LATINAS NEGOTIATING BORDERS IN FORMAL EDUCATION: A DEEPER

SPECTRUM UNDERSTANDING OF THE MESTIZA

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the women in my family who came before me, who have

persevered against great odds so I could write this paper. Also, for the young women in

my family as they continue in their greatness, especially you, Magnolia Jane.

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Dear Girl, keep that arm raised! You have smart things to say!

– Rosenthal & Rosenthal

Thank you to the wonderful people in my life who believe I have smart things to say. I may not always believe you, but I will keep my arm raised.

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ABSTRACT

This micro-ethnography study was designed to identify and analyze the generational differences among Latinas within one family—my family—to understand the influence of formal education systems on our cultural affiliation and ethnic identity. The study design included data collection through informed consent, group *pláticas*, individual *pláticas*, and *testimonios* created by each participant.

The primary research question guiding this study was: How do Latinas' K–12 schooling experiences inform their ethnic identity development? The primary and secondary research questions of this study were reinforced by Chicana feminist epistemologies (Anzaldúa, 2015; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2020) and Borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 2012). Additionally, the five stages of racial cultural identity development were used by the participants to identify and communicate our ethnic identification before and after the study (Atkinson et al., 1993). Three themes emerged from the data and represented the experiences of the four participants. The three themes were fear of failure, feelings of not belonging, and teacher influence.

The findings highlight how Latinas negotiate the boundaries of their identity, influenced by their interactions with academic authority figures, by displaying how they respond to the interactions and how they perceive the interaction and themselves after.

The findings of this study add to the existing body of knowledge on Latinas' experiences in formal education and the impact on their cultural or ethnic identity. Implications for practice include considering the subtractive elements in the schooling

system and intentional training for educators in order for them to be aware of the negative side effects of assimilation and what they can do to authentically build on their students' cultural and ethnic assets (Martínez-Roldán, 2021; Valenzuela, 1999). Future research should continue uncovering the ways in which our education system and our educators influence students' cultural and ethnic identities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Picture a scrawny, black-haired, brown-eyed girl with tan skin from a hefty number of hours playing outdoors. She was always the youngest and shortest in her class. She is wearing an oversized t-shirt, probably adorned with neon paint splatter; a blue velvet headband that was her only Christmas gift that year, which hides the fact that she has not brushed her hair in months; faded blue jeans rolled up to show her scrunched socks; and white Keds—they have been stained since the first day she wore them because she got them muddy playing in a field. That girl was me, Araceli Garcia. It was my third-grade year, and I went by Sally just like I had every year. I sat in the second row of individual desks, second from the last, far from the whiteboard and closer to the teacher's desk. I was shy and nervous around authority figures and doubted most of my abilities. However, I was a rote machine. I could memorize anything, and I dominated the game "around the world" with our multiplication facts. I was always anxious to show my skill set in this area of memorizing surface-level facts because I knew my teacher did not like me, but I still desperately wanted to please her, or at least prove I was good at something. As much as I was confident with rote facts given to me by my teacher, I was terrified of critical thinking problems. Heaven forbid I should have thoughts or ideas of my own about how to solve a problem, much less share them out loud. I was terrified of being wrong and I had no idea how to even begin solving such problems. It was as if my teacher knew this when she called me to the board one day to answer a word problem.

On this sunny day with absolutely perfect weather, the teacher offered the class a second recess after we finished our math lesson. Our math activity required us to work quietly by ourselves on a worksheet after which we went over the problems one by one as

she called individuals up to the whiteboard to show the answer. Of course, I knew all the answers having to do with multiple math facts, but the last two were word problems. Nope, I was stumped. I did not ask for help. I would wait for some other student to show their work on the board and then I would figure it out.

That was my plan. Except this time, the teacher called on me for the last question. Instant panic and fear made every step to the board excruciating. I read the question out loud, "If you have a sphere and remove the center, what shape will you have?" I just stared at the board. I could feel everyone's eyes on me, and I started to tear up. The teacher said, "Now, don't cry about it, just think about it." There was no way I was going to answer the problem now; I was so scared, all thoughts vanished from my mind as I considered only my humiliation. My teacher then stated, "Well, we can't go outside until Sally gets this right." I heard every grunt and sigh as my frustrated peers lost patience. My teacher let me stand there without any prompts for what felt like an eternity. Eventually, even she realized it was unreasonable to keep everyone else from recess. She told me I could continue thinking about the problem outside while everyone played. I sat beside her and watched my friends play. A peer walked up to us and asked if he could help me. The teacher nodded. He pointed to the tire swing. "OH! A donut!" I got to go play.

It was evident to me that I had no power in that classroom. I had no voice or thoughts of my own. I was only able to regurgitate what was explicated to me. I was not valued enough to help or encourage critical thought. I felt that this White authority figure saw me as different and consequently treated me differently. She made me feel as if I did not belong in her classroom. From my perspective, she held the knowledge and thus, her

perception of and interactions with me greatly influenced my perception of myself and my abilities. I carried internalized perception with me for the remainder of my educational journey. It was only once I started my PhD program that I started realizing and questioning how I and other Latinas internalize our interactions with educators and the impact of those internalizations. This realization of educators' impact on our educational experience became a part of my worldview. I am reminded of Yamada's (2014) statement: "I don't know how to describe it, but it went from being here to being everywhere. It wasn't just a part of me anymore . . . it was now a part of everything" (p. 29).

When I began reading articles about Latinas empowering themselves and one another despite internal and external oppression, unfamiliar emotions associated with my racial identity arose. Concepts such as Chicana feminism, *testimonio* theory, and counter-spaces scratched away at my White-tinted glasses and gave me chills as I felt a mix of pride, strength, and anger. I related to the Latina and Chicana authors and as I read their work, I realized my emerging feelings of connection with my ethnicity were entangled with the lingering, familiar feelings of confusion, dissociation, or embarrassment at worst and indifference at best (Cantu, 2012; Dyrness, 2007; Lapayese, 2013).

