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Passing vs Non-Passing: Latina/o/x Experiences and Understandings of Being Presumed White

Francisco Rodriguez

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PASSING VS NON-PASSING: LATINA/O/X EXPERIENCES AND
UNDERSTANDINGS OF BEING PRESUMED WHITE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Communication Studies

by
Francisco J Rodriguez
June 2020

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Latinos do not associate with a specific race, yet we are often homogenized into groups and stereotypes far from representing our diverse and ever-changing cultures and communities. How does the growth of Latinos affect the already existing and upcoming Latina/o/x communities in the United States? Due to my own lived experiences, I have dived into the layers of whiteness and colorism that exists within Latino communities in the United States. The idea that Latinos have a specific appearance is false and many assumptions associated to our complexion derive from stereotypes that affect the way we treat those around us, simply due to our physical appearance (phenotypes). For a further understanding of the lived experiences of those 'passing' and 'non-passing' Latinos, this analysis examines similarities and differences lived by people of the same community but who are perceived differently under the premise of 'white-passing' and 'non-white passing,' white Anglicized standards. White privilege, colorism, internalized racism, and third space will be revisited to determine the factors of society's misconstructions of Latina/o/x in San Bernardino and surrounding areas of Southern California through extensive research, a small convenient sample, and an ethnographic reflexive approach.

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The culmination of this project came with much anticipation, yet none of it would have been possible without the guidance, support, and effortless dedication of my chair and committee members, Dr. Liliana Conlisk-Gallegos, Dr. Fred E Jandt, and Professor Roberto Oregel.

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Dr. Jandt and Professor Oregel are both experts in their fields of research. They both are passionate about intercultural communication and truly embody the significance of social roles in communication theories. They are mentors to

whom I have shared my personal goals and aspirations, with their guidance I have achieved so much clarity. I was fortunate to have taken classes with both of them – undergraduate and graduate – and I am a complete fan of everything they do. Dr. Conlisk-Gallegos, Dr. Jandt, and Professor Oregel are examples of the type of admirable scholars I hope to become.

My deepest gratitude for everything.

DEDICATION

To my immediate family, this research that I have accomplished is for you all, we did it! Gracias por todo, por apoyarme, y escuchar mis locuras.

Particularly, my mother to whom I owe everything to. My mother is one of those brave, independent, Mexican women who have gone through unbelievably challenging obstacles in their lives and remain standing strong above all. For those of you who do not know her, she loves to sing, play music while cleaning, and cook the most delicious authentic food ever. My mother is the reason I made it so far, her stories have motivated me in times where I felt like giving up. Her experience has made me realize how fortunate and lucky I am to be here today. My continuous goal in life is to always make her proud. Te quiero mucha mama.

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I would like to thank all 10 of my participants and my Latina/o/x community for believing in me and for allowing me to develop this project with much respect and love. We are proud and our voices will be heard.

Lastly, this is a reminder to me. To my younger and future self: I can achieve anything. Continue to heal... stay hungry, stay strong, and enjoy the moment.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

*Fish swimming in water may
be unaware of the water,
but the water in which they
swim can be clean or polluted.*

– Camara Phyllis Jones,
Confronting institutionalized racism

Latinos will make up 29% of the total United States population by 2050, this is an 82% growth from the 2005 statistics where Latinos represented only 14% of the population (Passel & Cohn, 2008). Being that there are over 300 Hispanic-serving institutions across the United States and one-third of all Hispanics/Latinos are under the age of 18, it is crucial to examine how we educate and revisit Latinx history (Patten, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Not only do we need to validate the experiences of Latinx people – children, men, and women – as they navigate through U.S. culture, but there is also a need to understand how race and racism shape our perception on Latina/o/x individuals.

The illusion trapped in the idea that Latinos have a specific appearance – mostly based on racial markers – is false. Despite this rapid numerical growth, Latinos are still underrepresented in mass media, only 4.5% of all 47,268 speaking or named characters across the last 12 years were Latino, as were a

mere 3% of lead or co-lead actors. Most representations of Latinx in media are still limited by stereotypes (USC, 2019) and racialization or "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially un-classified relationship, social practice or group" (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 471). These assumptions feed and enable stereotypes which in turn affect the way we treat those around us.

Prior research has examined labels and definitions of the terms 'Latino' and 'Hispanic' through quantitative measures. Critical scholars have observed the history of internalized racism and colorism from both microscopic and macroscopic perspectives. Writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois (1903, 1935), James Baldwin (1963), Frantz Fanon (1967), and Anibal Quijano (1993, 2000), tackle issues of racism through its institutionalization into its effects on the individual. In turn, George Lipsitz (1998, 2006), Su Boatright-Horowitz (2012), Tanya Golash-Boza & William Darity (2008), Tiwi D. Marira & Priyanka Mitra (2013), and Morris & Kahlor (2014), tackle the more detailed nuances of racism within people of color with concepts such as internalization, colorism, and racialization in the United States.

As for research specific on Latinx racial identities within Latin American contexts, the principle of bronze colored skin as an identifier of Latinx identity as proposed by Jose Vasconcelos (1925, 1926) in *La raza cósmica*, created a mythological basis which racialized Latinxs. This historical contribution resulted in the identity issues marked later by Latinxs scholars in the United States such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997), Christina Gómez (2000), Chavez-Dueñas, et al.,

(2014), Edward Telles & Tianna Paschel (2014), and Caroline Fernandes (2017), which explain how such ideas are fermented into the lives of Latinos and how perpetuation of racism continues to exist in contemporary times.

The critical studies presented by the scholars cited above have equipped us with concepts to explain how white supremacy results in white privilege at a macro level (i.e. institutional, ideological) through socialization, and identification adapted into our conscious and unconscious minds (Du Bois, 1903, 1935; Baldwin, 1963; Fanon, 1967; Quijano, 1993, 2000). The scholars who explain racism at a more micro level, analyze the motives and complications of classifying other members of our community as inferior based on phenotypes (Lipsitz, 1998, 2006; Boatright-Horowitz, 2012; Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008; Marira & Mitra, 2013; Morris & Kahlor, 2014). Finally, scholars who focus on Latinxs identities within the context of both the United States and Latin America referred to Latinx individuals, do not identify with a particular race – because we can be Black, White, Indigenous, Asian, and/or Mixed (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Gómez, 2000; Chavez-Dueñas, et al., 2014; Telles & Paschel, 2014; Fernandes, 2017).

Scholars have tackled the issue of racism and its nuances at different levels. Those who have tackled the topic at the macro and institutional levels have given way to the more detailed studies centered on the issues resulting on the day-to-day experiences of communities. In order to further deepen into the

effect's racism has, we must begin to focus even more on the diversity of specific and individual experiences.

To continue with the concepts mentioned by the previous scholars at a macro and micro level, this study serves as an extension that has resulted and built on those same findings and historical contexts. There is more detail to what has been provided and it is based off the Latinxs experiences that I propose to examine. Other studies have contributed tremendously to the topics of racialization and colorism such as Fernandes (2017) and Alvarez (2019), however my perspective is from a diminutive lens to focus on individual experiences while tethering my own experiences in applying the concept of third space (Anzaldua, 1984; Bhabha, 1994, 1996, 2004; O'Hearn, 1998; Anzaldua & Keating, 2002; Sandoval & Davis, 2004; Gomez & White, 2010) as a form of connectedness between myself and participants. In addition, I offer a decolonial frame to this type of study to mark a more complex context and propose a lineage from which I derive this thesis.

With this study I provide an in-depth analysis of the comprehensive experiences, critical feelings, and situations prompted by racialization, colorism, white privilege, internalization, and third space resulting from the historical and contemporary effects of colonization and the coloniality of power. Furthermore, this comprehensive study demonstrates how Latinx individuals perceive themselves to be treated by others and what the differences and similarities are

within other Latinx who belong to the same diverse spectrum of skin colors “races.”

The goal of this study is to determine the reasoning of society’s misconstructions of Latinos and its personal and intimate effects on individuals living in areas of Southern California. This study takes a small, representative sample of ten interviewees with supportive research to demonstrate the lived experiences and understandings of individuals who self-identify as ‘white-passing’ or ‘non-white passing’ Latinxs. This study was made between 2018 and 2020 during the presidency of Donald Trump, who personally contributed to the context of a national rhetoric that fixated and misrepresented Latinxs.

The most current popular references to Latina/o/x have been prompted by political rhetoric employed by President Donald Trump. A vast majority of propaganda, stereotypes, inaccurate assumptions, and descriptions perpetuate negative presentations of Latino identity, massifying and stripping it from its live and everchanging nature (Fojas, 2014). Due to these false and fixated ideas of Latinx culture, our identities begin to blur into these Anglo-American made realities created to fit conventional stereotypes which further threatens the authenticity that is the complex Latinx cultural identity. In “*Cultural Identity and Diaspora*” (1989), Sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall brings to light the idea that culture is never fixed:

Cultural identity... is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already

exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (p. 225)

Our past histories certainly affect our present day; yet, representation fixes the unfixable; we decide how our cultural identity and culture in general changes based on our actions and current adaptability to our known world (Hall, 1989) Applying Hall's perspective on cultural identity to the concept of *Latinidad* will lead to a broader understanding of its importance.

Latinidad is defined as “a scale shifting identification, place specific, and has ramifications for national, transnational, hemispheric, and even global modalities of belonging,” (Carranza, Garcia-Castro, Hernandez, n.d.) a connector that unifies the Latinx community with commonalities but which also separates them through imagined homogeneity. Sociologist Felix Padilla coined the term *Latinidad* interchangeably with *Latinismo* in his study, “*Latino ethnic consciousness: The case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago*,” (1985). Padilla and Baez (2007) explain the Latino shared experience as *Latinidad*, they mention *Latinidad* is a process of identity-making among Latino/as interacting with one another in everyday, local spaces. Everything consistent with what is “Latino” and what is not, does not necessarily exist; *Latinidad* is a cultural phenomenon that is shared amongst Latin American cultures with a sense of fluidity and equilibrium (Hall, 1989).

Yet, *Latinidad* has also been used as a way to project an imagined homogeneity among Latino identity from a US white-centric perspective. According to Aparicio (2003), *Latinidad* can serve as a way to create a one-size fits all formula for Latinos, removing all of the elements that makes us so culturally unique, stating “the entertainment industry, mainstream journalism, and Hollywood have homogenized all Latinos into one undifferentiated group, thus erasing our historical, national, racial, class, and gender subjectivities,” (p. 91) which becomes troublesome to our identities and lived experiences. Furthermore, drawing from Emma Perez’s ‘decolonial imaginary’ as a response to silenced Mexican American women, we can use *Latinidad* to understand interlatino knowledge and identifications (Aparicio, 2003). Rather than reusing *Latinidad* as a term to homogenize or divide the Latina/o/x community, it can be used to showcase interlatino identifications, for example the case of artist Jennifer Lopez, being a Puerto Rican Latina portraying a Mexican-American *Tejana* icon in the film of *Selena* (1997) proves multiple identities can exist and be true (Aparicio, 2003). We must go into further observations to discuss how Latinos are being perceived, targeted, and talked about in the U.S., whether in large groups or small closed-off communities. To believe that Latinx has specific racial traits is a fabricated, oversimplified stereotype, which ultimately conditions and limits the Latinx population. Media sources like television teach white and non-white Americans how to perceive Latinxs which can affect viewers self-

esteem and influence how stereotypical representations affect audiences' perceptions and interactions with Latinx in real life.

For those who self-identify as white, as part of the supremacist ideology and construction derived from whiteness (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), a study found that the “more television white viewers consumed, the more their evaluations of Latinos reflected their TV characterization” (p. 362) this ultimately means that perspectives of Latinos in the real world may change over time with exposure to Latino stereotypes (Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Ortiz, 2007). In addition to these stereotypes, marginalized groups such as African American and Latinx make up approximately 32% of the U.S. population, according to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP, 2020) however they comprised 56% of all incarcerated people in 2015. Statistics like that of NAACP demonstrate how television and social stereotypes attached to everyone in the Latinx group become perpetuated and believed as the truth through institutionalized racism and U.S. media, which only continues to spread, it is a non-ending social cycle. ‘Tough-on-crime’ policies established by white resentment against the civil rights movement have profoundly marked a war on drugs leading to mass incarceration rates for communities of color (Halushka, 2019). Justifying drug related issues and violence, “mass incarceration was built through an incremental and diffuse process at the local- and state-level, often the result of mundane decisions made by well-intentioned city officials seeking to address the crisis of drugs and violence plaguing black neighborhoods,” (p. 376)

it is a corrupt system that faults people of color to retain stereotypes alive. Another common tactic is focusing on black-on-black crimes as a way to divert the attention from racist police brutality, especially with frequent aggressive accounts of harassment towards communities of color – while police and county officials view it as ensuring public safety for the majority (Halushka, 2019). U.S. media and mass incarceration rates for communities of color associate with the illusion that ‘brown’ equates to bad, thus invoking these false characterizations of Latino and African Americans, perpetuating stereotypes to become true (Halushka, 2019).

Racial profiling and stereotyping have gone far beyond the talking heads of mass media outlets. It has leaked into the lives of real people trying to make a living for themselves and their families. For example, a Peruvian-born U.S. citizen by the name of Mahud Villalaz made national headlines in November 2019 when he was attacked by a white supremacist in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Ismay, 2019). His attacker, who is a white 61-year old man threw acid directly onto Villalaz’s face while shouting “why did you invade my country?, why don’t you follow my laws?” (para, 3) clearly a racial profiling attack as he was picked out for his skin color regardless of citizenship status; this is one of many racist attacks that occur to people of color in the U.S. and many go unreported for fear of the law and immigration status (Ismay, 2019). Media desensitizes viewers to stereotypes and viewers even think nothing is happening because they are ignorant to the negative effects (Fojas, 2014). Even when not racial, stereotypes

in general are inaccurate statements of information brought up from generalizations (Bordalo, Coffman & Shleifer, 2015). These generalizations encourage U.S. mainstream society to believe that Latino individuals are not trustworthy, justifying their own selfish and advantageous approach to marginalized members of our society, such as immigrant workers (Calderon, 1992).

Racial stereotypes of groups like immigrant workers or Latinx in the media are powerful framing devices that have long term effects on the way society conceptualizes that specific group of the Latinas/o/x community explains Mingxiao Sui & Newly Paul (2017). As a society, people's attitudes begin to change towards that group, we remove their credibility and attach the stereotypes, making people believe that immigrants are in fact lazy, criminals, or job-stealers. Citing Entman (1993) and Ramasubramanian (2011), Sui & Paul (2017) claim that, "The process of framing, where some aspects of an issue is given more prominence over others (Entman, 1993), shapes the audience's understanding of the particular issue. Negative frames and racial stereotypes need not be explicit in order to cause attitudinal changes; subtle racial cues are equally effective in priming audiences' negative attitudes toward a group (Ramasubramanian, 2011)" (p. 274). This goes to show how distorted images of Latinx people are then viewed as true. Examining Latina bodies for example, we see the character of Hilda Suarez as Betty's spitfire sexy Latina sister who uses her body to her advantage in the hit show *Ugly Betty* (2006), another example is

the character Gloria Delgado-Pritchett who is critically known for her thick Latina accent, obnoxious loud voice and sex appeal in *Modern Family* (2009) (Katzew, 2011). These Latina characters become staple figures to viewers, especially those that have little real-life exposure to Latinas and may come to believe these images as true (Katzew, 2011). Furthermore, according to Menjivar (2016) immigrant communities, especially where Latinos comprise a majority like Los Angeles, California, undocumented status becomes associated with anxiety, fear, and insecurity because of its connotation with detention and deportation. U.S. media and the language used is constantly claiming anti-immigration sentiments which creates hostile environments for many immigrant groups, “Latino immigrants are perceived as the quintessential border crossers (threatening the nation) and also as breaking the law (bringing crime), they are equated with criminals and as potential terrorists,” (p. 604) especially after 9/11, there’s a need to secure the borders and detain immigrants which happens frequently in communities of color due to subtle racism against non-whites (Menjivar, 2016). In turn of all these misconceptions, Latina/o/x are then victims of hate crime, racial profiling and mass incarceration.

For the purpose of this project, the term Latinx “...refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (U.S. Census, 2010). Terminology can hold wider meanings especially within different experiential and historical contexts. The term **Latino** today often implies brown as racialization due to the fact that

American society stereotypes Latinos as most commonly brown skinned. “Brown is the color most people in the United States associate with Latin America,” explains scholar Richard Rodriguez (2002) who withstands with the idea that brown is also associated with the common adjective “dirty” for many Mexicans in America, referring to “dirt-like” as a symbol of dense concentrations of melanin. For the purpose of this project I will be using the terms Latino, Latino/a/x, and Latinx interchangeably.

Latinx derives from Latino with the ending “x” to recognize the community “without attempting to erase their gender identities and their realities and to shape institutional understandings of intersectionality between gender, language, race/ethnicity, and nationality,” (p. 151) the “x” is important to acknowledge as it represents a form of ‘ungendering’ Spanish and the relationship it holds with language, inclusion, and subjectivity (Rodriguez, 2017; Milian, 2017; Salinas & Lozano, 2019; Salinas, 2020). While the term Latinx was established in higher education, it’s main purpose is to be inclusive in such way that it encompasses – Latino, Latina, Latina/o, Latin@, Latin, Latin American, Hispanic and Indigenous communities – especially those located in Mexico (Salinas & Lozano, 2019; Salinas, 2020). In addition, Latinx also attempts to serve as an umbrella term for gender and sexual identity inclusivity (including nonconforming gender, gender non-specific and gender-free) in regard to queer and LGBT+ communities (Contreras 2017; deOnís, 2017; Salinas & Lozano, 2019; Salinas, 2020). While

Latinx is not associated with homogeneous phenotypes, scholar Du Bois addresses this issue for communities of color.

African American theorist W.E.B. Du Bois spoke about injustices in America in his work *“The Future of the Negro Race in America,”* (1904) especially during a time where whites would use concepts like social Darwinism and eugenics to justify segregation and oppressive practices that targeted people of color. This idea of finding traits, like eugenics and phenotypes, is parallel to my research on the effect white privilege has on both white-passing & non-white passing Latinx, and the way it diminishes brown bodies or “dirty” bodies as a means of separating and defining superiority based on white hierarchy. Furthering his work, Du Bois critiques white supremacy in the U.S. with works like *“Black Reconstruction”* (1935) in which he provides a philosophical understanding of how politics and government used tactics to divide African Americans and poor whites after the Civil War along with the implementation of Jim Crow laws and racial segregation from whiteness. Whiteness has always been normalized as a political classification and social construction, purposely meant to compromise the experiences of all ‘Others,’ communities of color (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Understanding whiteness and its evolution in the way it is presented, as a means to dominate, is crucial in evaluating communities where a multitude of skin color complexions exist, like Latinx, where not everyone has the same phenotypes although they share similar histories (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995).

