughts, experiences, and writing to the process. Call it an experiment in liminality and becoming. I'll leave you with an excerpt from the preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera*, followed by few questions:

The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.

--Where do you see and navigate borders/borderlands in your life/local community/relationships?

--How do you react to extended liminality? Why?

--What additional questions are you taking away from this entry?



--Why have I asked you to participate in its construction, and why is this invitation so unusual?

NBA XPLOR** is a 10-month service residency opportunity for young adults ages 21-30, with the purpose of empowering young adults to discern and develop a “heart for care” as they live together in simple community, engage in direct service and justice work, engage in leadership development, and discern their vocational calls to honor the various communities they are called to serve. **Learn more and apply at nbacares.org/xplor.