I noticed the transition to a place of Latina power begins later in life for some of us, if at all. In the formal education system, young Latinas often feel invisible or that they do not belong and some Latinas, like me, do not identify with their Latinidad until they are provided a Latina education, or become educadas (to be educated; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006), and connection begins (Cooper, 2012; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Parker, 2014). Belonging is something I searched for everywhere except within my own cultural and

ethnic community. But there it was, in the research—Latinas feeling what I was unable to describe when I was surrounded by my White friends, in White private and public educational institutions, who loved and befriended me—a sense of aloneness and insecurity. I did not belong; I felt it. I did not have belonging or relatedness, or what I coined *belongingness*. Belongingness is the feeling of being a welcome part of the space you are in and feeling secure with the people in that space. I did not have belongingness with the White community, but I also realized I did not have belongingness with the Latina community.

The existing research reveals there is a continuum of emotions surrounding Latinas' experiences in formal education. Latinas' stories range from being and feeling rejected and isolated in the school setting to Latina scholars drawing strength from their oppressive schooling experiences. Most Latina scholars and authors describe being proud of their language and accents; they assert their Latina power and have a clear understanding of their assets as women of color (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzmán, 2012; Fiol-Matta, 1996; Perez Huber, 2010).

Latinas have supported one another by creating communities, such as UT Austin's Mujeres, Research for the Educational Achievement of Latin@s (REAL), Madres Unidas, and the Adelante Project, to name a few (Cantu, 2012; Dyrness, 2007; Ek et al., 2010; Lapayese, 2013; Martinez et al., 2015). The need to build a community was even evident among my own Latina doctoral peers and caused us to create Not This Fierce Latina (NTFL), our own peer support and writing group. The power to recover our dignity that was once denied grew as we joined in community and listened to our "counter-stories" (Dyrness, 2007, p. 266). As we listened, awareness of the ways in

which we had been silenced influenced our "coming to speech" (Dyrness, 2007, p. 264). We transformed into metizaje, the hegemonic definition coming from Mestizo, meaning "a person of mixed blood" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1). Anzaldúa (2015) reclaimed the term to describe a Latina of mixed heritages and cultures who finds and redefines herself within the "cracks . . . [of the] fixed cement of disciplines and cultural beliefs, eventually overturning the cement slabs" (p. 73). I wish my 8-year-old self would have had NTFL.

As I was on the phone with Renee Bocanegra, peer and co-founder of NTFL, discussing what on earth our dissertations would be about—other than Latinas—and reflecting on Ibram X. Kendi's text, we realized an interesting point. Kendi (2019), even in his youth, expressed himself with confidence and power when he addressed racism. He was always critical and assertive, and he always belonged with a group. Renee and I were amazed and wondered, why did we not come from a place of power? I wondered why I never had a group to which I could belong. "May we do work that matters. Vale la Pena, it's worth the pain" (Anzaldúa, 2005, p. 102).

I can now say with pride, this matters to me—being a Latina in education, coming from a history of limited education matters to me. Spreading awareness of the strong assets Latinas bring into any space matters to me. I wanted to dive into this topic with conviction and urgency after recognizing how many stories needed to be told. I knew it would be a struggle. Discussing unpleasant experiences of isolation, alienation, exclusion, disregard, and racism would be painful, but it would be worth the pain.

When writing this dissertation, I was in a space where my Latinidad was becoming a more significant aspect of my identity; my cultural and ethnic identity was

slowly becoming a prominent part of my positionality. My Latina feminist, brown-tinted

glasses were on. I thought this dissertation would be mine and an independent journey. I

then began to understand that strength grows in a counterspace, a space where Latina

women can gather and develop a theory collectively, push against homogenous agendas,

and ignite lasting internal and external change (Dyrness, 2007). With my Latina feminist

perspective and in collaboration with other Latinas in my family, I chose to closely

analyze the impact of messaging in our formal education, our experiences as Latinas, and

our responses through our educational journeys. Together we took this opportunity to

renegotiate the borders placed around us through our experiences, pushing out from the

cracks "[of the] fixed cement of disciplines and cultural beliefs" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 73)

to begin the process of creating a new category of identity and becoming a new hybrid of

metizaje that did not fit within traditional expectations and perceptions of what it is to be

Latina. We could push against "being too Mexican or not Mexican enough" as we

"unchain[ed] identity from meanings that can no longer contain it" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p.

73). Our first step in this process was to talk about our experiences in our formal

schooling journeys as Latinas of Mexican descent, to share memories that had been so

significant that we carried them with us and allowed them to shape who we were.

Statement of the Problem

As early as the 16th century, the biological pigment of our human bodies

determined the perception of our capabilities, morals, and intelligence, and therefore

determined our belonging. Darker-skinned Mexicans, for instance, were oppressed and

subjected to a less-than identity by the Spaniards (Ferreira, 2014). Societal influence

continues to "contribut[e] to stereotype[s] that place darker skinned people in an inferior

role on the unsound basis of biology and genetics" (Ferreira, 2014, p. 13). It was

unnecessary to know someone, or even speak to that person, to determine their worth.

Dark skin equaled inferiority. As Mexicans became Mexican Americans through war and

revolution, discrimination continued. Negative stereotypes entangled their deep roots

around the heart of this infant country and choked out Latinx truths. Gonzalez (1990, as

cited in Ferreira, 2014) stated, "Because of differences in language, culture, and

appearance, Anglo Americans viewed Mexicans as 'lazy, shiftless, jealous, cowardly . . .

backward and immoral'" (p. 10). There are umbrella beliefs that if a person does not

learn English quickly, it must be due to laziness. If a person does not subscribe to the

"American dream," they are shiftless. Yet, if a person does subscribe to the "American

dream," they are stealing the rightful employment opportunities of Americans and are

jealous of what Americans have. If people do not adhere to the same morals and beliefs

as the mainstream, they are backward and immoral. This deficit thinking and the resulting

actions of intentional, cruel discrimination are evident in moments of U.S. history, such

as the Bracero Program in 1942, Operation Wetback in 1950, and the more recent

construction of the Border Wall. As I studied the history of my ancestors, I became

heartbroken and felt helpless. I learned of moments of deliberate discrimination and

refusal of basic rights, hate crimes, and the intentional withholding of protection and

quality education (Ferreira, 2014). This history played a role in the development of the

U.S. educational system.