Latinx identities are complex due to the constant divisions created with labels such as Hispanic and Latino plus diverse historical ancestry with many indigenous histories being erased – many Afro Latinos for example, are still not recognized in many Latin American countries, which continues to perpetuate racism based on skin color and complexion. Following the trajectory of Du Bois, scholar Noel Ignatiev embraces the idea to abolish whiteness and expose its historical roots. Historically, groups like Italian and Irish immigrants were targeted in the U.S. for being minorities (Ignatiev, 1995). Ignatiev explains how the goal in the U.S. was to maintain African Americans in the slavery system, therefore any measures to accomplish this, including creating the social distinction of “whiteness” to separate and discriminate against those who did not fit the criteria. “When Irish workers encountered Afro-Americans, they fought with them, it is true, but they also fought with immigrants of other nationalities, with each other, and with whomever else they were thrown up against in the marketplace,” the platform was set up to fight against each other for power and superiority, it was never about unity (Ignatiev, 1995, p.110).

“Since ‘white’ was not a physical description but one term of a social relation which could not exist without its opposite, ‘white man’s work’ was simply, work from which Afro Americans were excluded,” (Ignatiev, 1995, p.130), which correlates to how discrimination in general is meant to create divisions. Certain opportunities and jobs are not meant for people of color (minorities) because the goal is to discreetly push white narrative and white supremacy in peoples’ minds.

Ultimately, Ignatiev & Garvey (1996), argue and conclude with a strong statement regarding the idea behind whiteness and what it actually is supposed to mean:

Whiteness is not a culture. There is Irish culture and Italian culture and American culture - the latter, as Albert Murray pointed out, a mixture of the Yankee, the Indian, and the Negro; there is youth culture and drug culture and queer culture; but there is no such thing as white culture. Whiteness has nothing to do with culture and everything to do with social position. It is nothing but a reflection of privilege and exists for no reason other than to defend it. Without the privileges attached to it, the white race would not exist, and the white skin would have no more social significance than big feet. (p. 288)

Similarly, Latinos have been present in the continental USA since the early 1500's as Spaniards and Mexican mestizos – biological or cultural race mixing as a result of the Spanish obsession with superior genetic makeup – and yet, still today, Latinos who are a diverse population are often depicted as foreigners in their own land (Calderón, 1992; Tafoya, 2005; Sandoval & Ortiz, 2009).

Weber (1973) recaptures the moment in history when the Lone Star Republic – Texas – was fought over between Mexicans and Americans in “*Foreigners in Their Native Land*”, (1973) which progressively led to the annexation of Texas in 1845. This was a significant moment because many

Mexicans sided with the Americans whom they identified with. Both sides were fighting for land that originally belonged to the indigenous native community. Ultimately these wars had ulterior motives, like the annexation of California, yet white Americans outnumbered Mexicans at the time and thought of them as less than (inferiors), similarly to how they segregate Latinos residing in the U.S. to “Other” their experiences and keep them with a foreigner label as though they are not welcomed and never will be (Weber, 1973).

Mexico’s long and hassling relationship with its neighbor, the United States, has always been complex. A clear and early example of whiteness and racism put into power in what is now geographically recognized as the U.S. was the invasion of the indigenous people that traces back to unjustifiable motives. European settlers, mostly from England, and pilgrims came into the Americas claiming uninhabited land with concepts such as territorilization or land conquest justified with ideas like Manifest Destiny (Truett & Young, 2004). Manifest Destiny was a concept that envisioned Europeans as saviors and chosen by God to spread their knowledge and lifestyle towards the lives of indigenous natives of America who according to Europeans, lived ‘uncivilized.’ The motives behind 1845’s Manifest Destiny were completely greedy and racist. Examples like Manifest Destiny influenced many generations of people to racist ideas founded on the imagined supremacy of whiteness as a man-made concept to maintain hierarchal power. The idea behind concepts of separation due to skin-color, like those held by the Ku Kux Klan (a white supremacist domestic terrorist

organization) were established with the aim to dominate and even erase non-white cultural groups (Truett & Young, 2004). At the same time, the Spanish invaded what is mostly known as Latin America and thus established their own influence on those territories, including white ideologies like whitening races as a motive for Spanish survival, an idea known as the caste system (*las castas*) that would eventually spread in many of these invaded countries like Mexico.

El sistema de las castas (the European caste system) was a social stratification system derived from religion, theocratic rule of Church, as an indicator of how far someone was from Christianity, many times having their lives dictated by the state, church and landowners (“LibreTexts,” 2019). It was a new wave of classifications with extremes from white skinned to black skinned peoples, it worked as a racial measurement system implemented by people like Porfirio Diaz (Mexican dictator), who conveniently used it in his favor (Montalvo & Codina, 2001). By hiding his darker roots, Diaz could facilitate his status as whiter and move a lot more freely socially, making it easier for him to continue suppressing the poor community and activating/validating his racist laws, which only benefited the rich (Vargas, 2018).

Las Castas Mexicanas is a collection of 18th century paintings that depicted a representation of New Spain’s (modern Mexico and other Latin American countries) race mixture society, mainly based on the hierarchical system of interracial relationships with Spanish-Indian, African-Spanish and African-Indian (Montalvo & Codina, 2001). Due to this notion of the Castas, grew

the idea of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) which entailed that only Spanish-Indian unions could produce higher-caste offspring's (white) after three generations. On the contrary, mixtures of Spanish-African for example produced lower-caste called *torna atras* or throw back, and Indian-African children were in the lowest ranks due to them being the furthest, biologically, away from white Spaniards, they were called *cambujo* or dark/black and usually black-skinned (Montavlo & Codina, 2001).

These issues due to the effects of racist colonization and the hierarchization of race also evolved in Mexico. Mexican dictator Porfirio Diaz ruled between the 1890's to the early 1900's claiming that Mexico needed rebranding. He wanted the Mexican people to be more French-European and showcase whiter in appearance, style, culture, and environment (Truett & Young, 2004). Porfirio Diaz and his *cientificos* (scientists) were a team of scientists who led him to new ideas of brain-washing the Mexican community into believing that white was a superior race (Truett & Young, 2004). Diaz discouraged and massacred communities that were indigenous and instead wanted foreign people (especially Europeans) to inseminate with Mexican genes to reproduce a whiter-hybrid population, as they incorporated French and other European-inspired architecture into buildings and city areas (Truett & Young, 2004). Many Porfiristas saw the over nine-million Mexican indigenous as lacking individualism and therefore a burden to their national progress (Powell, 1968). Some discouraging practices included Porfiristas dividing the natives' lands into farms –

for their own agricultural capitalistic gains – aside from keeping them in rural segregated areas where poverty was common (Powell, 1968).

Porfiristas and supporters believed that the indigenous race could not be educated, their duties were to serve as the countries labor force since they were believed to not possess any intellect and therefore classified as inferior (Powell, 1968). A famous phenomenon, and predecessor to Diaz eugenic-style plans, was the colonial system of *castas*, which was a popular way to classify and hierarchize mixed-race children that were generally identified by the Spanish and Portuguese colonist; this racist method of superiority was used all across Latin America to determine superiors versus inferiors (Truett & Young, 2004). Porfirio Diaz internalized the racist ideas behind his actions as he was Castizo with a Mestiza (half native, half Spanish European) mother and a Criollo (full Spanish, yet born in the Americas) father.

Economic reasons justified Diaz's support of the *castas* system. He enacted policies that continued to help *hacendados* (farmers) at the expense of *campesinos* (agricultural workers), privileging one group of people by making others distinctly poorer (Jimenez, 2010). Another notable motive for Diaz was the practice of "*gracias al sacar*," (thanking a way out) whereby people—typically mixed-race free persons who had accumulated enough resources—in colonial Latin America & Mexico with its *castas* system would purchase certificates of whiteness from the crown, this meant they had better chances of achieving

higher social status and being accepted into social circles (Telles & Paschel, 2014).

Mexican people have always been a part of the United States, even before its inception as the nation we know today. A series of historical events reaffirm ongoing sociopolitical racist implications on Mexican Americans, Latinos, Italians and even native Americans who were often mistaken for Mexicans (Schulze, 2018). For example the displacement of Mexicans and Indigenous people in the early 1800's (Vickerman, 2016), the Bracero Program of 1940 (Loza, 2016), Chicano Movement in the 60's (Truett & Young, 2004), the border patrol management since established until now, (Schulze, 2018) and even the arrest of over 3,000 Mexican children held at the border in 2018 as part of Trump's administration racist rhetoric to detain and scare Mexican and other migrating communities (Ainsley, 2018).

Hispanics/Latinos represented 16% of the U.S. population in 2017 and made up 36% of all inmates versus whites who represent 64% of the population and accounted for 23% of all inmates according to the Pew Research Center (Gramlich, 2019). The numbers above become more alarming when we evaluate Latinos and African Americans as the largest groups incarcerated although they only make 28% of the total U.S. population combined in 2017. If we analyze racial systems implemented in the U.S. under a magnifying glass, we can identify many factors that correlate to similar themes such as phenotypes, socio-economic status, and education. According to the Open Policing Project (OPP),

they found that police stopped and searched African American and Latinx drivers with less basis of evidence than used in stopping white drivers, who are searched less often but are more likely to be found with illegal items like drugs (Cantu-Pawlik, 2019). Clear examples of racial profiling provoked by political propaganda and perpetuated through these convictions that are forced on communities of color. Fighting the war against crime and drugs means accusing those in impoverished neighborhoods, falsely accusing these communities as part of the narrative to stop illegal immigrants and eradicate violence in the U.S., a constant topic pushed by President's Trump administration. About 80% of people in federal prison and almost 60% of people in state prison for drug offenses are African American or Latinx ("Race and the Drug War," n.d.). These traumatic experiences create ripples of negative trauma into the dozens of Latinx families that worry about immigration policies and question their own status in a country that continues to exclude them based on social status and color of their skin (racism) with repeated micro and macro aggressions (Romero, 2006).

Despite the Latino ethnic group being grouped under the Spanish language due to European colonization, the diversity of Latinos has prominent and significantly unique qualities that outweigh any common characteristics. The forthcoming and intermixing of these mythicized as primary groups (African, Indigenous, Spanish, plus Arab, Asian, Jewish, etc.) resulted in a rich diversity of skin colors and physical characteristics, not a single race. Racial identification

amongst Latinx tends to vary and become very detailed depending on how they see and determine their social status (including physical appearance).

Results of pigment and culture mixing have led people today to feel very bizarre and comfortable with suppressing their true racial identity which in relation to the historical hierarchization of race has led to the practice of colorism. Colorism is a form of internalized discrimination by which an individual is treated differently because of his or her skin tone (Marira & Mitra, 2013). Colorism exists because of the whitening logic. Whitening logic is a tendency to avoid categories like “black” and “indigenous” because they are systematically, and colonial-historically, devalued in society (Telles & Paschel, 2014). Having a linkage with darker skin meant fewer social rights and privileges and this caused people to want to disassociate from darker skin tones, similar to the *blanqueamiento* (whitening) process derived from the *castas*.

Another major reason for the longing to unlink from darker skin identities was unattainable beauty standards based on social constructions prompted from European white ideologies of superior race. A gendered tactic specifically affecting more women than men as we have seen in U.S. pop culture throughout history. In the article, “*Who is Black, white, or mixed race? How skin color, status, and nation shape racial classification in Latin America,*” Telles & Paschel (2014) explain, “while there is an overall premium on lighter skin, straighter hair, and more European features throughout Latin America, women are subjected to this standard of beauty much more than men, especially around hair.” Amongst their

sample, Brazilian interviewees were asked to describe the phenotypes of hair. In Portuguese, kinky is *crespo* (typically referring to natural curls associated with African roots), non-kinky includes the categories of straight, as another factor of self-identification (Telles & Paschel, 2014).

On top of all the beauty standards women encounter based on their sex and their sexuality being oppressed, hair is not only a self-identifying feature for many but also a symbol of culture and pride. The existential colorism in Brazil however, caused uproar from a released song titled “Look at her hair,” in 1997 by Brazilian singer Tiririca, where he called out racist slurs towards Afro Latinas and Black women of the region due to phenotypes like their hair and skin color (Caldwell, 2007). Many countries similar to Brazil – especially in Latin America – suffer the effects of colorism founded from white, Anglo American oppressors to the oppressed to perpetuate and even humorize as done with the song (Caldwell, 2007).

Today, as much as we would like to think that color does not matter, we know color matters immensely. Racism is not manifested the same way as it was 20 or even 10 years ago. Today, we have a different picture of what it means to be Latinx or a “person of color.” In 2019, more women of color politicians like Letitia James, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Ilhan Omar have been elected in government positions than any other time in history (Jordan, 2018). As we celebrate the diversity being brought forth to represent a wider range of the American people, we also wonder about their journey to be where they are today.

Ocasio-Cortez and Omar were victims of President Trump's racist lies many times in public forums and Fox News reporters like Laura Ingraham accused these politicians for "minority privilege," which basically translates to victimizing oneself as the victims of political propaganda and rhetoric (Mahdawi, 2019) these are some examples of the backlash received from the media as a means to discredit or invalidate women of color in politics.

As many are aware, the media supplies a crucial role in society as it contributes to massive platforms with millions of viewers and followers that heavily rely on these channels as a source of information which subsequently also partakes in influencing communities. With subtle racist television shows, movies, series, and soap operas being continuously watched by families in the U.S., it is without a doubt they carry subliminal messages about the groups of people played and over characterized in these media shows. In popular Latinx *telenovelas*, (soap operas) main characters are white-skinned women and men with blue or green eyes and dazzling blonde hair. "Dramatic storylines of entertainment media find their way into the news media through stories that use metaphor and symbol to elicit negative effects of the Latino culture, these narratives begin to be what society believes to be true about certain groups of people (Fojas, 2014). Before the popular *telenovelas*, this phenotype trend began back in the 1930's with the Golden Age cinema where many recognizable honorary Mexican actors rose to fame like Mario 'Cantiflas' Moreno and Dolores del Rio. Popular films like *Maria Candalaria* (1943) showcase an indigenous

woman and the culture of natives entering a more progressive, non-indigenous Mexico (Mitchell, 2011). Actresses like Angelique Boyer who are some of the highest paid in Mexico are white, in fact Boyer is French born, blue-eyed, blonde hair and raised in Mexico; she ironically played a character in a *telenovela* titled *Muchachitas como tu* (2007) where all of the female protagonists could easily pass as white (Patricia, 2003).

These types of characters become the protagonists of every top soap opera and they become a fixed representation in what television in Mexico and Latinx communities in the U.S. cast as beautiful and successful. Years of colonization and racist perpetuation have extended these ideas throughout many generations of Latinxs. The idea that white is better, that white is safer, that being white gets you out of poverty and upgrades your social status is prominent. Yet, there are many “white-passing” Mexicans living in Mexico and the United States, and the U.S. media hardly ever talks about the implications on their experiences beyond becoming tokens of racist Eurocentric beauty standards. Actress Alexis Bledel, known for her character of Rory Gilmore in the hit series *The Gilmore Girls* (2000) is actually Mexican and Argentinian, although her physical features and voice pass as white (Medina, 2009; “Huffpost,” n.d.). Bledel was directed to pretend like she did not know how to speak Spanish in the show, even though it is her native tongue, working as a tactic to alienate her from any associations to Latinx culture (Medina, 2009; “Huffpost,” n.d.). Another example is the *telenovela* (soap opera) *Amigas y Rivaldes* (2001) produced in Mexico, starring Ludwika

Paleta's character as a wealthy young girl who has white features in comparison to Angelica Vale's character who plays a humble and low socio-economic character, she has more indigenous features; a distinction that describes the narrative that only white-passing actors have a certain upward social status and expectation ("Difusor Ibero," 2013).

To go beyond this binary, we are yet to experience more or any mass media representation of Asian-, Afro- and Jewish, and other- Mexicans. In the U.S. we are aware of a typified Mexican "look" which is the stereotype, the one accompanied by the cartoon *sombrero*, sarape, dark-brown skin, and long wavy mustache, often portrayed as a comedic character or bandits in movies or cartoons like Speedy Gonzales (1953). Mexican and Latina women in general are often seen as belittled maids such as in *Family Guy*, shown as sexualized/erotic objects with little intelligence such as Sofia Vergara's character in the hit show *Modern Family* (Casillas, Ferrada & Hinojos, 2018). Media shows how seemingly benign jokes and comments that are part of the daily discourse of the mass media contain insidiously phobic content. Latino cultural producers might disseminate these discourses unwittingly by pandering to audiences or poking fun at dominant culture in a way that intensifies racialized fears (Picker & Sun, 2013) on the methods used often by mainstream media. Today, we not only see white people perpetuating the stigma of what Latinx looks like through media, we see it within Latinx communities as well. This is offensive, detrimental to the characterizations associated to this community, especially because the

negative influence ripples through generations thinking it's okay to belittle or humorize Latinx culture.

On top of the U.S. mass media general influence on Latinx communities, Latinos are racialized as a homogenous “brown race” by the majority of U.S. citizens, government, and mass media, and are categorized under a single U.S. Census group (Calderón, 1992; Tafoya, 2005; Sandoval & Ortiz, 2009). The U.S. Census identifies Latinos as an ethnic group with distinct racial categories and American society views Latinos as a homogenous racial group (Sandoval & Ortiz, 2009; Tafoya, 2005). This perception of racial homogeneity has disregarded racial diversity among Latinxs. For example, Argentines and Cubans often identify themselves as white Latino and adopt the attitudes and privileges of non-Latino whites including, but not limited to, negative attitudes towards darker skinned individuals, and are more likely to live near non-Latino whites and experience less residential segregation (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). While 53% of Latinos identify their race as white alone (U.S. Census, 2010) little is known about their attitudes towards, or awareness or experiences of white privilege (Chavez-Dueñas, et al., 2014). For example, Latino racial identity research has looked at how Latinos view themselves and their ethnic group in comparison to that of non-Latino whites (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). By grouping this diverse ethnic group into a single category and using the pan-ethnic “Latino” label, clearly the differences in this same community are being ignored (Adames et al., 2016). This idea of homogeneity only adds to the ordeal of mixing all Latinx communities

as the known stereotypes which are the same ones being confronted in higher education and other organizations of color, the stigmas and false conceptions of making us all seem as one.

The research found in this study proposes that although the Latinx community consists of a large group of diversified individuals, we hold many unique attributes that make us different and despite our Latino label, historical context in relation to skin-color marks a vital role in the way we are perceived in the U.S. Certain Latinos identify as “white Latinos,” and dissociate themselves from indigenous roots, many times due to the histories claimed by their government, an example of this is in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Many Argentines claim that they “descended from the boats” claiming European immigrant blood as they came from the ‘boats’ or European countries and the boat being the means of transportation, while “others,” refers to natives in Argentina who have conveniently disappeared overtime (Sutton, 2008). While Buenos Aires became a prime destination to search for work after the 1930’s, many indigenous or mestizo (“brown”) migrants met with the scorn and even hatred of members of the middle and upper classes (Sutton, 2008). Sutton further explains that, “While race has no scientific basis, racism has real consequences. For Argentines who have been signified as ethno-racial or “others” and have experienced invisibility, everyday mistreatment, physical violence, erasure from history, economic disadvantage, expulsion from their land, harassment by the authorities, racist media representations, and environmental

injustice, racism continues to be very real even though the culture does not provide sufficient tools to name it,” (p. 109).