  Ferreira (2014) wrote that "Mexicans were considered inferior, therefore,

Americanization through education would be a solution to mold them into a population

that spoke English, shared the same religion, dressed like the mainstream, and were

trained for particular occupations" (p. 10). Classrooms became training grounds for historical, academic, and social truths that replaced Latinx truths, rather than offering a deeper understanding of the students' cultural identities. Mainstream schooling with the intention of socialization and assimilation can cause clashes in the identity of Latinx students that, if not addressed, will negatively affect their personal identity and cultural or ethnic identity (Ferreira, 2014; Patthey-Chavez, 1993). If Latinx students continue feeling inadequate in the classroom or are demotivated by the continuous pressure to conform to the U.S. mainstream through the subtractive schooling processes of "de-identification, or de-Mexicanization" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 161) and through educators' oppressive behaviors, the divide between teacher and student will extend. This divide will then hinder the opportunity for any kind of relationship, much less a collaborative one. This ripple effect of the discriminatory history upon which our educational system is founded extends to the fractured relationships educators have with their Latinx students that then potentially influence these students' academic and cultural or ethnic development (Brantmeier, 2006; Ferreira, 2014; Lapayese, 2013; Olson, 2002; Patthey-Chavez, 1993; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the interactions between educators and students of Mexican ancestry, specifically female students who identify as Latinas, to uncover areas where educators' expectations informed the identity of the Latinas. I conducted this investigation through a critical micro-ethnography of the ethnic identity development of four Latinas within the same family—my family. I used *pláticas* as a data collection strategy to gain insight into the life-narratives of the women in my family.

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Through storytelling via *plática*, we learned more about each of our interactions with educators and their impact on our ethnic identity formation. Additionally, individual *testimonios* created by each woman in the family provided a creative outlet for us to symbolize our experiences in formal schooling. It was my hope that these stories would provide insight into the impact of our experiences in the education system on our personal and cultural or ethnic identity.

Examining the impact of K–12 schooling in the United States on Latinas' ethnic identity development is significant for several reasons. With approximately 84% of public-school teachers in the United States identifying as White and only 6% identifying as Hispanic between 1999–2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021), it is safe to say that Latinas, alongside other ethnic groups, go through formal schooling with most of their teachers and authority figures coming with varied epistemologies and funds of knowledge that differ from their own (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzmán, 2012). The "subjectively additive and objectively subtractive" nature of our schooling systems simultaneously provides skills and knowledge while reducing the significance of the cultural or ethnic assets the students already own (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 162). Educators, being predominately White, may not have the insight or training required to be culturally responsive, resulting in missed opportunities for Latinas to identify and build upon the knowledge and intelligence they have developed in their homes and from their families (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999).

Although most educators today acknowledge the importance of using background knowledge to build students' academic skills, Latinas' funds of knowledge are not often explicitly addressed by educators or drawn upon as a resource (N. González et al., 2005;

Valenzuela, 1999). Overlooking, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the specific strengths and resources Latinas bring into the classroom can alter their ethnic identity development. This can then translate to Latinas not valuing their own racial/ethnic identity and funds of knowledge (Valenzuela, 1999). When you do not see your family history and culture as valuable you stop identifying with it and you then begin to forget it, allowing hegemonic narratives to replace your own. This process of "assimilat[ing] subtractively" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 84) is potentially muting Latinas' voices in the school system. I designed my study to contribute to the discussion on the development of Latinas' ethnic identity that is happening within our classrooms, or the lack thereof. The findings of this study can also be beneficial to educators as they reflect on their own influence over the personal and ethnic identity development of their students. This influence occurs through direct and indirect interactions, through the environment teachers create, and how they allow their biases to inform their pedagogy (Brantmeier, 2006; Ferreira, 2014; Lapayese, 2013; Olson, 2002; Patthey-Chavez, 1993; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999).

This study is also vital given its nuanced look at how multiple generations of Latinas might have perceived their ethnic identity differently given the time in history in which they attended school, among other contextual aspects. The existing literature, for instance, addresses the common forms of discrimination Latinas experience, such as low expectations, hyper sexualization, negative stereotypes, deficit thinking, and an outsider mentality based on language or social status (Cantu, 2012; Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012; Chang, 2017; Cooper, 2012; Daisy & José-Kampfer, 2002; Díaz de Sabates, 2007; Dyrness, 2007; Ek et al., 2010; Fiol-Matta, 1996; Lapayese, 2013;

Martinez et al., 2015; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Perez Huber, 2010; Rolón-Dow, 2004).

Though Latinas of previous generations might easily see their experience in the current

literature—they can relate to the stories of direct racism—Latinas of more recent

generations might not be able to make personal connections to these forms of

discrimination. The existing research also does not address the continued impact on

Latinas' perception of self throughout generations. I designed my study in an attempt to

address this gap in the literature by identifying how the direct discrimination faced by

some Latinas in our family's history can inform the perception of self-worth, confidence,

and capabilities of younger generations of Latinas who have not experienced racial/ethnic

discrimination directly.

Most importantly, the findings of this study were beneficial to my family. We had

an opportunity to tell our schoolyard and classroom stories and reflect on how these

experiences influenced the way we perceive ourselves as Latinas and how those

perceptions have directed our beliefs and behaviors. We allowed ourselves to be

vulnerable as we shared our classroom struggles to begin the process of redefining our

identity. We discovered a strength within ourselves individually and collectively that we

may not have seen without the opportunity this research provided. The findings of this

study were beneficial to me as I learned and continue to learn more about myself through

the stories of my family.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Latinas' K–12 schooling experiences inform their ethnic identity

   development?

2. How did interactions with educators, and the education system, influence the ethnic identity development of Latinas within one family over three generations?

    a. How did these interactions compare given the distinctive times in history in which the Latinas attended school and the Latinas' expectations for the role educators and the education system should take in shaping their ethnic identities?

    b. How did the Latinas negotiate borders in their K–12 schools?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I used for this study drew on Chicana feminist epistemologies (CFE; Anzaldúa, 2015; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2020), Borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 2012), and the five stages of racial cultural identity development (Atkinson et al., 1993). These three theories complement each other and provided the necessary foundation from which to ground this study, given the research questions posed.

CFE allowed for the use of methodological tools and the validation of cultural and gendered assets that felt authentic and natural when learning from the life experiences of the women in my family as we engaged and shared stories through *pláticas*, provided space to acknowledge cultural intuition, and developed *testimonios* that reflected our individual and collective voices (Calderón et al., 2012). Borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 2012) similarly encouraged an appreciation of the cultural funds embodied by the Latinas in my family but further enabled us to identify any colonization or oppression present within our experiences in the school setting. I used Atkinson et al.'s (1993) identity

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model to analyze our perceptions of our cultural or ethnic identity and feelings both

before and after the study. This framework influenced the design and practice of the

study to address the research questions. A more detailed discussion of the theoretical

framework is provided in Chapter III.

Brief Overview of Methodology

Qualitative research is a naturalistic approach that involves interpreting

phenomena through the meaning assigned by its participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative researchers make meaning of social problems through the voices of the

participants. The purpose of this micro-ethnography was to identify how Latinas' K–12

schooling experiences informed their ethnic identity development. I used a critical

ethnographic approach to "expose issues such as power, hegemony, and advocacy . . .

and address inequities" for the four Latina participants in their formal education

(Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 94). I based the study's design on previous ethnographies

written as narratives with a storytelling approach. I collected the stories told by my

mother, my sister and myself, and my sister's daughter (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The

research design for this qualitative study called for informed consent, group *pláticas*,

individual *pláticas*, *testimonios*, and a self-rating using Atkinson et al.'s (1993) five

stages of racial cultural identity development. An in-depth discussion of the study's

methodology is provided in Chapter III.

Key Terms

Chicana – "Often used to refer to U.S. born women of Mexican or Latin

American descent who identify with a collective history of oppression and pride

connected to a political consciousness with its origins in El Movimiento or the Mexican American civil rights movement" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 7).

Chingona – Previously used to shame women who might have come off as hard-headed or difficult, but now the term is breaking stereotypes. It is a way to tackle aspects of feminism within Latina culture by turning this once-derogatory term into a positive word of empowerment (Gonzalez, 2016).

Coconut – Brown on the outside and white on the inside.

Counter-stories – Stories told by a minoritized group to express and share their experiences and knowledge (Dyrness, 2007).

Hispanic – "A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture of origin" (Santiago-Rivera, 2004, p. 6).

Latinas – Individuals who identify as female and of Mexican or Latin American descent.

Messages – Explicit or implicit behaviors, perceptions, or attitudes offered toward another.

Mestizja/Mestiza – Anzaldúa (2015) reclaimed the term to describe a Latina of mixed heritages and cultures who finds and redefines herself within the "cracks . . . [of the] fixed cement of disciplines and cultural beliefs, eventually overturning the cement slabs" (p. 73).

Muxerista – A woman-identified Chicana/Latina who considers herself a feminist or womanist.

Plática – "An expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160).

Testimonio – "A novel or novella-length narrative, produced in the form of a printed text, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts" (Beverly, 2008, p. 572).

Organization of Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into five chapters, each chapter highlighting various aspects of the topic and design. Chapter I began with an introductory narrative of my classroom experiences, followed by the problem statement where the historical context of Latinxs in the United States and in education was offered with a discussion of how Latinxs' ethnic identity development was shaped by the treatment they received as a community. What followed was the purpose of the study, research questions, and a brief overview of the theoretical framework and methodology, concluding with the significance of the study and key terms.

The literature review in Chapter II focuses on Latinas' personal experiences within society and formal schooling and how these experiences might influence their ethnic identity. Chapter II also provides background information on multiple identity models. In Chapter III, I provide a detailed description of the micro-ethnography methodology I used for this study. Chapter III also includes an explanation of how I selected the theoretical framework and how I used the three theories that made up the framework for the research.

In Chapter IV, I share the findings of the study. The chapter begins with my family's appreciation for education, includes participant profiles, and provides the thematic findings resulting from the participants' experiences. Chapter V includes a discussion of the findings, a discussion of the impact of our schooling experiences on our ethnic identity, and recommendations for future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes a review of the foundational literature that supported this study. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the perceptions of Mexicans throughout history and addresses the current situation of Americanization in the U.S. educational system. The section that follows focuses on educators' perceptions of their Latinx students as one of the side effects of the Americanization process in the education system. These perceptions inform educators' teaching practices and influence their interactions with their students. The final section contains a focus on the personal and ethnic identity development of Latinx students as a result of the experiences they have within the schooling system. The Texas State University library site, Google Scholar, EBSCO, and ProQuest Central were used to conduct this in-depth review of the literature surrounding the Latinx experience in formal schooling.

Historical Perceptions of Latinos of Mexican Descent in the United States

The purpose of this study was to explore how formal schooling experiences, including the education system and interactions with educators, influenced the ethnic identity of Latinas within one family. To understand the full significance of these interactions, the background and history of how Mexicans have been perceived must be reviewed. A brief overview of what Mexicans have experienced throughout history and how they have been perceived and treated is included here to shed light on the potential influence of the perceptions of Mexican students on educational systems and educator interactions with Mexicans or Latinx students.

Chapter I included a brief discussion of the negative stereotypes, such as lazy, shiftless, and immoral, placed on Mexicans throughout history (Ferreira, 2014). The

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following sections offer more insight into the discrimination experienced by Mexicans from the dominant society, beginning with the Spanish conquest over Mexico in the 16th century and ending with the *Lau v. Nichols* case and the Bilingual Education Act of 1974.