Argentina is famously known for adapting into liberal movements and ideologies but at the same time claiming that racism does not exist in their country which is highly problematic. In a study conducted by the *Secretaría de Turismo de la Nación* in 2006 found that 85% of Argentines claimed to be white or white descended (specifically from Italian and Spanish blood) while only 10% self-identified as Mestizos and 5% under Other; we can attest that racism has not been a major area of political contestation in Argentina, however it is still a significant social problem (Sutton, 2008). This racist history is what makes communities in Argentina whiter from a genetically and physically perspective, which weighs heavily on how this country handles social issues like racism and colorism.

Many would say that someone like myself, who can be presumed white, has more accessibility and an overall easier navigation process when interacting with society. Those of us who appear to be physically white and yet belong to the marginalized communities that are usually depicted as brown and black have a unique perspective of fitting into two different roles. I began to wonder, where would someone like myself fit in? Many times people would ask me “Do you speak Spanish?,” or simply avoid talking to me because they assumed I would not understand their requests/questions in Spanish, till this day I get this exact same presumption.

I have learned that when I greet associates at work, I now say hi in Spanish, “Hola,” as a means to connect and let them know that I am one of them. Throughout my experiences, I have also realized that I have to prove to people that I am of Latinx background, which makes me wonder how much of me really fits into the Latinx culture. Without a fully shared experience of oppositional identity, as guarded by my white appearance, how Latinx can I be? I know that I have to constantly prove that I do in fact speak Spanish like many other Latinos and that I participate in the same practices and traditions as they do.

I have also experienced the feeling of having to reaffirm those who question my *Latinidad* in order to make myself credible enough and contribute to the community. *Mexicanidad* is defined as “[an] emancipation of all peoples that make up the Mexican nation for the construction of an appropriate national project, where all can themselves construct their destinies,” ultimately challenging European thought and bringing pride to the indigenous peoples; it is a form of survival and resistance (Rostas, 1997). It’s because of my appearance that many doubt my *Mexicanidad*, taking a second look at my hazel eyes and fair skin which do not match with the fixated representation of Latinos as brown, many will not acknowledge me as being part of the “true” Mexican spirit that represents Mexico’s vivid, diverse and familial culture. This is a U.S. experience of ambiguity because many people like myself who might self-identify as white passing could be from other countries while still having white-privilege according to U.S. standards. In this same society, the opposite is very much true and real

as well, my brown cousins and friends are mistreated at coffee shops, bars or local stores. I have personally witnessed the way friends and loved ones are treated differently and negatively because people interpret us differently with a single body-scan observation. I have seen store retailers feel the need to question my friends due to “suspicious” appearance, whereas I get a free pass, I do not receive any extra attention.

When I went to a car sales shop with one of my darker-skinned Latinx friends (in comparison to myself), he stepped into the store and asked if he could get an employee to help us (I was outside by the car), the manager in charge said they could not because time-wise it was too late and they were understaffed. We thought it was understandable for that given moment, however when I went in and my friend waited outside, I asked for the same help and the store manager replied, “I guess we can help you out even though we’re understaffed, someone will be right out to help you,” not realizing that we were together.

Clearly, I was able to get the assistance needed, but my friend was not helped. We both realized what was going on and decided to ask the manager why there was a difference in service for both of us. He nervously avoided the question. There is no way we could ever know if he behaved that way with us intentionally or not, but the fact is that it happened, and it happens, and it certainly is very much relevant because it affects people’s everyday lives. This recent episode in my life shook me and shifted my perception, filling it with questions. Where does my voice and intersectionality become acknowledged in

both of my Latinx and white American communities? How much difference does skin-color, regardless of speech or behavior, make in a historically racist society like the United States?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE ANALYSIS

Passing vs Non-Passing

For this study, two terms will be used to differentiate between the two types of Latinos that are being examined. First, it's important to acknowledge that the term 'passing' is borrowed and inspired from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community and refers to a person who is perceived by others as a particular identity/gender or cisgender regardless of how the individual in question identifies (Ritchie, 2018). While I understand the importance of the origin of the term, it is not the center of my project, as I speak from the perspective of a gay male who is experimenting with being categorized as white passing. Transgender author and activist, Janet Mock (2017) explains that 'passing' is mainly present in the transgender community but can become controversial as it comes across "like you're trying to deceive or trick someone" when in reality they are just 'being' (Gordon, 2017, para. 3). In addition, generally society has a fixed idea of gender as binary. It is assumed that the goal is to emulate one half of the traditional dichotomy between masculine and feminine appearance as transgender. This excludes transgender people who do not accept a binary gender system and those who do not want to pass or are physically unable to do so for medical or other reasons (Ritchie, 2018). The term

'passing' is now borrowed to define these two terms: white-passing and non-white passing as they apply to individual's physical appearance in relation to whiteness.

The term 'white-passing' refers to Latinx individuals who physically appear white to society, regardless of speech or behavior. They are ultimately presumed white. This individual may have but is not limited to physical characteristics associated with "whiteness" such as light brown or blonde hair and/or a fair-to-light skin tone. Next, an individual who is considered 'non-white passing' is a person who identifies as Latino and appears to carry traits of anything other than white. This individual may have, but is not limited to, physical characteristics associated with "brown race racialization" as found in its conceptualization as the bronze race or cosmic race (Vasconcelos, 1925) such as a brown-to-dark brown skin tone. In addition, there is the generalized dark hair and the linguistic relation to Spanish and/or a relative speech accent.

The difference between white-passing and non-passing Latinx is based on physical traits and appearance. This research study is not focused on interactions in terms of speech and language or behavior such as 'acting white,' as that would require the extent of a completely different study. I am closely examining white privilege, colorism, and internalized racism in terms of physical appearance with individuals who have self-identify as "white-passing" and "non-white passing."

U.S. Latinos have faced challenging stereotypes and classifications appointed by a dominant white American nativist ideology for hundreds of years (Brown, et al., 2018). U.S. media have established a web of identifiers associated with Latinxs in television, usually giving Latinx characters a restricted set of roles including characters such as: criminals, exotic lovers/sex objects, servants/blue-collar workers, and unintelligent objects of ridicule (Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2017). Latinx life experiences are diverse and multiple even if U.S. media portrayals seem otherwise (Cadena, 2007). Due to the multiplicity of experiences of Latinx individuals, it is important to recognize and define terminology. Munoz (1989) argues that the term Hispanic is problematic because there is nothing about the term that acknowledges any connection to indigenous cultures in the Americas. In fact, by using 'Hispanic' there is a colonizing association to it, especially derived from Spain which indicates the preference towards white/light-skinned people. Besides a preferred white skin complexion, the Spanish culture and language is favored as dominant and civil in comparison to indigenous cultures which have often been portrayed as uncivilized. By leaving out indigenous roots, Moreman (2011) explains, the term 'Hispanic' erases indigenous culture and transgresses into white assimilation for an imagined uprising experience of white privilege.

Moreman (2011) reiterates the narrative mentioned by Rodriguez (2002), "President Nixon carved us away from whiteness by creating the category "Hispanic" to exclude, once again, brown people from being included as white

people,” (p. 201) essentially claiming that every year and every decade Latinos become ‘new’ to this country because they have to be constantly differentiated from whites. One of the reasons Latinx people or ‘brown people’ remain as perpetual foreigners in U.S. ideology is because of Americanization, which foresees new immigrants as subjects to be embroiled for the larger goal of creating a nation racially organized so that "becoming American" and "becoming white" remain as interlacing processes for non-whites (Waters, 1990; Ramos-Zayas, 2001).

Having the power to ignore race, when white is the race, is a privilege – a societal advantage – it is not uncommon to Americanize identities, objects and ideas to prefix them as authentic and simultaneously neglect all other cultures and minorities, anything non-white (Waters, 1990; Ramos-Zayas, 2001).

According to Rinderle and Montoya (2008), the specific U.S. Census categories for self-identified *Hispanics/Latinos* in 2000 included *Hispanic* and *Latino*, *Mexican*, *Puerto Rican*, *Cuban*, and other, distilling identity choices for *Hispanic/Latino* respondents into five categories (one of which includes two identifiers), and failing to include other possible terms such as: *Chicano*, *Mexican Indian*, *Mexican American*, and a myriad of other identifiers for Hispanics of non-Mexican descent. Such limited, discrete categorizations fail to fully consider the complexity, contextuality, and multiplicity of *Hispanic/Latino* identity as well as the enduring question of whether such labels denote race, class, ethnicity, or some combination of these (Rinderle & Montoya, 2008).

By limiting the way Latinx people categorize themselves in the United States, not only is the perpetuating factor of erasure taking place (limited choices), but the relationship and interweaving with one's own cultural background and identity may become ambiguous or troublesome since there is no concrete sense of belonging or relation with the term's foundation. Although many people associate 'Hispanic' and Latino/a as interchangeable terms, there are many distinctions and associations when it comes to cultural identification.

Communication scholar and diversity expert, Susana Rinderle defined critical terms for the Latinx community (2005) as the following. **Latino/a** refers to a person residing in the U.S. of Latin American national origin or descent regardless of race, language, or culture; this is a typical term many first-generation individuals adopt as they see their culture as a mixture of U.S. and their parents/family Latinx origin country. **Hispanic** denotes a person with origins or ancestry from Spanish-speaking countries (not exclusive to Spain), residing in the U.S. **Chicano/a** describes a person of Mexican descent, born and residing in the U.S. who possesses a political consciousness of himself or herself as a member of a historically and structurally oppressed group. **Mexican/o/a** applies to Mexican nationals and those born in Mexico despite their current country of residence. **Mexican American** accounts for U.S. Americans of Mexican descent, born and living in the U.S. **Chicanismo** ("Chicano-ness") glorifies historical past by reclaiming the connection to indigenous people and cultures (Rinderle, 2005). These labels above enhance stereotypes because they knowingly categorize

individuals who identify with those specific definitions, leaving little to no room for fluidity, especially for Latinx who might identify with two or more, or none of the terms described. While it is important to be aware of the distinctions of each term as a way to differentiate the role of each, they also help sustain racialization.

Racialization is the process through which groups – frequently the dominant ones – use cultural and/or biological features/criteria to construct a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority among collective social factors (Grosfoguel, 2004, p. 326). Racialization, in relation to the U.S. being a racialized society, delineates social relations in America which in turn becomes a racial construction used to identify races with a spectrum from ‘white’ to ‘black,’ (Grosfoguel, 2004). Fanon in “*The Fact of Blackness*,” (1967) provides a recollection of the time he “discovered” his *blackness*. He knew he was objectified when his body became a racial construct derived from white people that suddenly called him ‘dirty’ and saw him as a ‘frightening creature.’

Racialization also stems from the ‘Othering’ employed by Europeans who, through colony and empire, instilled their superiority towards anyone different. Such an example was when Spaniards in 1492 expelled all Arabs and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula and colonized the indigenous communities in the West Indies. Meanwhile other Europeans also discriminated against non-Europeans all around (Grosfoguel, 2004). The complexity of racialization is very much associated with nationality, democracy, and citizenship through the coloniality of power. Anibal Quijano (1993) defines this European colonial logic:

Racism and ethnicization were initially produced in the Americas and then expanded to the rest of the colonial world as the foundation of the specific power relations between Europe and the populations of the rest of the world... Since then, in the intersubjective relations and in the social practices of power, there emerged, on the one hand, the idea that non-Europeans have a biological structure not only different from Europeans; but, above all, belonging to an 'inferior' level or type (p. 46).

Ultimately this new-found reality composed of strategic power within social constructions sprouted years of colonization which configured deep and persistent racist cultural formations, a pattern of ideas, images, values, attitudes, and social practices imitated from the white elitist and its generational trauma.

Appearance can affect people in such a way that some are forced to constantly question their identity due to suffering from identity crisis with an accompanying concept of estrangement or "not belonging." Identity crisis is defined as a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society (Erikson, 1970). Beyond its definition, identity crisis happens to many Latinos as a result of processes like acculturation, which relates to adopting the idea of residing in a multi-cultural or new culture in general due to colonization or other political factors; biculturalism also provokes this sentiment of lost identity found in identity crisis, and it mainly pertains to the blending of two cultures (Rivera-Santiago, 1996). Preserving the Spanish language and being

bilingual then becomes a symbol of biculturalism, where two languages are appreciated even if Spanish is not spoken completely fluent, it remains present through generations (Rivera-Santiago, 1996).

Some testimonies communicated what were perceived as benefits of racially being white-passing where others spoke on the negotiations of being mixed-raced. In Shane T. Moreman's study "*Qualitative Interviews of Racial Fluctuations: The "How" of Latina/o-White Hybrid Identity,*" (2011) participant Adam said, "I got the lighter features with the darker features, so sometimes I can get into places that other people can't. I say my last name in a white way 'Azcano', and people say, 'Are you Greek?'" individuals like Adam who are half white and half Latino, face the challenge of fitting into both cultures and playing along with the advantages of both (Moreman, p. 207).

In other cases, some individuals feel the need to disclose that they are Latino and not white to create credibility as a Latino and in this way, build relationships with other Latinos who might otherwise think twice at a first glance, "A lot of times when someone is Hispanic, or they appear to look that way, I throw in 'Oh, I am too,' this makes me more connected because people always say that I look white, and so they start making judgments about me," (Moreman, p. 211). Many times, being part of a diverse community of skin variations means having to be open to how others interpret you physically and at the same time be open to ambiguity.

Castas: The Colonial Legacy of Racial Hierarchy

The colors of Latinx individuals come from all sorts of racial backgrounds, voluntary and involuntary intermixing and years of survival through oppression and racism. Due to the race mixing — the *mestizaje* — is an inherent Hispanic/Latino identity feature of the pan-Hispanic/Latino experience. Meaning many Hispanic/Latina/o/x are *mestizos* because of their ancestry while indigenous communities who are not associated with intermixing remain as they are. It is important to note that *mestizaje* is not just biological, it can be cultural too, it is a cultural phenomenon – some would argue an ideology and movement as well – that came in behalf of the Spaniards obsessions with ‘biological *mestizaje*’ as a form of superior genetic makeup for survival (Wickstrom & Young, 2014). *Mestizaje* draws attention to the identity and power of ongoing intercultural relations, norms and ideas about cultural mixing in the Americas (Wickstrom & Young, 2014). *Mestizaje* was more so a racist religious movement for the advancement of Spaniards and Portuguese that conquered territory in the Americas and this phenomenon gradually transformed into a cultural identity attribute, as countries endured a “national character,” – a uniqueness in color as the majority cultural representation for their people, a tactic used to Anglicize and whiten countries (Martinez-Echazabal, 1998). When it comes to cultural identities, it is crucial to recognize the hybridity produced by *mestizaje* as the reason why there are groups like Mexican Lebanese, African Cubans and Argentine Jews to mention a few (Martinez-Echazabal, 1998).

Hispanics and Latinos have diverse social experiences and therefore different identities due to the ways their physical bodies appear to express this mixture. As a result of the historical legacy of colonialism – Western imperial expansion that started with Christianity for the purpose of conquering the Americas – in coloniality – the underlying logic of all Western modern imperialisms – light skin is generally favored over dark (Quijano, 1989; Mignolo, 2007; Rinderle & Montoya, 2008). Due to the hierarchical categorizing and rating of how light or dark someone’s skin tone can be, many racialization and categorizations were established as a means to push forward a propaganda of white supremacist as preamble to justify a racism socio-economic stratification when it came to identification.

Socio-economic status is important to acknowledge as it is part of the intersectional framework that make up Latinxs lives. Often, socio-economic status becomes an indicator of where and how Latinx individuals are living, geographically, which in turn is an influencer of their surrounding areas. Studies show that people who live in lower socio-economic areas – lower class – have a higher probability of suffering from discrimination and legal ramifications, on top of the influence of accents and heritage being exposed and perpetuated in those neighborhoods. A study taken from Los Angeles, CA, concluded that lower class neighborhoods had higher rates of immigrant people, such as Mexican and Latin American, to which many spoke English as a second language (Landale, Oropesa, & Noah, 2017). They also found that both native-born and non-native

born Latinx in lower class communities tend to suffer from more discrimination than non-Latino whites (Landale, Oropesa, & Noah, 2017). Although socio-economic statuses were not gathered from the participants for this particular study, it is imperative to keep in mind when it comes to the context of intersectionality – as it interlocks social forms of disadvantage – and this way sustains many social injustices that are commonly expressed as microaggressions (Landale, Oropesa, & Noah, 2017). It is also important to highlight that some groups who may be segregated in lower economic neighborhoods may report less perceived discrimination, similar to non-native immigrants who may be more likely to assimilate and are less likely to feel as if they have received unfair treatment; to properly examine these sentiments, we would have to observe immigration-related factors, neighborhood racial segregation and geographical regions which are not a focus in this study. Racial wealth gaps between whites and people of color – like Blacks and Latinx – have a long history of imposed barriers to wealth accumulation prompted by racism, this of course is a huge attributor to socio-economic status. Individuals who are structurally positioned to experience multiple forms of disadvantage, as mentioned with socio-economic status as part of intersectionality, are likely to have the highest levels of perceived discrimination (Grollman, 2012; Landale, Oropesa, & Noah, 2017).

In May 2019 there was an uprising controversy in regard to India's national beauty pageant. When it came to the 18 female contestants, they all had

very similar physical features, portraying fair skin as the preferred beauty trend which clearly debunked India as a country that embraces its diversity and unsurprisingly also ties with socio-economic class (John & Gupta, 2019). Undoubtedly, *mestizaje* is part of a globalization trend of whiteness where many connect their understandings of beauty markers across many nations from fixed white ideologies (Wickstrom & Young, 2014). These ideologies have transgressed into modes of expressions such as beauty pageants and television roles, among others and complicates the viewpoints of identification (Wickstrom & Young, 2014). Not only Latinos face this challenge, but people all across the world are left in historical ignorance and perpetuating this agenda of preference for 'white' or lighter skin tones. Another result from this light vs dark skin hierarchical logic was the determination of beauty standards as known today globally via media and pop culture (Banet-Weiser, 1999). An example is the iconic moment Vanessa Williams was crowned as the first African American winner for Miss America 1984 – crowned 1983 – but was rapidly pressured into giving up her crown due to unauthorized nude photos leaked from a popular magazine (Banet-Weiser, 1999). Miss America beauty pageant is an example of containment in wanting a national American identity represented in a female contestant, they pressure and deploy constructions based on whiteness to erase racial distinctions but at the slightest inconvenience, success can be snatched away much easier for women of color (Banet-Weiser, 1999).

Fernandes (2017) explains that racial identification of Latinos in the U.S. has been characterized by an abundance of controversy. While conducting the interviews for this research, two out of the four, white 'passing' participants admitted in wanting to be assumed white by society for the ease of "fitting in." Passing participants mentioned that although they did not always wish to have white privilege as a permanent status, with strangers and society at some point they did embrace their whiteness as a means of non-identification (ambiguity). Fernandes (2017) notes that the analysis of social and racial identification fluctuates according to self-classification of skin color which is a very complex concept that is rated differently in many parts of the world.

Fanon (1952) talks about the 'black man' experience in reference to the white man in "*Black Skin, White Masks*," specifically because the white man positions Black men as inferior and injects the idea that whiteness is pure and civilized while labeling *blackness* with ugliness and immorality (Bhabha, 1986; Sardar, 2008). The idealized Negro, as mentioned by Fanon, and the measuring of skin color from the white measurer is a construction of white men (Fanon, 1952; Bhabha, 1986; Sardar, 2008). European civilization and Western knowledge stems from racist beliefs transmitted by Western discourses and academic institutional pedagogy – to continue Eurocentric structural dominance.