The Spanish Conquest Over Mexico

The Spanish conquest over Mexico in the 16th century highlighted the foundations of separation and the unfounded value placed on the color of one's skin and economic status. Buriel (1984) stated the racial caste system that encouraged the use of a deficit lens when thinking of Indigenous people led to them being perceived as impure and influenced actions that prevented dark-skinned Indians and Mestizos from rising to positions of power and authority. These historical roots are far reaching and have remained embedded throughout the development of the United States. When considering the act of "passing" as a White person, the pigment of an individual's skin, something over which they have no control, could potentially play a large part in their success or detriment. For light skinned Latinx individuals, their "passing" potential increases and the potential for discrimination has variations. The physical appearance of Latinxs can influence their assimilation into mainstream society. Latinx individuals who are light skinned have a possibility of fuller assimilation, which may allow them to enjoy more privileges that are not available to darker-skinned Latinx individuals (Carter, 2005). Assimilation and the privileges associated with skin color are likely to influence the ethnic identity development of a Latino or Latina (Quiros & Dawson, 2013). This was true in the 16th century and is still true to this day. It is important for educators to understand this critical aspect of ethnic development as it can allow practitioners to better understand the unique differences among their Latinx students (Carter, 2005).

The Texas Revolution of 1835

The information in this section comes from a social studies lesson (Benitez, 1996) and an Encyclopedia Britannica article (Wallenfeldt, 2020) that offered a timeline and important details about the Texas Revolution. After Mexico's separation from Spain, leaders of Mexico and the United States discussed U.S. settlers moving into the area of Tejas. During this time, Mexico abolished slavery and women had the right to vote and own land. By 1830, a growing number of American settlers were living in Tejas, and tension between the two governments grew. As the Anglo-Americans were insistent on bringing slaves into the territory, Mexico began prohibiting further immigration by U.S. citizens and established new presidios, military settlements, in the region to monitor customs practices. The colonists proposed that Texas become a separate Mexican State. As Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, a Mexican politician and general, took measures to strengthen and create a centralized government, the Anglo-Texan colonists planned their revolt. The Texas Revolution began in 1835 and discussion about Americans taking independence began.

In 1836, Tejas declared independence from Mexico and the Mexican Army retaliated and defeated the Americans at the Alamo near San Antonio. General Sam Houston led the Texans in the defeat of Santa Anna's army at the Battle of San Jacinto and the capture of Santa Anna. The Mexican Army retreated to Mexico City, ending the Texas Revolution. Texas was now an independent colony though Mexico refused to recognize this independence. As Anglo-American settlers inhabited Mexican territory, clear laws were established to assimilate them into Mexican culture, such as learning and using the dominant language. Mexico was not able to continue control over this occupied

area, as the Anglo-Americans exerted their ways of knowing as dominant. On Mexican land, and in an area that was mostly populated by Mexicans, Anglo-Americans established dominance without negotiation. Tejas became Texas, and the majority ethnicity conceded to the minority ethnicity. Texas continues to operate with this dominance over its majority ethnic group of Latinx individuals of Mexican descent, as evident in the socioeconomic and political discrimination that inform healthcare, employment opportunities, and education policies (Rivera-Santiago, 1996). These discriminations "play a significant role in the identity development of Latino youth" (Rivera-Santiago, 1996, p. 21).

Immigration Act of 1924

The Office of the Historian (n.d.) explained that the Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson Reed Act, limited the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States through a national origin quota. The Act implemented a literacy test that required immigrants over 16 years old to demonstrate basic reading comprehension in any language. It also increased the tax paid by new immigrants upon arrival and allowed immigration officials to exercise more discretion in making decisions over whom to exclude. Those who did not possess the valued knowledge or the money to pay the tax rate were meant to stay an outsider. The most basic purpose of the Immigration Act of 1924 was to preserve the stability of the country and the ideal of U.S. homogeneity. This ideal established the perception that different means unstable and different is unwelcome.

The Great Depression (1929–1939)

History.com Editors (2020) explained that after the stock market crash of 1929, steep declines in industrial output and employment began as failing companies laid off workers. By 1930, four million Americans could not find work, a number that had risen to six million in 1931. There was a rising number of homeless individuals. Severe droughts brought the "dust bowl," high winds and dust from Texas to Nebraska, killing livestock and crops. The dust bowl inspired a mass migration of people from farmland to cities in search of work. Franklin D. Roosevelt and The New Deal created jobs for 8.5 million people from 1935–1943. In 1935, Congress passed the Social Security Act, providing Americans with unemployment, disability, and pensions for old age. The Depression Era fueled the rise of extremist political movements, most notably the Nazi regime in Germany. Farm and domestic workers were not included in the 1935 Social Security Act. Rather than fire domestic workers, private employees could simply pay them less without legal repercussions.

During the Great Depression, many Mexican Americans, documented immigrants, or even native-born citizens were deported to Mexico to preserve employment for White Americans (Little, 2019). Latinx people of Mexican descent lived in constant fear of being rounded up, torn from their families, and sent to Mexico (Little, 2019). Large companies laid off numerous Mexican American employees following the "American jobs for real Americans" slogan endorsed by the president (Little, 2019). Mexican Americans were considered less than and expendable and this message was sent from government leaders. This acceptance of discrimination and ill treatment toward people of Mexican descent is part of the foundation of American history and remains

active in the present. This discrimination has an impact on how the Latinx community is viewed by others, how they are treated, and how they then perceive themselves.

Sleepy Lagoon Case of 1942

Coroian (2021) offered information surrounding the death of Jose Diaz and the discovering of his body in the Sleepy Lagoon reservoir in California. Police began to arrest men of Mexican descent that could possibly be associated with a local gang. Despite lacking evidence of their involvement, 13 Mexican men were prosecuted for the murder of Diaz. The media deemed these young Mexican Americans as hoodlums and claimed Mexicans had a biological tendency to be violent because they were descendants of Indian tribes who practiced human sacrifice. The police began rounding up Latinos in the area and charging them with suspicion of crimes, such as assault and robbery. Hostility between Whites and Hispanics were inflamed by the press, police, and city officials, which ignited the Zoot Suit Riots.

Zoot Suit Riots of 1943

Coroian (2021) explained that Latino youth in California were known as pachucos, Mexican Americans who wore flashy clothes and were seen as gang members and were increasingly viewed by affluent Whites as menacing street thugs, gang members, and rebellious juvenile delinquents. Because of World War II and the strict rationing of select fabric, servicemen and many other people saw the oversized and colorful suits these Mexican Americans wore as a flagrant and unpatriotic waste of resources. Mexican Americans were serving in the military in high numbers, but many servicemen viewed zoot-suit wearers as WWII draft dodgers, although many of them were not of age to join the war efforts. On May 31, a clash between uniformed

servicemen and Mexican American youth resulted in the beating of a U.S. sailor. On June 3, fifty sailors from the U.S. Naval Reserve Armory marched through downtown Los Angeles carrying clubs and other weapons, attacking anyone seen wearing a zoot suit or other racially identified clothing. Full-scale riots ensued where Latinos were attacked and stripped of their suits, leaving them bloody and undressed on the sidewalk. Local police watched from the sidelines and then arrested the victims. Servicemen, off duty police officers, and civilians joined in over the next couple of days, marching into public spaces and beating anyone wearing a zoot suit or having the haircut style affiliated with this trend. Other minorities were also attacked despite not wearing a zoot suit.

By June 7, the riots were spreading, and other military and servicemen joined the mayhem. Leaders of the Mexican American community implored state and local officials to intervene, with no relief. Local papers framed the racial attacks as a vigilante response to an immigrant crime wave and the police generally restricted their arrests to the Latinos who fought back. On June 8, U.S. military personnel were barred from leaving their barracks. There was a ban on zoot suits the following day. Similar incidents took place in cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit. A citizens committee recognized the existence of racial prejudice and identified the problem of juvenile delinquency as not being confined to one racial group, but every American youth.

The Sleepy Lagoon Case and the Zoot Suit Riots illuminate the severe mistreatment of Mexican Americans due to the differences in their culture and the overall perception of them being of lesser value than Anglo Americans. This oppression and discrimination may have an extreme impact on the development of one's ethnic identity.

U.S. Mexican Farm Labor Program

Immigration History (2019) and Smith (2017) offered information on the U.S. Farm Labor Program, which invited Mexicans into the United States, through the Bracero Program, to work in the fields, yet despite the invitation Mexicans were viewed as stealing jobs from Americans. The Bracero Program funneled Mexicans into the United States on a legal temporary basis in exchange for guaranteed wages and humane treatment. Humane treatment was advertised to convince those who remembered the heavy discrimination against immigrants that this time things would be different. However, not all employers wanted to follow the guidelines or pay the correct amount and discrimination continued in Texas so much so that Texas was excluded from the program. Mexicans continued to seek work in Texas illegally by crossing the Rio Grande River, thus the term "wetback" was created to inappropriately label determined Mexicans. Illegal immigrants who worked the fields in Texas were paid less than those who worked in states that complied with the program's protocols.

Operation Wetback 1950

Blakemore (2019) wrote about the short-lived operation titled Operation Wetback that used military style tactics to remove Mexican immigrants from the United States, some of them U.S. citizens. Though millions of Mexicans had legally entered the country through joint immigration programs in the first half of the 20th century, Operation Wetback was designed to send them back to Mexico. The Mexican government was experiencing a labor shortage and desired the return of Mexican Nationals, so they readily aided border patrol agents in using military techniques and tactical operations to remove the immigrants. Pervasive anti Mexican sentiments of harsh portrayals of

Mexicans as disease bearing and irresponsible people, alongside other racial stereotypes, were used to justify their sometimes brutal treatment of immigrants. During Operation Wetback, immigrants were shoved into buses, boats, and planes in environments comparable to slave ships. Many died from heat stroke and disease before arriving to their forced destination. Rather than include Mexican-born workers in The New Deal welfare programs from the Great Depression, mass deportation resolved the issue.

Within a few months, Operation Wetback funding ran out and the program ended, however, the Bracero Program continued until 1964 when Congress terminated it against farmers' complaints to preserve jobs for U.S. citizens. By then the program had created an ongoing desire for cheap farm labor and cheap food and a corresponding desire for Mexican Nationals to seek out their fortune in the United States. Ironically, the program bred even more illegal immigration. Though it occurred over 60 years ago, Operation Wetback charged back into the news when Donald Trump endorsed the program during his presidential campaign. Though he did not refer to the program by name, Trump praised a policy that dumped undocumented immigrants in Mexican territory.

The next highlights in history were selected to identify a shift in the narrative. These were moments in which people who had been repeatedly discriminated against spoke out and were heard. These narratives create the possibility of the oppressed being able to reclaim their ethnic identity and find the power and value within themselves.

Mendez v. Westminster 1947

The United States Courts (n.d.-a) details the history of a landmark case. Sylvia Mendez was 9 years old when she was turned away from an "all-White" school. Fueled by gaining justice for his daughter, Gonzalo Mendez, Sylvia's father, took four Los

Angeles school districts to court. The district judge agreed that segregation would result in feelings of inferiority among Mexican American children and would hinder their development as productive U.S. citizens. He ordered that school districts cease their "discriminatory practices against pupils of Mexican descent in public schools" (para. 6). This event set the stage for *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Brown v. Board of Education 1954

The United States Courts (n.d.-b) also detailed another landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954. In this case, Oliver Brown filed a class-action suit against the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, in 1951 after his daughter, Linda Brown, was denied entrance to Topeka's all-White elementary schools. Brown claimed the schools for Black children were not equal to the White schools and that segregation violated the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. Earl Warren, the governor of California, agreed and determined that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place as segregated schools are inherently unequal. As a result, the court ruled that the plaintiffs were being deprived of their rights to equal protection. Unfortunately, states were not supported with desegregating their schools and this lack of intentionality and accountability allowed discrimination to continue in schools.