A consequence of this trauma, for instance, is that of dark-skinned individuals disassociating from being seen as equal humans which develops as internalized self-hate and racism, in fact most thesauruses provide over 120

synonyms for *Black/blackness* and none have a positive connotation (Bhabha, 1986; Sardar, 2008). Fernandes (2017) concluded that Latinos who are lighter in skin color may be more likely to benefit from whiteness and be considered white in ways that African Americans or other dark-skinned counterparts cannot. When someone becomes racially ambiguous, especially in regard to passing as being presumed white, there is less social judgement than an individual who cannot pass or who is automatically labeled as non-white.

The assumption of *mestizaje* assumes that all Latinos, regardless of their background, are racially mixed into a brown race when that might not always be the circumstance (Vasconcelos, 1925; Fernandes, 2017). The idea of *mestizaje* causes an impact on how all Latinos view their racial self-classification because many are aware of their ancestral roots – like indigenous ethnicity – while others ignore them and assimilate to white-U.S. culture and ideologies showcased in behavior and living styles persuaded by the ideas to “act white” to fit in and essentially prosper their American Dream. Mexican scholar Jose Vasconcelos wrote, “*La Raza Cómica*,” (1925) about the Cosmic Race composed of Latin American people as products of *mestizaje* and thus all connecting with the sameness mix of races and cultures towards an all-encompassing and promising one-of-a-kind race.

In Mexico, Vasconcelos helped consolidate *mestizaje* as the national ideology, which had a profound impact on the politics of race, culture, and identity (Manrique, 2016). An example of this was, “... the art movement in the

1920's redefined Mexico as brown and mestizo." (Manrique, 2016, p. 11).

Vasconcelos (1925) also captured the idea that Hispanics/Latinos were genetically mixed – of Spaniards and Indigenous blood – but could still elevate towards “bettering,” *la raza*, otherwise known as adapting European eugenics and acculturation (Manrique, 2016).

The same concepts of bettering *la raza* as proposed by Vasconcelos (1925) has been manifested in many ways throughout Latin American countries. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans for example, have been in America for many generations. Mexican U.S. history pre-dates Anglo settler expansionism while Puerto Ricans were annexed to the U.S. as a colony in 1898 (Healey & Brien, 2015). This colonial history may be the reason why they report more discrimination than their Asian and European counterparts (Healey & O'Brien, 2015; Fernandes, 2017). Skin color in many circumstances overrides common Latino ethnicity in self-identification and social status. Colorism and white privilege is also prevalent in many Latin American countries like Argentina, Peru, and Brazil (Block, 2013). For example, according to Block (2013) in the country of Brazil, most executives, authority figures, and people of power associate with whiteness or embrace lighter features in their characterizations, a common phenomenon in many Latin American countries. White Brazilians get the better jobs, the roles on television and most of the privileges, in fact most of the upper socio-economic class of Brazil is considered white (Block 2013). Brazil is unique

in the fact that it had the majority number of African slaves, about 4 million and their ancestry is biologically reflected in 97% of their people (Block, 2013).

Adding to the skin color controversy distinctively in Brazil, a research study examined in 1976 by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics showed how Brazilians came up with 136 skin color variations when describing their skin tones, some included names like: somewhat chestnut colored, cinnamon, chocolate, honey colored, singed, toasted and deep-dyed (Prahbala, 2014). Prahbala (2014) and Nolen (2015) explain that Brazil's long history of colonization has led them to be one of the most diverse countries in the world yet prevailing with white mindset's because they claim that "Black is beautiful, but white – white is just easier," and that makes all the difference (Prahbala, 2014; Nolen, 2015). Being white or black in Brazil does not have the same meaning as it does in the U.S. which is one reason why many Latin Americans believe in the notion of being 'white' but suddenly become a person of color in America. They are given a racial identification according to U.S. standards, which stems from white hierarchical ideologies (Nolen, 2015). When there are no spaces open to discuss things like race and privilege and there is a lack of education on these topics on top of the fact that many of these texts and histories are ignored, people tend to keep those thoughts and feelings to themselves.

Whiteness and Colorism

Anti-colonialist's pioneers W.E.B. Du Bois (1898), Frantz Fanon (1952), and James Baldwin (1963) decipher the complexities that founded whiteness, the

white “race/culture” and whiteness theory. The Negro problem was used by whites as a tactic to spawn hate and racism which sequentially turned the image of African Americans into monsters while safeguarding white purity (Du Bois 1898; Fanon, 1952; Baldwin, 1963). For many years ‘the Negro problem’ was, and still is, a controversial topic in many places especially in the U.S. because of the implications on the African American community (Du Bois 1898; Fanon, 1952; Baldwin, 1963). “Whiteness is a dangerous concept. It is not about skin color. It is not even about race. It is about the willful blindness used to justify white supremacy. It is about using moral rhetoric to defend exploitation, racism, mass murder, reigns of terror and the crimes of empire,” (Baldwin 2016).

In the documentary *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016) Baldwin explains historical context and facts that implicate transgressing never-ending racism towards that community and people of color today. Throughout history, whiteness has been a term used to identify and create imaginary binary distinctions between those who are white versus non-white; in addition, it refers to the cultural web of assumptions of normality and invisibility that maintains the social privileges, power, and hierarchies typically associated with white skin (Barrett and Roediger 1997; Frankenberg 1997; Gallagher 1997; Hartigan 1999; Bahk & Jandt, 2004).

In addition, whiteness is defined by a culture that poses as “cultureless.” When someone who is white gauges into my Mexican culture, they are always in awe with their findings, almost exoticizing the culture because they yearn to find

such a community and belonging – to fill their supposed culture void due to their identification with whiteness – (Ramos-Zayas, 2001). For people like myself, being a U.S. born Latino, my identity with the Mexican culture has been a process that I've had to learn, whiteness gives white people the privilege to believe they can overtake and relate to all cultures where I cannot (Ramos-Zayas, 2001). Ramos-Zayas (2001) puts into perspective how 'white culture' takes into other cultures, like that of Mexicans, to obtain some kind of belonging and association, something that happens frequently in the U.S.

Whiteness expert, Matias (2016) mentions that whiteness and white people are not equivalent, "Whiteness does not equate to White people, albeit Whiteness tends to operate more readily among White people due to the nature of White supremacy," (p 153) meaning it is intended to serve white people but it does not automatically condom white people for being white (Matias, 2016; Allen, 2001; Gillborn, 2006; Leonardo, 2009). Whiteness theory is interdisciplinary (Morris & Kahlor, 2014). It explores what it means to be identified as a white individual and the social, economic, and political privileges granted to individuals classified as such. Whiteness theory poses the idea that cultural-racial hierarchy has existed in the United States since the country was founded, and individuals classified as white are positioned at the top aforementioned cultural-racial hierarchy (Morris & Kahlor, 2014). Matias (2016) defines whiteness as a "social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions and experiences, epistemologies, emotions and behaviors," curating a large influence

in the way whites and people of color distinctively navigate the U.S. and how they perceive others (Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, & Galindo, 2014, p. 290). It also suggests that anything classified as white in the United States is viewed as the cultural norm whereas traits not associated with white are viewed as different or foreign (Morris & Kahlor, 2014). With the idea of being white or in other words, 'white-passing', comes a unique experience of white privilege. White privilege is having unearned power or a set of benefits (knowingly or unknowingly) that originally were specifically meant to serve the Anglo/Dutch white settler race. As a result of the concept of whiteness, people of color, are often attributed or grouped based on skin color and/or race and the stereotypes that come with those assumed identity characteristics. For example, Matias (2016) describes the popular study by Clark & Clark (1939) known as the *The Clark Doll Experiment* where children – ages 6 to 9 – recognized the difference between Black and white dolls, noting the Black ones as “bad” and white ones as “good.” This study essentially proved some of the effects of hegemonic whiteness being taught to children in regard to race, the results were significant in showing internalization of stereotypes and racism within themselves (Matias, 2016).

The phenomenon of whiteness affects everyone, whether recognized or not. Whiteness never works in isolation; it functions as part of a broader dynamic grid created through intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality (Lipsitz, 2006). It is a factor that determines, for example, who gets certain advantages

while performing as a member of society. For example, white entitlement of space performed by calling the police on a black man for sitting at a *Starbucks* coffee-shop due to his mere presence making them feel uncomfortable (Cullen, 2018).

McIntosh (1989) listed 46 privileges that were associated with being white, precisely, she named concrete ways in which the legal, social, and economic constructions of race benefits white people in their daily lives here in the United States. McIntosh (1989) also describes white privilege as “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks,” (p 1) and unearned power that is not taught to whites, therefore they do not recognize or feel like oppressors when it comes to the advantages they have over people of color. Whites should deconstruct their advantages granted from skin color and learn white privilege as a means to put an end to it (McIntosh, 1989). An example of this is seeing whites represented positively in the media and having white European epistemology as the standard in U.S. academic institutions. This contributes to whites not being targeted or having to deal with being marginalized in social settings because of their apparent racial identity (Lensmire et al., 2013). The power of whiteness depended not only on white hegemony over separate racialized groups, but also on manipulating racial outsiders to fight against one another, to compete with each other for white approval, and to seek the rewards and privileges of whiteness for themselves at the expense of other racialized populations (Lipsitz,

2006). Comprehending white privilege is crucial to further develop white self-awareness and interactions with others, including people of color or any other race with similar struggles (Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2012). Understanding one's own white privilege means learning about the experiences of others who encounter discrimination or racism in their everyday lives as a result of their designated racial category (Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2012).

From the foundation of whiteness as supreme and this logic being embedded in all institutions through coloniality, stems the concept of colorism (Du Bois, 1935; Quijano, 1993). Colorism is a form of internalized discrimination by which individuals within a minoritized or racialized identity are treated differently because of his or her skin tone (Marira & Mitra, 2013). Individuals can experience this form of discrimination by people within and outside of their own racial group. For example, due to white-centric beauty standards an African American woman with lighter skin is often perceived by individuals within and outside of her racial group as more beautiful than her darker counterparts (Hill, 2002).

Studies have shown how discrimination negatively impacts darker as well as lighter individuals and their psychological and physiological well-being, in fact we see it in the media within advertisements and commercials (Gómez, 2000; Robinson & Ward, 1995). In the Latino community, colorism is a determining perpetuating factor that creates separations in the culture and overall community. Colorism, for the purpose of this research, will focus on prejudice or

discrimination against individuals with darker skin tones, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group (Fernandes, 2017). Colorism is a key factor in many Latino families, mainly because it determines how closely related an individual will physically look to resemble whiteness. When someone can 'pass' as white, they are earning the white 'passing' privilege's which is much more related to white European beauty standards, social status, and attractiveness.

Dawson & Quiros (2014) state, "Discrimination among dark-skinned Latino/a/x has been associated with lower wages, job prestige, and higher rates of depression compared to white or light-skinned Latino/as," (p. 203) understanding the link between discrimination, life chances and mental health outcomes among Latinos. The aforementioned literature is most often focused on the Mexican American population (being that it is one of the largest) and is quantitative in nature, overlooking the experiences and voices of other Latinx groups such as those from the Caribbean region. Understanding the role racial hierarchies play in structuring and representing the social world and the disadvantage and perceived privilege experienced by diverse populations is essential to understanding the experiences of Latino/as in the United States.

Dawson & Quiros (2014) propose that we must analyze the Latino community as a whole while simultaneously dissecting its parts, because although we are identified by the same label, our interactions, perceptions and experiences vary at complex and deep levels. While some traditional forms of colonialism may no longer exist, the high value and systemic privileges and

rewards afforded to white or light-skinned individuals remain among communities of color, with United States being a common perpetuator (hooks, 2006). Being racially marked in the United States can potentially affect the agency and choice-making decisions Latinos have when it comes to negotiating their racial identity and how they go about acting on it (Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008). Being someone who can negotiate racial identity is deemed a privilege and these individuals can be sectioned in their own subcategory due to them belonging to the racial ambiguity group while still being part of the larger Latinx community. To understand the complexity of their experience we must acknowledge the differences between race and ethnicity.

Race is defined as a category of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, and stature (Smedley, 1998). Most people think of race in biological terms for a variety of reasons, for example, skin tone being one of the biggest differences among physical characteristics in the human body (Smedley, 1998). When looking at racial identity in the U.S., people like ex-president Barack Obama fall under “Black” or African American even though his ancestry is 75% white and 25% black. This practice reflects the traditional “one-drop rule” in the U.S. which defines someone as Black/African American if she or he has at least one drop of “black blood,” and that was used in the American South to keep the slave population as large as possible (Wright, 1994; Smedley, 1998).

Ethnicity on the other hand, indicates shared social, cultural, and historical experiences, stemming from common national or regional backgrounds, that make subgroups of a population different from one another. Subgroups of a population share social, cultural, and historical experiences with relatively distinctive beliefs, values, and behaviors including some sense of identity of belonging to that particular subgroup (Wright, 1994; Smedley, 1998).

The privilege attributed to light-skinned Latinos aligns with the fluidity of identity that lies between race and ethnicity, and therefore many negotiate with the labels they use to identify themselves; they have the privilege to choose identities (Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008). For instance, while white-passing and light-skinned Latinos have the ability to move in and out of racial and ethnic categories depending on the context of the situation, negotiation of identity is limited for dark-skin Latinos whose ethnicity is more likely to be intermixed and silenced because race outperforms ethnicity (Rodriguez, 2001). Furthermore, Latinos with darker skin tones and most ethnic features are more likely to experience anti-Black racism (i.e. Afro-Mexicans and/or Afro-Latinxs), while light-skinned Latinos can more easily pass and assimilate and are more likely to benefit from white privilege. In other words, skin color serves as a dominant capital that exists as a means of classification and social status but not openly discussed (Du Bois, 1935; Bonilla-Silva, 2004).

The Afro-Mexican community living in places like Costa Chica, Veracruz, and Guerrero in the country of Mexico makes up approximately 1.3 million of the

entire population and have been forming communities for many years, although just recently acknowledged and counted by the Mexican census as of two years ago (Agren, 2020). Communities like Afro-Mexicans are left in the margins and frequently suffer from colorism as darker skinned Mexicans are not preferred and their African ancestry's often go unrecognized in places founded with the logic of coloniality (Agren, 2020). It is also important to acknowledge all the Afro-Latinx communities that make up a large percentage of Latinxs in countries like Puerto Rico, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic among other Latin American countries and Caribbean islands. Celebrity Diana De Los Santos, known as "Amara La Negra," is an example of an Afro-Latina who has gained popularity in both American television shows and Latino television media, De Los Santos has spoken up many times to share her experience as someone whose identity is judged by both the African American community and the Latinx community and even discredited (Moll-Ramirez, 2018). The Afro-Latinx community is yet another example of the diversity and complexity that makes up the Latinx culture, however with silencing and constant perpetuation of racialization, their own experiences can sometimes submerge into internalization – making them believe that their skin is not as valuable as their lighter counterparts – one of the many effects of racist ideologies. Since little is known about the intimate experiences of Latinxs, as they negotiate tensions of colorism in the United States, the analysis of the interviews found in this study aim to expose more of the experiences and sentiments attached to colorism, race, ethnicity, and identity. Cultural references

like traditional foods and diets also play into forming our *Latindad* and sometimes even used as a way to justify racial disparities.

Stabb (1959) reevaluates racist thoughts like those held by *científicos*, who were collaborators of the early 19th century dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz in Mexico. One of these *científicos*, Francisco Bulnes, bluntly justified and narrowed down the cause superiority within race to things like diet. Bulnes believes the wheat-eaters (Northern Europeans) were mentally and physically superior because of the nutritional excellence of this grain. The rice-eaters (Orientals) were thought to be weaker physically and intellectually because of the lesser food value of rice. Finally, Stabb (1959) draws attention to Bulnes perspective on *indigenismo* and Bulnes claims the corn-eating American Indian cannot possibly compete with the superior races of the world since their dietary staple is pitifully lacking in proteins, nitrogen, and phosphorus, "*que forman la principal materia del cerebro,*" meaning, which develop the principle region of the brain (p. 419). Clearly the pseudoscience in vogue at the time was a perpetuating factor that contributed to ways in which many white or non-white researchers have found justifications to their racial prejudices and their belief in their white superiority against other races.

While food plays an important role in the culture of many communities and natives all around the Americas, it is extremely problematic and unjustifiable to discriminate against minorities with a basis of food source and ingredients. Researchers like Bulnes have an environmentalist and biological background but

immensely disregard aspects of culture and instead focus on things like diet and territorilization, his support is focused a lot more on terms of 'superiority' and racist thinking (Stabb, 1959). That is why this study will focus on: Latinx lived experiences and understandings of white privilege and colorism to deconstruct imposed U.S. stereotypes and capture the reality of social treatments based on the factors of being a person of color with white passing or non-white passing privilege.

The Chicano Movement and Borderlands

The Mexican American Civil Rights Movement, also known as the Chicano Movement and *El Movimiento* encouraged the Latino community to step out and boycott injustices and discrimination while encompassing unity with the Latino label and identity. Dolores-Huerta and Cesar Chavez with their will power represented and brought-forth the many agricultural workers being underpaid and exploited in states like Arizona and California. The Chicano Movement was one of the most influential events in the 1960's that created an impact in American history but especially, in the Latino community. It incorporated various causes from restoration of land grants, to farm workers' rights, to the enhancement of education, to voting, political and racial rights.

What many people are unaware of is the development of the Chicano Movement and its unique take at the borderlands between Mexico and United States. The ill-representations of the Chicano Movement in mass media influenced the negative creation of Mexican American identity stereotypes in the

United States. It came to be a form of retaliation to the persistence of Latino communities to continue the fight for their rights in their own ancestral lands while refusing assimilation. This played a massive role at the borderlands where many generations of Latinos triumphed. With the analysis of politicization over the years, we can see regulations transform at the border and take effect on people.

Being one of the biggest historical events, *El Movimiento*, shaped the way Latinos and Chicanos navigate in today's society. The impact and legacy that it continues to create has paved the way for many scholars, educators and thousands of minorities recovering their agency in a society that denies Xicanx history as U.S. history. It is a significant trailblazer-moment that really captures the ideas of pride in culture, autonomy, racial and social justice. The border being a unique middle-ground thriving experience, brings in the idea of racial identity into a new perspective. Despite many differences among groups like African Americans and Latinos including altercations and racial slurs, in some cases they have united for the purpose of achieving a common goal such as fighting white supremacy.

At the same time, the border creates very exclusive realities to those who have to cross it on a daily basis and even signifies the separation of culture and family values for a new set of combined beliefs. These include the experiences of Latinos who constantly code-switch when communicating between language in the U.S. versus those who live in central Mexico or the United States; two distinct realities. Taking one closer look, we can see the way Mexicans, Mexican

Americans and other groups unfold at the borderlands and how they are affected by the way they interpret and manage the symbolization of whites and subgroups of Latinx community.