Chicano Civil Rights Movement/Walk Outs in the 1960s

Carillo (2020) and Gallardo (2021) explained that after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo put an end to the Mexican American War in 1848, Mexicans who chose to remain on territory ceded to the United States were promised citizenship and the right to their property, language, and culture. In most cases, Mexicans in the United States found

themselves living as second-class citizens. Land grants promised after the Mexican American War were denied by the U.S. government. Mexicans who identified as Chicanos, or people of Mexican descent born in the U.S., became increasingly frustrated and angered by the horrible treatment they had endured. Although schools in the United States were desegregated in the 1960s, deep-rooted racism persisted (Ochoa, 2016). Teachers, school administrators, and fellow students treated Spanish-speaking children with low regard and contempt, creating a difficult and painful experience for Mexican children (Ochoa, 2016).

By the late 1960s, those in the Chicano movement abandoned their efforts to blend in with the mainstream society and actively embraced their full heritage. By adopting "Chicano" or "Xicano," activists took on a name that had long been a racial slur and wore it with pride. Instead of only recognizing their Spanish or European background, Chicanos now also celebrated their Indigenous and African roots. Latino and Latina leaders such as Cesar Chavez and Reies Lopez Tijerina led the community in strikes for farm workers' rights and the push to reclaim land confiscated by English settlers in violation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Lau v. Nichols and the Bilingual Education Act

Oyez (2021), a free law project from Cornell's Legal Information Institute, recorded the failure of the San Francisco school system to provide English language instruction to over 1,000 students of Chinese ancestry who did not speak English or to provide them with adequate instructional procedures, which denied them a meaningful opportunity to participate in the public educational program. This violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans discrimination based on the grounds of race, color, or

national origin in any program or activity receiving federal financial aid. In 1970, the

Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) made the guidelines more

specific, requiring school districts that were federally funded to "rectify the language

deficiency" to open the instruction to students who had linguistic deficiencies (U.S.

Department of Education, 2020, para. 4). The Chief Justice determined there was a

substantial group being deprived of meaningful schooling because they were being

denied instruction they could understand. Although these guidelines seem more

inclusionary, the phrase "linguistic deficiencies" suggests continued deficit thinking and

subtractive schooling (Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). The strength and value of

students' cultural language was not included; rather, schools' intention became to

subtract their language as it was a hinderance to the "correct" learning that was taking

place in English.

Americanization of Schooling Systems

The historical events mentioned above tell the story of how Mexicans experienced

harsh discrimination due to the perception of them as inferior, unintelligent, expendable,

delinquent, wetbacks, disease bearing, irresponsible, and deficient. When students of

color were allowed in U.S. school systems, they carried the weight of these stereotypes

into their classrooms. The adults with the power in these classrooms were called to

inculcate in their students these American ideals.

The U.S. education system today, although beginning to shift pedagogy toward

inclusive practices, is still operating under the historical and societal pressure to produce

model citizens, or model "Americans" (Biesta, 2010; Brantmeier, 2006; Emeka &

Vallejo, 2009; Ferreira, 2014; Patthey-Chavez, 1993; Rivera-Santiago, 1996). Latinx

students, as well as students from other minoritized groups, are expected to fit the mold of American mainstream classrooms and educators are expected to whittle away any conflicting habits to help students achieve this goal, indicating schooling then becomes a form of socialization (Biesta, 2010). Educators have often constructed what school should look like, sound like, and feel like through their experiences and philosophy of education hinged to American standards (Patthey-Chavez, 1993). Every interaction with students projects the expectation of students conforming to the established, mainstream classroom. Educators across the country are responsible for carving out problem-solving, responsible members of society and often rely on mainstream socialization practices, in their whittling, that are likely "to cause increasing conflict when the values intertwined in these practices clash with student values" (Patthey-Chavez, 1993, p. 54–55).

Over time, the Americanization of minoritized students begins shifting their perceptions of self and levels of cultural affiliation (Ferreira, 2014; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). The tools of Americanization, assimilation and acculturation, aid in the decline of ethnic identities (Emeka & Vallejo, 2009; Rivera-Santiago, 1996). Assimilation is the "erosion of ethnic antipathies, partly predicated on the decline of ethnic identities and the rise of unhyphenated American identities" (Emeka & Vallejo, 2009, p. 1550). Acculturation is an attitudinal or behavioral change that occurs when an individual encounters a new culture due to colonization (Rivera-Santiago, 1996). These subtracting processes cause an individual's ethnic borders to dissipate as they conform to the language, behavior, and customs of the dominant society.

The use of many Mexican American students' home language, Spanish, is a conflict in American classrooms that is often subtracted for students to be considered

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successful in an academic setting. Brantmeier (2006) highlighted the social inequality and unequal power relationships produced through restricting how students speak and what language they use. He posited that educators' understanding of the "right or correct" language can offer negative consequences "for those who lie outside the dominate linguistic norms" (p. 3). He continued to suggest that language is used to reinforce power and status, and "the rightness and correctness of *what* language should be spoken and *how* that language should be spoken can foster in-group acceptance and demarcate out-group status within those contexts" (Brantmeier, 2006, p. 4). The stereotypes surrounding language and newcomers and the concept of the "correct" way to speak "American" or "academic" reinforces the in or out group status and defines who holds the power. Brantmeier explained that the burden of change has been placed on the newcomer student. This connects to the idea that educators establish the classroom environment, based on mainstream hegemonic expectations, before students arrive, which may lead to the exclusion of the cultural assets of their students. This exclusion may lead to students subtracting cultural or ethnic parts of themselves to fit into the environment, rather than adding their unique abilities (Valenzuela, 1999).

Educators' Perceptions of Latinx Students

The history of deficit perceptions of Mexicans, coupled with the educational system's agenda of Americanization, plays a role in how educators perceive their Latinx students, influencing their interactions with them (Chang, 2017; Cooper, 2012; Daisy & José-Kampfer, 2002; Lapayese, 2013; Monzo & Rueda, 2003; Patthey-Chavez, 1993; Perez Huber, 2010; Rivera-Santiago, 1996; Rolón-Dow, 2004). The following section provides literature depicting how educators often view their Latinx students, focusing

especially on Latina students as this study was connected to the Latina experience in formal schooling. The literature shows educators sometimes lead with deficit assumptions and hold low expectations for their Latina students, are quick to see family failure, and blame Latinas' lack of engagement with academics on their hyper-sexualized nature (Chang, 2017; Cooper, 2012; Daisy & José-Kampfer, 2002; Lapayese, 2013; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Parker, 2014; Perez Huber, 2010; Rolón-Dow, 2004; Valencia, 1997).