African and Mexican Americans are two minority groups that forced geographically become part of an interconnected community at the borders in Texas and Mexico (Behnken, 2011). At first, Mexican Americans did not want to join African Americans on fighting for their homeland because of racialized ideas like them being 'dirty,' but soon realized that they would both 'fight their own battle,' which would ultimately weaken their power as marginalized, minority communities already persecuted and targeted by Anglo whites (Behnken, 2011). Winning battles such as *Brown vs Board of Education (1954)* and *Delgado vs Bastrop (1948)*, activists of color began to pick up momentum like Cesar Chavez who founded the National Farm Workers Association in 1962 to protect agriculture workers' rights (NFWA) (Behnken, 2011). The complexity of Mexican American racialization in Texas was huge, many Mexicans pushed the agenda of claiming to be white due to its advantages – whites earned more money and were socially accepted.

During this entire period of pushing identity acceptance and struggling for equal rights, many Latinos developed the sense of having 'brown pride,' which acknowledged their indigenous ancestry and Mexican culture in the U.S. However, educators like Vasconcelos (1925) gave a negative connotation to 'brown pride,' while others maintained their white washed ideologies of wanting

to pass as white and essentially assimilating to white culture as a modern Latino/a or person of color, a method used for survival and social upgrade (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Behnken, 2011).

The Chicano Movement is an example of the struggles Latinx communities endure with these concepts of colorism, racial identity and community pride in a country where they are constantly questioned and stigmatized. *El Movimiento* was an enlightening strike for Latinos, white passing or not, it was a fight against the enemy: white supremacy. Although we still see the implications of Eurocentric beliefs trickled down on the Latino culture today, it became a signature moment to strengthen 'brown pride' and racial identities. These type of social and cultural movements give us a broader insight to reimagine and analyze the spaces we exist in, physically, socially and mentally. Identity wars for people of color have been significant historical frames that have contributed to larger themes of anti-colonialism, like combating white supremacy and restoring brown pride and history. For hundreds of years indigenous lands and Latinx homes have been invaded with catastrophe such as violence and removal of knowledge, which is why Latinx histories are so complex and non-fixated. Understanding important movements like *El Movimiento* and un-colonizing our education are progressive ways to restore and heal our Latinx pride. To explain our existence and how we navigate our presence while acknowledging our differences distributed by *mestizaje* and phenotypes, we must understand the role of third space.

Third Space

When we imagine culture clashes, we generally think of biracial families or migratory families adapting to a new sense of reality, similar to the hundreds of Latinx individuals living in the United States, especially first-generation groups that have to re-learn ways of living from two colliding worlds. This concept of integration and hybridity self-positions itself to enter Third Space Theory, recognized by post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (Bhabha 1994, 1996, 2004).

Bhabha (1994, 1996) refers to third space as colliding cultures that summon something different, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation such as hybridity. Scholars Sandoval & Davis (2000) and Licona (2005) add a specific perspective on third space which claims that “Third space can be understood as a location and/or practice... it reveals a differential consciousness' capable of engaging creative and coalitional forms of opposition to the limits of dichotomous (mis)representations [it] has the potential to be a space of shared understanding and meaning-making” (p. 105). This is done to incorporate unique third space feminist views and emphasize that third space subjects are constantly in-between realities that extend beyond binary forms. Their lived experiences are continuously shifting and being examined as ‘Other’ ways of being (Anzaldúa, 1984).

According to Bhabha (1994), “Hybrid third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no ‘primordial unity or fixity,’” (p.

2) meaning that there is always space for new creations, new ways of thinking and alternative ways to exist (Bhabha, 1994; Meredith, 1998). Meredith (1998) adds to third space by reiterating it as a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that provokes new possibility. It is an interruptive, interrogative, and affirmative space of new forms of cultural meaning that proposes to question and even challenge established categorizations of culture and identity (Bhabha, 1994).

The concept of third space is submitted for analyzing the transgression and subversion of dualistic categories going beyond the realm of colonial binary-thinking by having alternative options and methods (Anzaldúa, 1984). As we know Latinx is a complex community with a variety of social constructs, however participants in this study self-identified in the binary form of either white-passing and non-white passing for ease to be categorized and examined in regard to white privilege. Third space allows room to explore capacities where limitations exist, physically like the borderlands among Mexico and the U.S., and mentally, like the idea that Mexicans are of one unified skin complexion. At the same time it provides space for growth and community development “initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation,” (p. 2) most importantly it brings forth third space consciousness that involves the movement of empowerment, envisioned histories and decolonial imaginary (Bhabha, 1994, 1996; Perez, 1999). Understanding third space allows us to get a glimpse of the thoughts and sense of belonging experienced by these Latinx individuals who are

often caught between two worlds/cultures, developing unique cross-reference hybrid identities.

Despite the hegemonic pervasive idea established by British and English settlers, Bhabha (1996) and Anzaldua (1984) push the narrative that third space opens up for negotiation and meaning beyond what already has been established (Bhabha, 1996; Meredith, 1998). Additionally, identity has been defined as "the individual's psychological relationship to particular social category systems... also the term most often invoked by those who struggle to create meaning and purpose when culturally significant, ideologically powerful social category systems clash with personal and collective group member experiences" (p. 140) such as race, gender, class and ethnicity (Tajfel, 1978; Frable, 1997). Psychologist Frable (1997) believes that when an individual's reality and race clashes with their culture, it hinders the way they create meaning and purpose, thus falling under a psychological frame of identity crisis. Identity crisis as aforementioned is common among Latinx communities because they often find themselves assimilating to U.S. white culture while developing their own persona, characteristics, and autonomy.

Gomez and White (2010) state that "identity is a multidimensional concept, fluid and complex, particular and socially marked," (p. 1016) similar to Bhabha's third space which reaffirms that our identities as third space subjects are not fixed but instead ever-changing (Bhabha, 1994). Identities provide "causal explanations of our social locations in a world that is shaped by such locations,

by the way they are distributed and hierarchically organized,” (p. 6) speculating that the way in which we socialize and negotiate with our surroundings affect our identity (Alcoff, Hames-Garcia, Mohanty, & Moya, 2006). Many of my participants found themselves in various unfixed standing perspectives, juggling their identity, values, beliefs and understandings of who they are and how they have been raised. According to Gomez and White (2010), our identities are not fixed or single, they suggest that "at different times and in different places, various aspects of our identities may be foregrounded depending on with whom we are interacting,” (p. 1016) we are living creatures that are ever-changing and evolving with the world and with the way our perspectives change. Participants are aware of hierarchal views placed on society, they give examples of how they have encountered those stereotypes placed on themselves by society and give us their own perspective of how they believe they are misinterpreted by the same labels that boxed them in fixated categories in the first place. “In this sense, each person's identity is actually a hybrid of multiple dimensions of a self,” (p. 1016) and this matters in how we manage to exist and how we feed our own existence in order to survive in spaces that were not specially created for hybrids. For example, higher education institutions create a disadvantage disconnect for first-generation students when they do not provide resources for that particular group (Gomez & White, 2010).

Another scholar that discusses third space is Gloria Anzaldúa, “*Conocimiento*” comes from opening up all your senses, consciously inhabiting

your body and decoding it's symptoms... *conocimientos* challenge official and conventional ways of looking at the world, ways set up for those benefiting from such constructions," she recalls from, "*This Bridge we call Home: Radical visions for Transformation*" where she examines new forms of communities, practices and consciousness (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 542). This is crucial for understanding the fluidity of Latinx culture, the fact that we do not identify with one single race and the reality of 'standing out' not as a negative connotation as not fitting in with American culture, rather as a positive reminder of how different and unique we are, embracing the idea that we are a diverse group. Anzaldúa and Keating (2002) make a powerful statement when referring to *conocimientos*, literally translated to 'knowledges,' she talks about the awakening of the human mind as a way to combat the systems and patriarchy established to force us to think in certain ways. Beyond knowledge, *conocimientos*, is to understand our inner-self, Anzaldúa & Keating (2002) visualize it as a way of living, a way of breathing and opening up to all potential alternatives; moving away from the binary and allowing to see other worlds, cultures, and communities, being connected to your roots but still transcending as an individual moving forward in life. Participants enable this organically as they share conscious and unconscious realities that have shaped their way of thinking and what aspects in their lives have influenced their perspectives, such as family culture, school mentors and micro-aggressions derived from colonized ideologies.

Reflecting on my own identity, my perspective comes from a white-passing Latino who is continuously learning to navigate the world. My interpretation of living 'in-between' became one with multiple unique outlooks. Belonging to a lower-class humble family, coming out as gay in my late teenage years, and experiencing academia as a first-generation student synchronously helped me construct my own perspectives to further understand who I was as an individual. My participants describe scenarios in which they often had to question who they were and how they narrated their understanding of being a Latinx living in the U.S., wrapping that concept of biculturalism and hybridity around their lived experiences. Being Latino for myself meant that I was fully bilingual, I could speak with my parents in *Español* and speak English with my academic friends. It meant that I was a culturally mixed product, a hybrid of two cultures: Mexico and United States. Similar to my participants, I began to mind map my own terms and definitions of what I was and what I was not, based on societal constructions made for certain people who fit exclusive criteria.

Growing up in a traditional Mexican household, I knew important topics included things like immigration, what I did not realize was my take on subliminal racial discrimination. As an adult, I acknowledged my white-passing male privilege, strangers were not afraid to talk to me and people charmed my light skin as a way to express their acceptance of me – it's common to be called *güerito* (blondie) in Latinx communities if you resemble white European features, although I did not know at the time why it was favorable. My story is only mine,

although many others have similar experiences, dealing with racial stereotypes, falling on the outskirts of where to fit in culturally, moving into a mental space to heal while reflecting back on family values and U.S. white culture. Our ancestral heritage and *mestizaje* make us the distinctive individuals we are today and colonized perpetuated racism are reasons why we are treated differently. Today, I am able to recognize my intersectionality and place them in what I interpret as my own personal third space, a place where I can exist while being 'in' and 'out' of a complex infused culture that distinguishes those of us who need a middle location. A fluid space where my reality is my truth and I can think and express myself openly and freely.

Third space for me resembles a mental space of belonging that allows me to exist but also illustrates why my voice and my presence as a member of the Latino and LGBT+ community as both make up sections of my identity. Other Latinx individuals may not have the privilege to experience of being presumed white on a daily basis or recall being bullied for being light skin as I was in middle school and vice versa; however many of us do struggle with identity crisis as we try to make sense of where to fit in. O'Hearn (1998) describes third space as 'a third, wholly indistinguishable category where origin and home are indeterminate' emphasizing that it's a place of infinite opportunities due to the fact that there are no concrete limitations. This allows people like myself and my participants to co-exist and produce our own realities, even if others do not understand or resonate with our experiences, they are still ours. For example, many Latinx are U.S. born

first-generation citizens while others are born in other countries and raised in the U.S. (immigrants), and some have a darker complexion but do not identify with Latinx culture and vice versa.

Expanding more on this, Bolatagici (2004) elaborates upon Bhabha's notion of third space by stating that, "borderline culture of hybridity is a powerful and creative 'third space' through which 'newness enters the world', subverting the authority of the dominant discourse," (p. 116). Sakamoto (1996) makes a great point in acknowledging that in order to exist, some people will have to define their own spaces and comfort zones, especially in a world fixated for a specific type of person; in the U.S. most institutions were created with the purpose of serving white men (Bolatagici, 2004).

As I reflect on my own existence, I am able to place myself in a selective space, simultaneously not limited to others, solely on the fact of how my phenotypes and characteristics are identified, such as being a white-passing individual. I not only base my existence on what I physically look like, but also on my knowledge and understandings of my privileges, my own *conocimiento*.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Auto-Ethnography

Within the parameters of qualitative research are the valuable perspectives provided by autoethnography (Chang, 2013; Denzin, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography is an approach that systematically analyzes (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno). It is both a process and product which introduces an exclusive format of storytelling that can otherwise be complex and difficult to evolve (Ellis et al., 2011). This format allows a reflection of self, an intimate screening of experiences and epiphanies for the purposes of helping insiders (culture members) and outsiders (culture strangers) better understand a culture (Maso, 2001; Ellis, Adams, & Brochner, 2011).

Moving away from conventional research practices, autoethnography is anti-colonial conscious as it is researcher-focused all while endorsing numerous ways of writing, speaking, valuing, and believing (Ellis, Adams, & Brochner, 2011). This particular approach challenges the idea of what is considered 'meaningful and useful research' by allowing these stories of – race, gender, age, ability, class, education, religion – to unfold from the researcher's perspective and it acknowledges "researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from

these matters or assuming they don't exist," (Ellis, Adams, & Brochner, 2011, p. 274).

Furthermore, Chang (2013) argues "autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self," (p. 48–49) which means the researcher and research are linked, not maintained separated like traditional research tends to operate (Sparkes, 2000). In addition, personal stories can serve as therapeutic narratives that can patch our own collection of realities and ultimately make sense of our experiences. Deep diving into our personal stories with autoethnographies, we seek to better understand our relationships and encourage personal responsibility and agency (Pelias, 2000, 2007), promote cultural change and raise consciousness (Goodall, 2004), and provide a platform to those whom may be silenced or voiceless (Spivak, 1988; Boylorn, 2006; Jago, 2002).

Autoethnography is a way to reclaim my "I," as an academic to bring forth communal findings and a collective sense of being. Villanueva (2013) discusses the importance of reclaiming the "I," to talk about our experiences because writing is an "empowering tool," (p. 26) that subsequently also serves as a way to detach from Westernized colonialization ideologies. The opportunity to spread community-based knowledge as it pertains to my personal experiences as part of a wider Latinx culture, is a valuable form of validating our truths and claim knowledge that derives from communal experiences, whereas traditional learning

formats do not offer that opportunity (Villanueva, 2013). My intersectional experiences as Villanueva (2013) explains, are factors that make me gather academic ideas and perform research in a way that my Latinx community can learn and relate with, we create bonding's this way. As a white-passing Latino, many times my mind was clouded with Anglo ideologies about my own culture, the education system taught me that "white," American history was the only history, U.S. media and Latino media also proved that white was the better offspring as that is what we predominantly saw, even rooted in my own family as I would often hear phrases like, "y es güero," which means, "and he's white," when referring to a homeless man or criminal on television, as it were shocking news because white people were and still are imagined to be the exemplary race. I admit, I was not aware of my privilege prior to my graduate college experience. I have 7 years in higher education and the last 2 years are really the one's that caused the most impact in terms of applying the knowledge that's helped me heal and reflect, while previous years helped to guide and craft the art of decolonizing and unlearning of Anglo ways of thinking, researching, and simply 'being.' While I share and relate critical factors with my participants, like being a first-generation Latino or coming from a working-class family, experiencing what I read, and study is completely eye-opening. Some of the white-passing participants for example mentioned being questioned about their racial and ethnic background because of their ambiguous complexion, something I have gone through more than I can keep count. Some of the non-white passing

participants expressed being stared at and stereotyped for their complexion, something that many of my own relatives and close friends have told me about yet I will perhaps never experience. My identity, however, has been shook and puzzled like many of my peers, participants, and community members. Finding ourselves is a community goal given that we all stem from a wide complexity of races, a stripped history that's been many times rewritten and reshaped, and a group of ancestral immigrant families seeking to understand ourselves and live a life with vast opportunities in a country founded on racism. The individuals I interviewed all come from complex backgrounds, most of them are first-generation college students who have also been limited by higher education in expressing themselves and have been brainwashed by the deep historical ideas of coloniality. My participants are just like me, seeking a place to exist because the U.S. limits our identities and community to a stereotyped version that is simply not an accepting choice. Many participants faulted themselves in situations where they were deemed the "bad" people, to the extent of even becoming oppressed oppressors, for not realizing that they were not the problem, but systemic and institutionalized racism was. These are the experiences that are vital to research, discuss (*platicas*), reflect, and heal from. My reflexive perspective functions as a way of disclosing my own personal positionality as a researcher and to support this project since my experiences have directly influenced my interest in further analyzing the complexity of racism, colorism, white privilege and third space. I felt it was highly valuable to identify my realities

and experiences. Juxtaposing them side-to-side with my participants will distinguish similarities and differences to determine macro and micro levels of cultural association. My specific experiences provide an insight to the results found, as best fitted, while allowing me to learn, as both participant/student and researcher/educator, for future research.

Critical Race Theory

An essential piece of philosophical literature embedded to support marginalized communities is critical race theory (CRT). CRT was developed by academics Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado and Crenshaw and mentioned in *“Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment,”* published in 1993 as a method meant to revisit experiences of people of color and exert them as valuable (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993). A major role of CRT is to question and express skepticism towards legal claims that suggest ideas like color blindness and neutrality, as it discredits many racial historical factors. In addition, it prides in combatting racial oppression by stacking knowledge on issues of racism, politics, legality, education, among others and advancing in racial justice practices (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993).

CRT is considered interdisciplinary as it borrows from other traditions like liberalism, Marxism, feminism, critical legal theory, and postcolonialism, as well as scholars like Frederick Douglas, W.E.B. Du Bois, Derrick Bell and Richard

Delgado. This movement seeks to achieve social activism and change through everyday notions of race, racism, and power (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993; Delgado, 2012). Doctor and academic Camara Phyllis Jones (2002) explains how placing thought and action into concepts like CRT can decrease the advancement of issues like institutionalized racism, not only in academic settings but in public health. Minorities are the primary groups affected by displacement and unfair treatment, due to income, race or immigration status, therefore having conversations of these issues to then be implemented are one way to combat racial and ethnic disparities (Phyllis Jones, 2002).

Additionally, activist Kathleen Boyd acknowledges CRT in "*Using Critical Race Theory to Solve Our Profession's Critical Race Issues*," as a theoretical framework used by researchers to examine culture as it relates to race, power and identity (Boyd, 2018). In order to analyze critically and really connect with how these racist ideologies worked, many researchers and scholars took into action what they believe could prevent and reverse racism from happening, starting by acknowledging that it was in fact happening (Boyd, 2018). Part of CRT involves examining various components that shape individual identity, it offers a way for scholars to understand how race interacts with other identities like gender and class, which also leads us to understanding identity beyond homogeneity with the concept of intersectionality. Civil rights advocate, Kimberle Crenshaw defines and discusses the term intersectionality:

Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It is not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things. (Columbia Law School)

Crenshaw used 'intersectionality' intertwined with CRT to get into understanding how these aggressions of race, gender, class, and power truly function together (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, we know that discrimination against a white female is the standard sex discrimination claim; claims that diverge from this standard appear to present some sort of hybrid claim, i.e. intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). More significantly, because Black females' claims are depicted as hybrid, they sometimes cannot represent those who may have 'pure' claims of sex discrimination, explains Crenshaw (1989). The effect of this approach is that even though a challenged policy or practice may clearly discriminate against all females, the fact that it has particularly harsh consequences for Black females places Black female appellants at worst or lower case probabilities than with white females (Crenshaw, 1989).

Crenshaw (1989) further explains the idea that Black women often experience double discrimination, the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race and on the basis of sex. Sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women, not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but simply as Black women. This same idea of blocking

intersectional existing factors happens with physical complexions (skin color) and the way it is expressed through pigmentation. For example, being a white-passing Latino is one perspective while being a gay, white-passing Latino adds sexual orientation to that complexity. When discussing the dichotomy of white and Black physical appearance and the history behind these terms, it is imperative to apply CRT and notice that these differences in color cause a huge impact on how participants navigate the world, providing us with a lens that allows us to see the realities and differences of each experience. For this reason, CRT theory can also be used to analyze the experiences of Latinxs, especially when it comes to nativism.

For the purposes of this study, nativism is defined as the practice of assigning values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the white settlers as native, and to defend the [new and imposed] native's right to dominance, at the expense of the non-native (Pérez Huber et. al., 2010). Whites have wrongfully altered histories to be illustrated as the historically and legally native "founding fathers," of the U.S. (Higham, 1955; Saito, 1997). With this important connection between racist nativism and whiteness in mind, racist nativism is defined as, the assigning of values to real or imagined differences in order to justify the superiority of the white settlers as native, who is perceived to be white, over that of the non-native, who is perceived to be people and immigrants of color, ironically including actual native Americans, and in that way defend the native's right to dominance and power (Pérez Huber et. al., 2010).

CRT is a crucial framework that aligns with my research specifically pertaining to the histories that led up to the transformation of white privilege and colorism. Pérez Huber (2010) says, “CRT in educational research unapologetically centers the ways race, class, gender, sexuality and other forms of oppression manifest in the educational experiences of People of Color” (p. 78). In order to claim authentic stories that have not been modified, it also targets the idea of identity, a crucial and delicate topic in the Latinx community. CRT and Latino critical theory (LatCrit) are conceptual frameworks arising from legal studies, as mentioned above, that can help improve our understanding of issues related to social justice and racial inequality in society (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993).

Furthermore, as many scholars attest to LatCrit – Latino Critical Race Theory, as an extension of CRT – this specific lens examines specific experiences that the Latinx groups tend to live by, including immigration and language (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Some of my own participants are first-generation Latinx students, some dealing with immigration issues and others with identity crisis or the like. However, they are all products of Latinx experiences unfolding at different levels in and out of academic spaces. To fully collect my participants narratives and identify key ideas interrelated to the Latinx culture but perceived differently – between those white-passing and non-white passing – using CRT and LatCrit encourages and stimulates anti-colonial

methodological epistemologies and practices by emphasizing on People of Color and specifically for my research, where the historical stories of Latinx individuals are imperative (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Pérez Huber et al., 2010).

Finally, LatCrit helps to analyze issues that CRT does not necessarily address specifically, like language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Martinez, 1994). It also validates multidimensional identities that intersect with 'isms' such as: racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other forms of oppression of Latinx communities (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001; Vallalpando, 2004). Delgado Bernal (2002) observes that LatCrit permits us to look at Latinx identities in conjunction with immigration, migration, human rights, language, gender, and class to better understand their experiences in the U.S., which is exactly what my research answers with a focus on physical/racial appearance (Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Vallalpando, 2004). Colorism for example, as previously defined, is a term that intertwines racism and ethnicity particularly in the same culture/community, like Latina/o/x; it is specific in the way it mixes discrimination and applies it within the same community as a way to excavate closeness to whiteness.

Research Questions

The following are two questions generated from the concept of colorism and how participants make sense of their practices and/or lived experiences being that they self-assess to fit into either: 'white-passing' or 'non-white passing' categories. The purpose of these questions is to go in depth with how Latinos

belonging to what is imagined as the same community experience (ethnicity), relate to racial prejudice's to then formulate their own understandings of privilege based on common physical attributes. Participants must understand and digest the concept of white privilege and the way it is being examined in this specific circumstance. Participants are encouraged to openly talk about their experiences regarding racial treatment and feelings towards themselves and other Latinx people in their communities as well as non-Latino's. As participants go through this journey of self-reflection, they begin to analyze these questions being asked in regard to skin color so they can capture the magnitude of whiteness and how it is infiltrated into the Latinx culture and their own personal identity. At the same time, this healing journey also allows participants to connect with other Latinx members as a way to demonstrate that they are not alone. With examples, term definitions, and cultural familiarity we hope participants can understand whiteness and picture commonalities. These following questions are being examined for a collection of narratives to compare and contrast the livelihoods of Latinx experiencing racial prejudice based on skin color complexion:

1. What are self-identifying Latino/a/xs understandings of white privilege and colorism?
2. What factors or stereotypes influence the way Latinx individuals navigate amongst diverse and white dominant societies in the United States?

Methodology

Participants included self-identifying 'white-passing' and 'non-white passing' Latinx individuals both male and female. Half the participants self-identified as Latinx and pass as presumed white or "non-Latinx" and the remaining half self-identified as anything but white, i.e. Latina, Mexican American, Hispanic. A total of ten participants were interviewed individually. The interviewees were all adult participants, ages 18+ who were asked 13 questions that focused on their experiences based on their racial appearance and interactions as Latina/o/x navigating in a multi-layered society that is the United States. Some factors being examined include speech accents, skin-color evaluation, understandings of white privilege, being perceived as passing or non-passing in association to U.S./Anglo-centric standards of whiteness, inclusivity, and self-identity.

Interview Assessment

The interview method and formatting was composed of *Pláticas*, as defined by Fierros and Delgado Bernal in "*Vamos a Platicar: The Contours of Pláticas as Chicana/Latina Feminists Methodology*," (2016). Delgado Bernal (2016) mentions that *pláticas* are not standard, institutionalized research methods, rather *platicando* (talking) is a form of exchanging academic knowledge in and outside of a classroom, it ultimately connects and allows for peers, scholars, and anyone else to express themselves with multi-layered themes (i.e. academia, family, immigration, language, hobbies, etc.). *Platicas* creates a space

where cultural knowledge is spread naturally due to its inherited Latino culture foundations and it's ease to immerse completely into the culture for an authentic and rich storytelling experience. Having an intimate and comfortable space produced by *pláticas*, researcher-to-participant, allows stories to unfold organically to cultivate main ideas and understandings of the participant's lived experiences. *Pláticas* are opportunities to co-construct while exploring the culture and allowing an understanding to better know someone, it is a continuous relationship (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013).

Academic brothers Francisco and Miguel Guajardo (2013) further emphasize the intimacy and vital informal narratives that spark from *pláticas* by saying "plática requires a level of relationship building, we enter community in a way that honors community member stories, rather than through the classical approach of moving into a community to extract information... our approach to inquiry is based on invitation first, followed by multiple one-one *pláticas*, then by small group *pláticas*. We find that *pláticas* beget other *pláticas*" (p. 161). It maintains the cultural structure possessed by many generations of Latina/o/x in the way of communicating, it is cultural and personal.

Background information about the participants is carefully extracted by connecting with cultural familiarity. With a mixed methods approach of formal and informal details about each other, participants are able to feel comfortable with me and know that I am a trusted Latino who partially understands some of the issues they have encountered, especially since many of the participants are also

first-generation Latinos. This approach is more than a 'hi, how are you?' this requires connection exclusively between us Latina/o/x as a culture, sometimes this means speaking Spanglish – code switching between the Spanish and English language – or turning a memory into a humorous moment about our parents or upbringing. Centering these small moments in order to establish a connection have a huge impact because not only do we get to know a little more about each other personally, but we also humanize our experience as an indirect way to say, 'I hear you and I am here for you.' This method of constantly creating connections, whether directly or indirectly, throughout the interviews provides guidance for the participants to feel at home and unafraid to disclose or share personal content, we create a safe environment where it is understood that we are here to help each other and our community. Our interviews are more so conversations as I were catching up with a cousin I have not seen in a year. After small talk is initiated and established, the *pláticas* are prompted by 13 questions asked in consecutive order. The questions were asked as a conversation to maintain a steady back and forth flow and exchange of ideas that attempted to capture the relationship between the interviewee, their Latinx identity, and their race or ethnicity. The questions follow an ongoing theme of how the participants believe they are perceived, while encouraged to also provide examples or stories about their experiences related to colorism, internalized racism, white privilege, or any other useful information willing to be disclosed for the purpose of this research study. Participants were not obligated to answer anything they disliked

or found uncomfortable and had the freedom to skip or retrieve from the interview at any given point.

Data Collection

There was a total of ten participants who were interviewed as a small sample representation of Latina/o/x. In terms of background data, out of the 10 participants, 8 self-identified as male and 2 as female. 6 self-identified as 'non-white passing', whereas 4 self-identified as 'white-passing.' The youngest participant was 18 years old and the oldest 27, which resulted in the median age being 23. Recruitment was based on convenient non-random sampling also known as snowball or network sampling; people that I know, who might know other people that fit the research study criteria were able to provide reference.

Table 1. Participant Data

	Pseudonym	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Region	Passing/Non-Passing
1	Robert	18	Mexican	Mexican	Fontana, CA	NP
2	Stella	21	Mexican & Salvadorian	Hispanic/Latina	Fontana, CA	NP
3	Jesus	21	Latin-American/Mexican	Hispanic/Latino	Corona, CA	NP
4	Rich	22	Mexican American	Hispanic/Latino	Hesperia, CA	NP
5	Leo	24	Mexicano	Latino/Transnacional	San Bernardino, CA	NP
6	Maria	25	Mexican	Latina	Los Angeles, CA	P
7	Jaime	25	Mexican American	Mexican American	Ontario, CA	P
8	Eddie	26	Mexican American	Latino	Twin Peaks, CA	P
9	Liam	27	White/Hispanic/Latino	Latino	Victorville, CA	P
10	Ricky	28	Mexican American	Hispanic/Latino	Chino, CA	NP

The criteria were based on three main factors:

1. Individuals who ethnically self-identified as Latina/o/x.
2. Individuals who were presumed white by Anglo-centric societal expectations and/or self-perception and self-identified as white-passing.
3. Individuals who were presumed non-white by Anglo-centric societal expectations and/or self-perception and self-identified as non-white passing.

Friends of friends were also able to advise me about other individuals who were interested and fit the criteria to be interviewed. The setting for all interviews took place in a quiet environment, either at California State University, San Bernardino library rooms or local coffee-shops, depending on how far the participants were willing to travel. Transportation was not an issue as I coordinated all necessary steps to meet with participants based on scheduled and planned appointments. 90 percent of the participants were located in the Inland Empire (i.e. San Bernardino, Corona, Riverside, Colton, Fontana, etc.) area of California. Other participants outside the Inland Empire community included the cities of Twin Peaks and Los Angeles.

Interviewees were audio-recorded because many experiences disclosed by the participants cannot be captured quick enough by hand nor by memory. Therefore, having them agree to be recorded serves as supporting documentation. To audio-record I used my personal cellular device since it is managed with ease; specifically, the *JustPressRecord* phone application was used to audio-record participants and store their recordings. Before I began any

interviews, I explained the confidentiality notice and how the research generated from the interviews is only to serve academic research purposes. I also had them sign a release form stating that they agree with the terms of their words and audio-recorded statements to be used for general exposure and academic research as needed. I was fully transparent with all my participants just in case they had future questions. I transcribed the information as soon as it was received and specifically searched for themes related to passing and non-passing circumstances. All the recordings were stored in my personal cell phone under a password protection that only I had access to. All the transcribed texts and any related documents of the like were also stored and protected in my personal laptop under a password protection as well.

White-Passing Group

Some questions asked had themes revolving with negative or positive circumstances believed triggered by race/ethnicity, white privilege, colorism, acknowledgement of whiteness, and understandings of white privilege via lived examples and experiences. Questions for this group included:

1. What separates them from other Latinxs and how they believe they are perceived by others (society/public)?
2. How do they feel about their own appearance, have they used it as an advantage/disadvantage?

3. How do they feel about 'non-white passing' Latinxs, and are these feelings related to their knowledge and self-perception of whiteness and white privilege?
4. Are they aware of any pre-existing risks or harms with how they are perceived?
5. Do they believe to have a 'Spanish' accent when speaking and are they typically perceived to have an accent by others (is there a pattern noticed)?

Non-White Passing Group

Some questions asked had themes revolving with negative or positive circumstances believed triggered by race/ethnicity, tokenism, racial discrimination, colorism, and understandings of whiteness and white privilege via lived examples and experience. Questions for this group included:

1. Do they understand the Latino racial stereotype (as constructed by Anglo-centric U.S. ideology and do they believe they fit the description?
2. What qualities/traits separates them from other Latinxs, how do they believe they are perceived by others (society/public)?
3. How do they feel about 'white-passing' Latinxs and are these feelings related to a sense of pride or perceiving the white-passing Latinxs as opportunistic?

4. How do they feel about their own physical appearance and have they used their appearance to take advantage/disadvantage of a situation?
5. Are they aware of any pre-existing risks or harms with how they are perceived?
6. Do they believe to have a 'Spanish' accent when speaking and are they typically perceived to have an accent by others (is there a pattern noticed)?

Both groups were asked the questions above to formulate better understandings of their own lived experiences without talking for them, instead mirroring their own truths and realities. Through *pláticas*, participants were able to comfortably discuss complex issues related to their physical appearance, race, and privilege. Provoking and making sense of someone's identity can become a challenge, however these questions seek to comprehend how they see themselves and how they are perceived by society in order to piece together its relationship to how they are treated in society. A deeper look into self-perceptions of 'why' or 'why not' Latinx experience racism or racial profiling in the U.S.

These questions allow participants to focus on themselves, reflect not only on the impact of their physical appearance, but their own understanding of culture. This gives the research extra in-depth details to the reasoning behind their take on society versus the way society interprets these individuals. Lastly,

these questions allow us to move within participants and find a sense of connection where often times the Latina/o/x group struggles to be defined and fixed; it allows us to know them freely but intimately, to share identities that will lead to us to refrain from labeling them.

Limitations

One limitation in this study are the blinders that might hinder the way I view the participants responses due to my owned lived experiences, beliefs, and biases; I also want to mention that several participants are my friends which may also promote biases. However, I am clear and thorough with highlighting the section of my auto-ethnography for the purpose of this research project to avoid any information or results from being skewed in my favor or that of any particular group or individual in the study. Another limitation is the population selected to be interviewed. The focus is on ten individuals who have voluntarily shared and disclosed their experiences as Latina/o/xs living in the United States. This group does not represent the entire Latinx community in the state of California or the United States, they are microscopic percentage of the entire Latinx population and therefore mentioned as a small, convenient sample for research purposes.

A third limitation is the duration of the research. The research project has developed in the span of a year and half, with results being examined in 1 year. Therefore, this has not been studied over an extended period of time of more than 1 year and a half, January 2018 through June 2019. A fourth limitation is societal pressures dependent on identity of the interviewer and interviewees

possible longing for shared identification or acceptance. This can result problematic as the interviewees (participants) can provide answers or experiences in favor of the interviewer (researcher) as a mode of shared identification and social acceptance with that person/group/culture. Especially when you are a friend of a friend.

Finally, my graduate committee chair and committee will also be providing me with feedback as the overseeing academics to prevent my own biases from influencing the research. All participants were self-identifying as 'white-passing' or 'non-white passing' while always having the option to not identify or remain ambiguous. The purpose of self-identification was to purposely fit the criteria of either 'white-passing' or 'non-white passing' as a way to categorize these individuals. However, the option of not identifying with the two categories available was also stated as to not pressure and self-assign, ambiguity was another option as a way to give the participants complete autonomy and avoid pressured identification.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

This section is dedicated to the data analysis collected from this study and to illustrate participant quotes in order to correlate them with thematic findings in three formulated categories:

1. White-Passing Group
2. Non-white Passing Group
3. White-Passing Group and Non-white Passing Group

Based on the ten interviews conducted, several themes became more prominent than others. Seeking to understand the lived experiences of two groups made distinct by their personal experiences affected by society's perception of their racial identity as white-passing and non-white passing. Simultaneously, all participants are categorized by the U.S. Bureau and imagined belonging to the same community as either Hispanic or Latino/a/x. Under these circumstances, several main themes became apparent, including:

1. Acknowledgement of white privilege due to physical characteristics.
2. The assumption of not speaking or knowing the Spanish language.
3. The sense of not belonging within a binary understanding of culture, those being the Anglo U.S. and Latin American, but instead in a unique alternative third space with other individuals who share similar experiences.

4. Acknowledgement of being treated differently than their lighter skin (white-passing) counterparts.
5. Combating identity crisis while facing society's assumptions/expectations.
6. Having pride in their Latina/o/x culture regardless of skin complexion and family cultural background.
7. The idea that Latina/o/x are portrayed with negative associations in United States media.
8. Feeling comfortable "in their own skin," referring to who they are (character) and physical appearance.

While this study reflects the experiences of the ten participants plus myself as an auto-ethnographic author, one of the main purposes was to understand perceptions and notions of white privilege from a Latinx perspective. For that reason, we revisited the concepts of internalized racism, colorism, and white privilege in relation to the Latina/o/x U.S. experience while debunking the idea that Latinx are a homogenous group, as believed by many Anglo-American stereotypes. It is important to acknowledge the diversity within these dichotomized groups as a small sample of a broad diversity of Latinx identities. Supporting platforms through the method of *pláticas*, provides a format where cultural knowledge is used to help respondents feel at ease and comfortable enough to share their truths. In this way, even situations involving academic research can often times serve as healing opportunities, especially because

trauma can be easily triggered when remembering reflexive experiences. Participants disclosed many lived encounters and thoughts associated with their physical appearance, like being judged mainly because of their skin tone to the degree where they felt uncomfortable or being assumed that they speak Spanish, again, because of complexion. These examples are products of the ideas of Anglo-U.S. perceptions of Latinx people and the physical manifestation of *mestizaje* portrayed in our Latina/o/x genes (Martinez-Echazabal, 1998; Wickstrom & Young, 2014). They also demonstrated and highlighted concepts of racism, for example, being placed in remedial classes for being Latinx, and colorism, such as being compared to lighter skin siblings (Du Bois, 1935; Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Fernandes, 2017). White privilege, for instance, not being questioned by authority figures in society and another common trait is being praised for having white features in the Latinx culture (Du Bois, 1935; Quijano, 1993; Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2012). Educational experiences throughout their interview sessions were also recalled, such as the first time they engaged in conversations about racism and having “aha,” moments of enlightenment where they were able to learn the histories of racism and coloniality.

White-Passing Group

The interviews with the ‘white-passing’ group (5 participants including myself), shared three main themes. **The first was the acknowledgment of white privilege due to physical characteristics.** All five participants made it clear that they believed they had some sort of upper-hand privilege due to their

physical white-passing abilities. They felt they were able to navigate society as white-passing individuals without as much racial judgement as their counterparts (non-white passing). They expressed experiences that they interpreted as being due to white privilege.

Interviewee Maria, age 25, stated, “If you get to know me, you would see that I am Latino. I get misjudged because maybe I am not brown enough,” Maria claims that her light skin and petite body figure carry a huge influence on how she is perceived by people around her and firmly believes that strangers may perceive her as harmless due to her exterior/physical appearance and smaller-framed body type. She adds that she is not curvy thin and petite, which steers away from the assumption and stereotype that Latina’s are curvy and deemed as sex symbols in the media (Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Ortiz, 2007). In addition, she also expressed that height and weight have a lot to do with the presence of people and how they are perceived, stating that taller people with heavier body frames can appear more threatening due to the power dynamics associated with height and how gender minimizes skepticism for women. She mentions that men are typically taken more seriously whereas women may be seen as less credible than men and even objectified at first, especially true for Latinas (Casillas, Ferrada & Hinojos, 2018).

Participant Liam, age 27, talks about a random moment where he experienced white privilege first-hand while having car issues near a gasoline station, “this white lady [asked] ‘do you need forty dollars for

gas?' automatically, but I thought about it, had it been my friend who is Black, there's no way she would of offered him," he explains.

Liam adds that he lives in a Republican dominated town where African Americans make up less than 10% of the population. Despite Latinos and African Americans considered minority groups in the U.S., they can clearly see the difference in how skin color and race are perceived by outsiders judging off of physical appearance without being fully aware of each individual's own racial identification. Liam is aware that he is white-passing and realizes the privilege that comes along with that construct, while again, these experiences are filtered by his perceptions and are not meant to generalize.

A distinction with acknowledging white privilege, is also realizing that white-passing individuals will never have the same type of experiences as non-white passing people due to that single privilege of skin color and vice versa. These experiences also depend on the way that subjects perceived situations to be and how well they understand the concept of white privilege.

Jaime, age 25, tells us, "when people see me they think, 'oh, this guy is white' ...so that's why I think I've always had white privilege in life, especially when I was younger because I had blonde hair too and I never really dealt with anything racial [that was] negative."

Jaime explains that through higher education he was able to recognize his privilege as a white-passing Latino, claiming that certain courses taught him more in-depth in regard to his experiences where otherwise he would have been

'blinded' by color differences. He also pointed out his physical features including blonde hair and blue eyes – descriptors that for him, indicate a white-passing image – not commonly associated with Latinx people in the U.S. because of the media stereotypes (Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, & Ortiz, 2007; Fojas, 2014).

All participants added that being able to negotiate their racial identity or ambiguity is an advantage since it provides them more autonomy and freedom to influence others in regard to their appearance (Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008). These participants also noted that there are less pre-judgements when people or strangers cannot stereotype their racial identity. This belief comes from the idea that questioning can soften or decrease judgments whereas concrete definitions – i.e. racial category, sexual orientation, gender, etc. – automatically come with labels and stereotypes attached to them (Grillo, 2000).

As we tether all the pieces of white privilege acknowledged by Latinx white-passing individuals, I can also recall a time where I became a part of a racist experience. A manager at a retail store did not help my friend, who is also Latino and has a darker skin complexion than mine. However, he helped me when I asked for assistance (the manager was not aware that we were together) and that day it hit me how it can happen to anyone, anywhere. As expressed by several white-passing participants, many of them live their lives not ever experiencing negative racial experiences, literally the definition of white privilege. They do not become aware of this huge difference until they begin having these conversations with people who have, or until they begin to re-learn about the

histories and realities of people of color who do in fact go through racism as a daily discourse in their lives.

The second contributing theme is the assumption of not speaking or knowing the Spanish language. At first glance, all of the white-passing participants mentioned that they tend to get questioned about speaking Spanish as most people will assume, they are not familiar with the language. As white-passing individuals, they might get several puzzled looks by strangers wanting to determine their race – racial ambiguity – which in turn contributes to wondering and guessing their language. Every participant in this group claimed that they do in fact speak Spanish, to the degree of holding a moderate conversation, yet they are still questioned by most people.

Eddie, age 26, stated, “Sometimes people tell me that when I speak English I have like a little accent, and when people ask me if I speak Spanish, they want me to prove it.”

Eddie's statement demonstrates how complex language can be as some people notice the inflections and pronunciations in the English language. As aforementioned, others want proof that Spanish is in fact the originated language of that person as an indicator of connectedness, it's a tactic that lets us know we can be trusted, *somos como tu* (we are like you). Many Americans are not aware of the diversified complexions that exist within Latin American countries, the fluidity of pigment and the complexities of race. Much less are they aware that for example, in Mexico alone more than 68 original languages are spoken with over

364 linguistic variants (El Universal, 2019). Furthermore, by giving “Latinos/Hispanics” a stereotypical identity or fixed image for Anglo-Americans to recognize in the U.S., they excuse themselves from furthering their knowledge and education about other races besides whites.

Maria, age 25, explains, “There have been times where people don’t believe I speak Spanish or they assume I don’t, or they’re confused about what I am. Like, ‘what are you specifically? You’re throwing me off.’” She states strangers do not believe she is Latina nonetheless that she can speak Spanish.

Language is a broad, yet specific tool used to connect people, groups, communities, and nations, it is transnational. The Spanish language, although originated from Spain, has extended to most Latin American countries and some Caribbean islands as well (excluding Brazil and the Guianas) as a result of colonialism after The Spanish Conquest (Hassig, 1994). There are different types of accents within the Spanish language. Similar to comparing California English versus Mississippi English. It is the same language but with different accents because they are in different regions and different countries. Anglo-Americans associate Spanish with Mexicans due to the proximity of the U.S./Mexico border. Yet, if they hear a white looking person speaking Spanish, they might assume they are Spanish originating from Spain, or an Anglo-white individual who learned the language. When we see white-passing Latinx, some people might assume they do not speak Spanish as they get automatically associated with

whites, which equates to English and vice versa, many people believe that non-white passing Latinx people (brown people) should speak Spanish (as they are associated with Mexicans and/or Latinos) when in reality that might not be the case. Adding to this highly problematic mentality is dichotomous thinking, derived from the logic of coloniality, which only has space for the English and Spanish language as options and thus erases all indigenous languages and dialects that may exist among Latinx cultures (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Marira & Mitra, 2013).

When I was working at a retail shoe store, I would get asked daily ‘do you speak Spanish?’ and even when I would proudly say ‘yes’ some customers would look at me with uncertainty, while others would resume to ask me their questions in Spanish. This was a Hispanic serving region and I was aware that Spanish would be very important in my role. At the time, I also understood that this would be a frequent question I would encounter.

Jaime, age 25, also recalls a similar experience, “my Spanish is very broken, but I can still speak a decent amount although most people think I don’t know any... [they] ask me if I speak Spanish” to note that he’s often questioned about his Spanish language.

The concept of having to “prove,” that we speak Spanish is not necessarily asking for proof, but more so confirmation. It is a way to say, ‘I may look white, but I am still part of your/our community.’

Language is a factor that connects people and stretches far beyond many physical and invisible barriers which are given to us through assumptions and

stereotypes. At almost every job I have had, I would get the question, “Hablas Español?,” which means, ‘Do you speak Spanish?’ and with good reason. I get that people do not want to assume someone’s language for the sake of offending someone especially because physical appearances are not reliable determining features – this can fall closely to stereotyping – so we are better off asking politely first, but also for the motive of preventing racist backlash from people who might be offended for being mistaken as Latinx. At my last corporate job, after an employee asked me if I spoke Spanish they followed up with “te vez muy güero,” (you look too white) which causes people to second-guess if I speak Spanish.

These encounters also add to the concept that Latinx are not portrayed with lighter or fair complexions in U.S. media and when we are, it is usually glorified, as if we’re “extra” special or one of the “lucky,” ones because we’re closer to whiteness. However, in Latin American media we frequently see the white passing Latinx as the glorified and elite characters usually portrayed with positive storylines and protagonists’ roles. Histories have shown over and over the influence of Anglo-white power purposely discriminating against anyone who is not like them. ‘Othering’ – [a] set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities – a colonialist tactic placed on everyone else who was not Anglo-white (powell & Menendian, 2016). The Caste system is a perfect example of racist practices deemed to uplift white

phenotypes. As proposed earlier, many light skin or white-passing Latinx are hand-picked to be protagonist on television and media films because they have Euro-centric phenotypes in addition to speaking the Spanish language. In fact, many Latinos, used the term 'los gringos' which means "the whites" to create a bond among Latino dialogue (regardless of phenotype) to refer to Anglo-whites and draw distinctions between Latinos who are white-passing or "look white" or even "act white," and those who are "real whites," under current mainstream ideology (Lipsitz, 2006). This is a prime example of how language like Spanish is used to create common ground within U.S. culture, because only Latinx people would understand what 'los gringos' means, it brings the group together while setting distinctions for those who they want to keep out.

The third shared theme was the sense of not belonging within a binary understanding of culture, those being the Anglo U.S. and Latin American, but instead in a unique alternative third space with other individuals who share similar experiences. All the participants pointed out their differences in terms of not fully fitting in to their individual cultures (i.e. United States, Mexico, Guatemala) but instead an infused/hybrid or multiple culture (U.S. and Latin American countries). Growing up with two languages – Spanish and English – and celebrating cultural traditions from both sides makes them believe they are products of a hybrid and mixed culture with well-defined roots (knowledge about our native family country and history). All participants are proud of identifying as Latina/o/x but agree that their culture is unique in the

sense of existing as an alternative to the limited views on what identities can actually exist beyond the dichotomy of being either part of the American 'white' culture or of their ancestral country of origin.

Third space was brought up as a way of existing because there is a need to have a space where people can relate to others intellectually and spiritually. It is of vital importance to have a space where thoughts transcend, culture is understood, and identity accepted. "Ni de aquí, ni de allá," (neither from here nor there) a very common phrase in Latinx cultures that reaffirms the way many Latinx Americans or other third space individuals really feel when it comes to their own lived experiences and culture. Being a product of two distinctive and overarching cultures can affect many aspects of identity, especially when forming our sense of who we are and how we identify – from childhood to adulthood.

The 'white-passing' participants also mentioned the fact that being of lighter complexion has influenced their own perception of fitting in with white culture and the Eurocentric beauty standards that come with that stigma.

Participant Eddie, age 26, says "I've always known that I can pass as white so it just made it easier to fit in with my white friends even if that wasn't my intention...that's the community I grew up in," although he did mention having a large part of his family also living in the same white community.

It is clear to some people the need to acknowledge that they fit in, into a white-passing group, at least to a certain extent, as a way to recognize their privilege.

Certain Latinx families intentionally move towards white communities with the idea of 'bettering' their status and their families since they associate 'whites' with higher social and economic statuses and with access to opportunities through social connections as aforementioned (Vasconcelos, 1926; Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Having the ability to enter these white communities with zero to no trouble becomes a privilege for white-passing Latinx people because of their navigating abilities and non-problematic outcomes, they are not singled out or discriminated against as someone with non-white passing abilities would.

Jaime, age 25, states "it's hard to fit in and my grandma always told me I was Hispanic, but I've noticed that I've felt out of place... I fit in the American culture just not all the way," claiming that he does not completely feel as he belongs to Anglo American culture, but into an alternative tier within it, a third space.

A multitude of U.S. born Latinx people have similar shared experiences because of their unique positionality in this country. For example, first-generation Latinx, who hold cultural traditions close to the family of origin (Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Uruguay, etc.) whereas the further generation one is, the more distant people can become, this is a case-by-case scenario. American Anglo-centric culture and assimilation play a huge influence.

Liam, age 27, mentions "I have learned to just create my own community where I am both white passing and a Latino and sometimes I get looks," as a result of his experience as a white-passing Latinx individual who is

often strangely criticized as he feels misjudged by two cultures, Anglo-whites and Latin Americans.

I remember growing up thinking to myself 'where do I fit in?' because I felt like I was part of two cultures that I did not completely identify with. I understood white privilege at a much older stage in my life, once I was more mature and I began to organize the way the world around me worked. I saw myself as a one of many individuals with a peculiar lens, having my own alternative space made up of mixed realities felt like home. As Bhabha (1994, 1996) and Anzaldúa (1984) explain, third space is beyond a place to fit in, it is a place of growth and transformation. Feminist theory also adds a component of resistance as it emphasizes existing for the purpose of new creations, living our 'truths' unapologetically.

Non-White Passing Group

In the interviews conducted with the 'non-white passing' group (made up of 6 participants total) three major themes were found. **The first one was the acknowledgement of being treated differently than their lighter skin (white-passing) counterparts.** All participants in this group said they were aware of how they were treated by society in terms of racist negative behavior received from people. Participants gave some examples of how they felt differentiated and/or 'Othered' in various contexts.

Leo, age 24, said “I remember landing at a [Texas] airport and I could feel the eyes of dozens of white folks staring at me as I walked down the aisle... it was very uncomfortable, I felt out of place.”

Leo mentions that he was at a predominately white area in the state of Texas and it became a culture shock as it was his first time in that state. Many times, participants experienced the feeling of being “out of place,” as a result from the surrounding environment they found themselves to be in, similar to Leo, Robert, and Ricky also discuss about placement.

Robert, age 18, describes “the whole time there [Nevada] I just felt judged, even though no one was saying anything to me... maybe because I was so used to Southern California.”

Robert stated that he could feel white people staring at him as he navigated through Nevada and he believes it is because he is the darkest member of his family in terms of complexion. Ricky’s experience happened at a dining restaurant in California, while Luis and Robert were while traveling to other states.

Ricky, age 28, gives his perspective on the issue by saying, “there was this dude who wouldn’t really help my table out and he would talk to my friend more because he’s white... I felt like he didn’t want to interact with me, it was very obvious.”

In Ricky’s situation, there was action being taken from the waiter discreetly not attending him – subtle racism – that he realized was happening. Stella on the

other hand provides a retelling that has underlying themes of colorism, especially those that emphasize lighter skin as the ultimate beauty standard. Many of which are seen in mass media by multiple outlets and all types of groups of people like clubs, committees, and organizations – an example is *Televisa*, the popular and controversial export television franchise watched by thousands of Latina/o/x and Latin Americans.

Stella, age 21, recalls “my aunt would say that my sister had really pretty skin, calling her ‘blanquita’ [white] while I being the darker skinned, didn’t receive any praise... my aunt would say that I had big round eyes, that was my compliment.”

Jesus describes a time where he was judged at his high school and it became apparent that he was thought of as inferior simply for being brown.

Jesus, age 18, tells us “when I was in high school, the counselor wanted to put me in ESL (English as a second language) just because I am Latino, she didn’t even know me.”

Lastly, Rich gave us a very thoughtful insight of his perception regarding colorism and the way he views it, especially by giving it a name. Rich is aware of his *conocimiento* due to his personal experiences.

Rich, age 22, gives us his thoughts on the subject, “I feel like there are other Mexicans who judge other Mexicans that are darker than they are so they want to look down, I guess what I call ‘brown scaling’ so the browner you are, the [more] discriminatory actions you might face.”

Calling someone 'blanquita' as a pseudonym for "bonita" (pretty) and associating that with beauty, as stated by Stella, has been a common yet discreet formula of the colonial legacy of effects of white supremacy within the Latinx community. The less 'indio' (indigenous) you appear, the better. This is historically due to the racist motives brought by Anglo-Europeans and U.S. imperialism who discriminated against hundreds of indigenous tribes across Latin America (Gómez, 2000; Robinson & Ward, 1995; Fernandes, 2017). We can still see this trend being mirrored in *telenovelas* or soap operas. The protagonist is usually a light-skin individual while the villain tends to be a dark-skin person with features described like those of 'indios' (Stab, 1959; Dawson & Quiros, 2014).

Being aware of the difference in treatment can be difficult to digest but important to acknowledge when it comes to creating support groups and opportunities. More often than not, many people are discriminated against solely based on appearance. Other notable forms include speech (language), name, gender, and so forth however colorism specifically is within the community, like Rich's example. We can examine all of their experiences and see that they have been aware of all of these racist situations due to the color of their skin. In many cases it is colorism, and in all cases, it is racism, like in Jesus and Ricky's examples. I know growing up for myself, I constantly received what I perceived as compliments from family and complete strangers, being *güerito*, which means white or blonde looking as a good physical trait, associated with being "attractive"

and an understanding that opportunities will be more readily available which will most likely result in a better life experience in general.

The second theme was combating identity crisis while facing society's assumptions/expectations. Identity crisis is very popular among Latinx communities because we find ourselves in a distinctive situation. We are living in a country that has a dominant Anglo culture while we struggle to maintain our own traditions – our families cultural traditions – which increases the notion of ‘not belonging’ (Rivera-Santiago, 1996). Society's expectations are often based off things like phenotypes and stereotyping groups of people, for example, assigning Latinx ‘brown people’ as Spanish speakers is problematic because not all Latinx individuals learned the language. Placing groups of people into categories we “think,” they belong in is assuming we know about their culture when we do not.

Participants disclosed their specific experiences as they tried to come to sense with their own belonging and identity as Latinx individuals. Identity crisis came along when they felt like they did not belong due to being born or raised in the United States but having culture and family background from another country. This typically means infusing or intermixing both cultures (or a multitude) and it closely relates to the concept of third space as it seeks a unique area of coexisting.

Robert, age 18, explains “Culture wise I don’t feel like I fit in, yeah I like some Spanish music but for the most part I am very Americanized even though I have darker skin, people just think I’m super Mexican.”

Robert compares two cultures he is a part of as a way to demonstrate that he has trouble fitting into the American white culture and always will because he’s not ‘white-passing’ although he embraces his *mestizaje* by acknowledging that he enjoys both cultures (Mexican and American).

Stella, age 21, mentions, “my friends would make fun of me because of how I say certain words in English, I know they’re just messing around... people always assume that I speak Spanish, I mean I do, but they assume just because ‘I look Mexican’; I guess,” as an example of how she perceives society to view her skin complexion.

Often, first-generation people speak fluent English with emphasis on certain words not being pronounced in the ‘white’ way, meaning we simply speak the language how it comes naturally. However, others point it out as ‘not white enough’ or missing the standard white accent like in Stella’s case. All of the participants in this group felt that people assumed they spoke Spanish simply by their physical appearance (brown skin). Although all six of them do, it still implies racial judgement as this same idea is the opposite for the white-passing group.

Another example of how some participants felt they endured were assumed judgements is that often, they would not be taken seriously.

Rich, age 22, tells us a similar encounter to Jesus from the first theme, “in high school they made me take English as a second language (ESL) courses because I was ‘brown-looking’, even though I was born here and I grew up with English and Spanish, all my other friends didn’t have to take them [ESL classes].”

As people of color, others like Anglo-whites or anyone who feels superior try to take our agency away by instilling their own thoughts and telling us what we are and what we are not – speaking for us (Spivak, 1988; Boylorn, 2006; Jago, 2002). Participant Leo tells us about his encounters in academia as a person of color.

Leo, age 24, said, “there were a few times that white folks spoke down to me, like if I didn’t have the capacity to understand or as if I was a child – they didn’t see me at the same level as my peers – I feel like it has to do with me being brown and Latino,” validating his perception, racism can be shown anywhere, even in higher institutions where we are taught to be inclusive of all cultural backgrounds and ideas.

The way I experience identity crisis may be completely different than someone in the non-white passing group. However, we all inhabit our own place to belong and negotiate with outside perceptions to embrace an identity we can relate to. All the examples mentioned by this group demonstrate how Latinx find themselves navigating through society and pushing away from the boxes they are put in by white idealist logic which stems from racist ideologies (Solorzano &

Delgado Bernal, 2001). When we look back at whiteness and colorism we are able to see that these racist practices stem from the ideas of preserving 'white' purity and making other's seem lesser than human – things like the slave trade, Jim Crow laws in the 70's, up to today, we see high incarceration rates and high unemployment rates for Latinx and African Americans (Boatright-Horowitz et al., 2012).

The third theme was having pride in their Latina/o/x culture regardless of skin complexion and family cultural background. The idea of being prideful of family culture is one that sometimes matures with time in adulthood, especially as we piece together all the triumphs and struggles that the Latinx culture has endured in the U.S. throughout history. As bilingual children learning to share two cultures that do not always intermix (Anglo and Latin American) and developing our philosophical senses of who we are, we can lose autonomy of our cultural background and pride for reasons like supremacist ideologies, trying to fit in with groups, or due to the fact that Chicano and Latinx literature and histories are not commonly taught in the K-12 educational systems. It is important to acknowledge that as a minority group in a diverse country, community building and pride are essential to support *la raza* (our people) and encourage each other to learn about our own culture. Community building and networking is one of the many ways that we connect as first-generation Latinx, it is a way to learn from each other while succeeding in places of white supremacy not made for us to thrive. Robert begins by telling us about his perception of

progress as a Latino living in the U.S. through the process of cultural assimilation to Anglo culture:

Robert, age 18, says “I don’t think we should abandon Mexican culture, but we need to adapt to American culture... at least learn the language to progress.”

Participant Ricky adds the idea of instead, embracing living in a hybrid culture by pointing out bilingualism, a common trait among first-generation Latinx.

Ricky, age 28, says “I’m pretty comfortable in my culture, I love being bilingual and being both Mexican-American.”

Being able to hold pride of our family’s country of origin is excellent, and to bring that forth to the U.S. as a catalyst for our communities is even better, Leo recalls the moment his ideology changed.

Leo, age 24, describes “my trip to Mexico... I was able to reconnect with my roots and I was able to de-assimilate myself... before I would tell my family I was assimilated and I was American [anything related to Mexico] wasn’t part of me anymore.”

Furthering the notion of Latinx cultural pride, Rich discloses about his family and indigenous roots:

Rich, age 22, mentions “I’m not ashamed, I truly believe our culture is something special... not only are we separated from the old world, which is Europe, Africa and Asia, but we also have our own set of heritage and

culture... My father speaks 3 languages, he speaks Spanish, English and his native tongue, *Mixtec* from Oaxaca [Mexico].”

In the end, our families and their cultural aspects are practices that stay with us as a reminder of where we come from. Jesus recalls what being Latino means to him, values embraced and engraved in our character.

Jesus, age 18, tells us “I’m prideful because of all the things being Latino has taught me, listening to others, being caring and understanding, family oriented, don’t be materialistic, help others in your community, try to advocate for resources for your community.”

As a white passing Latinx, I can identify still with the non-white passing participants in that I also dealt with identity crisis which often meant doubting my own family cultural values and at times I did not want to be labeled Mexican due to all the negative media attention our community receives. Growing up I was confused about who I was and what exactly my family culture was, but now as an adult I am able to reflect back on all of our family traditions and I am proud to be Latinx. There’s an appreciation that grows within for our family, but it is only after learning our complex history, about the immigrant experience, the racism and skepticism that our brown people face while transitioning and living in the U.S., it brings me great joy and pride to be part of such a hard-working and intensely rich cultural community. All participants shared positive reasons of why they feel appreciative of their Latinx roots and identity, demonstrating that knowledge of our culture is immensely important to understand and comprehend our stories –

struggles and achievement – that are often shared by many as a communal sentiment. Despite the U.S. and Latin American media imposes so many unjust biases about Latinx, there is an overall appreciation of our culture and upbringing once internalization is dealt with and racialization understood at the individual level.

White-Passing and Non-White Passing

The first overlapping theme among all 10 participants included the idea that Latina/o/x are portrayed with negative associations in United States media. All participants mentioned that Latinx people are typically given stereotypical roles in movies or television which in turn creates a false assumption about that group. This practice purposely perpetuates negative stereotypes, a cycle of dishonest and inaccurate representation. In early 2019, Latina actress and producer, America Ferrera, gave a TEDx talk about the roles she was offered as an aspiring young Latina trying to successfully land leading roles in Hollywood. She was often seen as too fat, ugly, and dark [skinned] by most white directors and producers (Ferrera, 2019). It's no wonder U.S. Americans in general believe Latinx are *cholos* or gangbangers if males and/or bound to get pregnant if females when our triumphs are belittled or ignored, and stereotypes are heightened as shown over and over by U.S. media (Cadena, 2007; Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2017; Brown, et al., 2018).

Jesus, age 21, draws attention on the commonalities associated with Latinx people in the U.S., such as immigration, “we are perceived

negatively because of immigration issues, [the media] make us look like the bad guys when most people [immigrating to the U.S.] just want better opportunities.”

Jesus is referring to ‘the American dream’ a long-time misconception that belongs to all cultures in the U.S. not just Latinx. However, this fairytale of ‘American dream’ becomes difficult to achieve if you are a person of color due to all the unfair treatment and white idealistic powers in place meant to disadvantage people of color. Despite the negative media attention placed on the Latinx community, participants are aware of the hard-work and dedication produced by the Latinx culture.

Maria, age 25, mentions “we are a fast-growing population and they fear us... you don’t really see homeless Latinos asking for money, instead they’ll sell fruit or flowers on the street.”

She emphasizes resilience and honest work ethic formed by the Latina/o/x community as a means to survive and provide for families but also as a cause for pride.

Jaime, age 25, makes another point by saying “it’s not that we don’t want to be rich and achieve all of our goals, but as Latinos we don’t get [the same] opportunities as other races like white kids.”

Jaime’s statement ties into the race-class system (based on household income) and targets communities that for example, receive more funding from the

government while others remain in poverty perpetuated by government cycles to maintain the same socio-economic levels in those communities.

Leo, age 24, mentions “when I’m in the classroom [or] meetings people treat me like I’m less than, [as if] I need to be educated because of the fixed perception they have of Latinos... when I [had] short hair, people started looking at me different, like I was more professional, supposedly... long hair is seen as rebellious.”

Institutionalized racism is not a new topic, Leo claims many instances where he is still treated as less than due to his skin color and even physical appearance not being at par to white ideological standards.

Stella, age 21, states “if you have an accent you’re categorized as a Latino... your complexion is a big factor in it, being darker, the typical Hispanic being of a darker complexion according to the U.S... memes [they say] if you’re wearing this, then you’re Mexican, for example the crocodile boots, those people are Mexican.”

Recalling humorous and popular memes on social media, Stella tells us about the stereotypes she finds in regard to Latinos.

Ricky, age 28, says, “with this new president... [we] need to be kicked out, children are being lost, supposedly we’re stealing jobs and [involved in] drug trafficking... if all these people support Trump for all that stuff, there must be quite a few people that feel that way.”

Ricky provides an insight with a political perspective by recounting his thoughts on the influence President Trump has over millions of Americans.

Liam, age 27, describes “super stereotypical and generalist, lazy Mexican, free loading, no paying taxes, immigrant illegals.”

Liam gives a list of stereotypes produced by social U.S. media and Leo, as mentioned, adds real-life examples of what these stereotypes have caused him to experience in many formal and informal spaces.

Participants were aware of the various forms of racism and stereotypes regarding Latina/o/x implied in many television series, shows and movies including news reports, radio, and web articles. As someone who also recalls seeing American Indians as the villains in many U.S. cowboy franchises like *The Battle of Elderbusch Gulch* (1913) and *Stagecoach* (1939), these are media messages that begin to form in our minds as realistic ideas about people of color (Young, 2015). We begin to imply that the darker you are in complexion, the closer you are to being uncivilized. This idea grown from *the castas*, purposely made to create separation and distinctions between Anglo Europeans and others unlike them (Quijano, 1993; Grosfoguel, 2004). Today, we see these forms of subtle racism or institutionalized racism in places like big firms, corporations, and higher institutions, as well as blue collar workplaces and spaces. U.S. media has the privilege to manipulate news and convert stories into “fake news,” or news without authentic factual evidence as a political or racial tactic to harm communities of color (Bovet & Makse, 2019).

A second theme found among all participants was that they all feel comfortable “in their own skin” referring to who they are (character) and physical appearance. The data is imperative as it suggests a perspective of how Latinx people feel in terms of skin color, they take pride showcasing their *mestizaje* complexion and how that is portrayed within their own families and communities. All participants deliberately said they were happy with being themselves and fitting in their own version of a third space culture to a certain extent, and graciously identify themselves as Latina/o/x, for example, Mexican American, Hispanic, Latina, *Mexicano*, Mixto/Mixed, etc.

Participant Ricky, age 28, says, “I am glad to be Latino, I love my culture and I wouldn’t want to trade it for any other.”

Ricky proudly discusses the cultural traditions that he enjoys as a Latino like eating *conchas* (Mexican sweet bread) with hot chocolate and *pozole* (traditional Mexican dish) on Christmas Eve.

Liam, age 27, also mentions “even though I may look white to some, I have relatives of all skin colors... I love my Latino family and they accept me for who I am.”

Liam talks about acceptance as a way to show that his family is supportive and *familia* (family) will always matter despite all having different skin tones.

Rich, age 22, says “I would never hide away from what I am, I was born in Anaheim and grew up in Santa Ana and those two regions are really Mexican-American oriented... they taught me Mexican history, Spanish

history, I learned Spanish songs, Mexican culture... I love my culture and I would never be ashamed of it, it's something that belongs to me."

With much pride, Rich explains his experiences growing up in California and how that contributed to his Mexican American culture.

Maria, age 25, describes "I feel comfortable in my skin, I feel like I completely belong in my culture... I have a lot of roots just being born in Mexico that I just can't shake that off and I know that about myself, I think [sometimes] when you're little you try to hide it because some kids are mean I guess because they have these preconceptions or something, but as I grew older I said no, that's awesome, I'm an immigrant, first-generation, I'm going to be successful, pride."

Maria talks about her thoughts as a young girl not wanting to be associated with her Mexican culture while gradually maturing and pridefully loving herself.

Jesus, age 21, says "Family was always important growing up... I was raised to love yourself the way you are and if you don't know who you are then time will tell [who you will become]."

Jesus, above and Stella below, both point out aspects about accepting yourself and learning to stay connected with your family culture, a Latina/o/x belief engraved by family tradition.

Stella, age 21, says "I'm half Salvadorian and half Mexican but I grew up more with the Mexican culture, I would go to Mexico, I speak Spanish..."

I've always been connected to that side, what I eat, the way I talk, it's a daily thing."

Similar to Maria, Jaime felt some shame growing up knowing he was Latinx due to the stereotypes portrayed in television. Demonstrating the deep impact and influence that U.S. media has on Latinx individuals growing up in America. As stated by the participants, we are much more complex than these portrayed stereotypes and it essentially affects our identity.

Jaime, age 25, tells "I am who I am, I never gave in to peer pressure to fall into trends or anything like that... when I was little, I wasn't as proud especially because of the stereotypes I saw in cartoons and stuff like that."

Leo brings up a very real, current, and important value when he discusses the idea of constantly relearning how to battle white ideologies and subtle racism, everywhere we go as people of color.

Leo, age 24, mentions "I've overcome internalized racism luckily... you're always fighting [racism] ideologies in your mind, I know in my mind that stuff was taught to me when I was little, even in our families like when a baby is born *esta bonito porque esta blanquito* [they are cute because they're light skin], we learned to accept whiteness, it's an ongoing battle, like Anzaldúa says, we have various cultures in us, it's never over."

All participants had positive correlations when it came to Latina/o/x family views and bonding, the hybrid sensation of fully belonging in two cultures seemed to be a troubling piece for almost all participants. As described earlier, it's never easy

to find a balance between two curated cultures but we do it as a means to understand and accept our mixtures, our various *mestizaje*'s while valuing ourselves and our ancestors for those trajectories. Today we get the opportunity to acknowledge our ancestral triumphs and exist with a newfound purpose; the ideas of *Latindad* and the pride of being multi-layered individuals that share wide historical backgrounds of a variety of cultures, stories of brown pride and complexed Latina/o/x. Like several participants mentioned, I too had complications growing with accepting myself and my identity. As I grew older, I found myself and grew out of the shell that had me thinking negative ideologies about my own people, about Latina/o/x. Through personal experience and knowledge, I was able to rebirth a new perspective on what whiteness and white privilege meant to me and eventually value myself in conjunction with my Latino community which I proudly stand by with.

Discussion

As a Latino growing up with white-passing privilege, I saw the world through my own lens while assuming the way I navigated experiences was just like any other first-generation Latino growing up in Southern California. Little did I know, my existence was experienced very differently than many of my counterparts. My vision of the way people interacted was solely based on opportunistic approaches. I figured, for example, if someone cannot get a job, they are not trying hard enough or people that do not amount to measurable accomplishments, need better decision-making skills. I was completely blinded

from the capitalism engraved in America and unaware of racial concepts rooted and founded in American history that affected people of color and hundreds of Latinx today. My understandings of my own Latinx community were brief and underdeveloped. I did not know my own history and cultural background until higher education exposed me to that reality, much which is purposely kept hidden as it is deemed separate and not part of “American,” history, even though it is.

My experiences and those of my Latinx community inspired my research to further understand and acknowledge the depths of colorism, white privilege and treatment experienced amongst ‘white-passing’ and ‘non-white passing’ Latina/o/x individuals. In order to develop a concrete understanding of racial differences in the Latinx community – specifically in regard to colorism – I had to acknowledge the need of anticolonization learning and realize that these differences are still being perpetuated in today’s Latinx generations, often times unconscious of its effects. Many families, higher institutions, business corporations and communities still practice hegemonic, white racist ideologies that perpetuate these same notions of colorism, oblivious of where they stem from, their histories and foundations altogether. Additionally, I reviewed historical events pertaining to Latinx like the Chicano Movement, immigration, U.S. media, *las castas*, amongst scholarly work and interviewed Latinx participants who disclosed their personal experiences about being presumed ‘white-passing’ and

'non-white passing' to comprehend how these factors had affected their identity and measure their understandings of colorism and white privilege.

When we observe the basics of analyzing skin color, we can clearly recognize that there are no fundamental differences between light and dark-skinned Latinos. Physical differences trace back to literal pigmentation color and our eyesight perception as stated by Ronald E. Hall (2007) in, "*Media Stereotypes and 'Coconut' Colorism: Latino Denigration Vis-à-vis Dark Skin.*" Derived from human perception, these ideas of racism and discrimination based on skin color were founded on racist and power obscurities with the sole purpose to discriminate and separate communities, like the implications associated with 'white-passing' and 'non-white passing' Latinx (Hall, 2007). The stigmatization of dark skin versus the notion that light skin is linked with superiority is what has made all the difference.

Being that the United States is truly a nation full of diversity (i.e., people, cultures, languages) the variations of skin color present have created a categorization system, promoted by white-ethnic groups, to view non-white cultural groups like those in the Latinx community, based on their proximity to whiteness (Hall, 2007). Furthermore, because Anglo-American ethnic groups already dominate the culture in the United States, they not only benefit from the Latinx community falling into stereotypes, but they also cause a cycle of internalized racism to be perpetuated among the Latinx communities, within our

own people, by conditioning and pressing the idea that lighter skin is better in many aspects including social and economic status.

When we think of power structure, we can accept the fact that Anglo-Americans founded the white supremacist theme, which entails the concept of purity. In order to keep this 'white supremacist' concept functioning, colorism and racism towards dark-skinned groups like Latinx need to exist, the skin-color difference and the threat of mixture – brown and white mixing – has to be present (Hall, 2007). Besides dark skin color being associated with negative stereotypes, there is a huge correlation with lack of political and socio-economic power. For example, exploring a place like Puerto Rico and its American influence, we can significantly notice that most of the power is held by lighter-skinned people who have more European characteristics and less African phenotypes (Hall, 2007). This is an example of the power of colorism and whiteness theory imposed in a diverse region like Puerto Rico. Similar to my participants knowledge of being stigmatized by U.S. media and portraying brown people with negative connotations, many of them expressed their recalling of racism, colorism, and/or stereotyping experiences like not being acknowledged or imposing assumptions based on the color of their skin.

Moving forward, this study was effective on capturing the lived experiences of a variety of Latinx individuals who self-identified as 'white-passing' and 'non-white-passing' Latina/o/x. As aforementioned, the results were very prominent, and several themes aroused from both groups as well as

overlapping themes amongst all ten participants including myself. This study was successful in bringing forth awareness of racial categorization as well as foundations of *mestizaje* and the historical context of anti-Black sentiment in relation to racism and colorism, and lastly the complexities of Latina/o/x cultures. CRT and LatCrit theories were briefly discussed to answer both research questions and overall ideas concerning white-passing and non-white passing Latinx navigating the U.S. Intersectionality was intertwined with these mentioned theories as a way to acknowledge multiple factors – like socio-economic class, gender, sexual orientation, racial background, etc. – that effect perceptions and realities for Latinxs as well as to make sense of the eight themes founded from the participant interviews. As hypothesized, several participants spoke about instances where they experienced colorism which was tied to understanding *mestizaje* and common phrases like using the term *indio* (to refer to indigenous features) as a derogatory term for darker skinned people, from both family and non-family members. Language was another big concept verified by the experiences of the participants to which they exposed being assumed that they either spoke the language if non-white passing and questioned about it – ambiguity – if white-passing. Participants spoke about U.S. and Latin American media also causing a heavy influence on the already perpetuated stereotypes and sentiments in regard to colorism and they all agreed about U.S. negative media attention towards the Latinx community. Lastly, an overall concept grappled from all the social issues was a reflection on their own culture and

physical complexion, in order to capture their feelings, to which all responded positively to, encouraging the idea of being able to co-exist as hybrids, regardless of skin color, because our ethnicity and *Latinidad* brings us into a third space scenario full of our own truths and acceptance. Both groups shared similarities and differences in terms of their experiences contributing to their physical complexion which all derived from the notion of attempting to understand the foundations of racism in today's Latinx community.

While we have learned about the rise of the Latinx community in population numbers, we also learned and are constantly re-learning new ways to educate our own like realizing community-healing events or platforms (Anzaldúa, 1981) and adding scholars of color in academic literature. This way we share pride for brown skin – *la raza* – and mainly pride for belonging to the cultural identity associated with the Latinx cultural community. We become aware of stereotypes and we learn to live our everyday lives while unconsciously perpetuating racist ideas towards dark-skinned people as a norm. Research like this can open our minds in regard to how we view our communities and co-create a new vision for our future generations, a world where we can decolonize our histories and share our knowledge. A flabbergasting moment for me through this entire experience was that as a non-Black, white-passing Latinx person, practicing decolonization and antiracism meant acknowledging the duality of being both colonized and colonizer (due to my ethnicity and complexion). This grants me the ability to navigate the racial markers of the U.S. in a unique

fashion while using my privileges to do better; a continuous job to end racism. Today, we further examined the experiences and feelings of both 'white-passing' and 'non-white passing' Latinx individuals to validate their truths and explore a deeper understanding of their differences. We also recognized the generational trauma, experiences, and historical context from various Latinx individuals and most importantly we continue to heal and share knowledge as a community.

APPENDIX A:
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



May 10, 2019

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Expedited Review

IRB-FY2019-136

Status: Approved

Mr. Francisco Rodriguez Ramos and Prof. Liliana Gallegos
CAL - Communications
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Mr. Ramos and Prof. Gallegos:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Passing vs Non-Passing: Latinx Experiences and Understandings of Appearance Privilege" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The informed consent document you submitted is the official version for your study and cannot be changed without prior IRB approval. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended using the IRB Cayuse system protocol change form.

Your application is approved for one year from May 10, 2019 through May 10, 2020.

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