Low Expectations

Many teachers hold low opinions of Latinas and these beliefs seep into their teaching practices, often causing Latinas to understand this to mean they are not intelligent, or they should not attempt to work toward advanced academic achievement (Cantu, 2012; Chang, 2017; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Ortiz & Telles, 2012). Educators perceive there is no buy-in from Latina students and consider their social experiences to be limited, prompting them to place boundaries on their academic achievement (Parker, 2014). The perception of Mexican students as inferior causes teachers to track these students "into less challenging curriculums on the basis of their race and [to hold] Mexican-origin students to lower academic and social standards" (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, p. 131). Latina students, specifically, often experience unsuccessful advising and are placed in lower tracked classes, restricting their access to enrolling in higher-level courses, which leads to lower numbers of Latinas in mathematics and science (Locke & Gonzalez, 2020; Parker, 2014). There is also a contrast of Gifted and Talented (GT) students and regulars. Educators believe their GT students have a larger and more diverse science background because of the opportunities provided by their parents; in contrast,

they believe Latinas' families offer no exposure to places such as museums, despite them being free, reinforcing their belief that Latina students would not be successful in GT classes (Parker, 2014). Low expectations from educators implicitly direct Latinas to "accept [the] lower aspirations and stereotypes" (Parker, 2014, p. 330) placed on them, leading to these students having limited goals and stunting their academic success (Chang, 2017).

Perception of Latinx Families as Undocumented

Mexican immigrants were and still are viewed as "alien and low status" and continue to be "scapegoated and targeted for mistreatment" (Ortiz & Telles, 2012, p. 45). As evident from the summary of U.S. history previously provided, the stigma of being an immigrant, or a descendant of an immigrant, has infected society and school systems from their onset. Both immigrants and U.S.-born minoritized youth are "collectively 'othered' by institutional practices that are ideologically invested in their cultural and linguistic divestment" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 18). That is, if an individual is an immigrant, or an offspring of an immigrant, they are an outsider who requires modification through Americanization. The deficit depiction of Latinx students as racially inferior illegals produces the misjudgment that Latinx students do not value education, nor do their families (Locke & Gonzalez, 2020). Valenzuela (1999) posited that it is not that Latinx students do not value education, rather they do not value the schooling systems. The schooling systems prove to be unwelcoming to students who do not fit their American mold, causing Latinx students to withdraw. The hostility toward immigrants or undocumented Mexicans further silences Latinxs and influences an internalized negative construct of what it means to be an immigrant (Perez Huber, 2010). Rather than address

the schooling system's influence on Latinx students to withdraw, the misdirected blame is placed on the "apathetic" and "underappreciative" students and their parents who do not attend school activities and who have failed to produce children who see the value of education (Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Valencia, 1997).

The deficit perception of immigrants and their families incorrectly labels Latinx students as outsiders who do not value education, causing teachers to respond with exclusionary teaching. In actuality, these students value learning, just not the way the schooling systems present the learning of the curriculum (Valenzuela, 1999).

Hyper-Sexualization

The physical appearance of Latinx students creates a clash in the classroom and influences the way educators perceive and interact with them (Lapayese, 2013; Locke & Gonzalez, 2020; Rolón-Dow, 2004). Latinas, specifically, are perceived by their teachers as unsophisticated, hyper-sexual girls who care more about boys and lipstick than their education (Rolón-Dow, 2004). This sexist attitude toward Latinas often causes teachers to anticipate promiscuous behavior, irresponsibility, and trivial aspirations, influencing teaching practices and leading to lower expectations and a higher number of disciplinary actions (Lapayese, 2013; Locke & Gonzalez, 2020). Educators often believe Latinas dress suggestively because they do not have attention from their fathers, they are not valued at home, they are lacking in their home life, and they have a need to feel powerful or valued (Rolón-Dow, 2004). These educators, like many others, are quick to lead with the deficit assumption about their students and their families and are not taking the time to get to know these Latinas, which reinforces separation and resistance from both the teacher and the student. Because of the sexuality of some Latinas, educators are choosing

to look past their possible intelligence and investment in their education. They are allowing stereotypes to reinforce the deficit idea that Latinas do not belong in academic spaces. What these educators are not aware of is that Latinas, both at the K–12 and higher education levels, represent the largest group of girls and women of color in schools (Locke & Gonzalez, 2020). However, for many reasons, these Latinas are not staying. Latina graduation and college completion rates do not align with enrollment numbers (Locke & Gonzalez, 2020). Could the enrollment numbers be showing us that Latinas value their education and the dropout rates be showing us the effects of the deficit and subtractive schooling systems and teachers?

Influence of Schooling on Latinas' Perceptions of Self

Historical "truths" have influenced structures in society and education, which influence the perceptions educators have about their students and the interactions they have with their students. As Latinx students experience homogenous systems and subtractive education, the borders of their identity stretch or shrink. These vulnerable students find themselves negotiating the boundaries of their identity based on their experiences with the educational powers they encounter. Educational practices that include direct discrimination by educators "lead to differences in self-perception" and affect the extent to which students "will engage and persist in school" (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, p. 132). Specifically, Latina students report feeling underestimated, insecure about their potential or abilities, unintelligent, ill-equipped, not valuable in an academic setting, and that they do not have the ability to reach their educational goals (Chang, 2017; Cooper, 2012; Patthey-Chavez, 1993). The low expectations and overall deficit perspectives of Latina students direct the experience they will have in formal schooling.

Anzaldúa (2015) stated identity is relational and the shaping of who and what we are depends on those surrounding us. For a very large amount of time in our lives, educators are a big presence surrounding individuals. The deficit beliefs carried by educators become part of the shaping of who their students are. Educators have crafted an idea of what Latinas are interested in and what they are capable of based on society's stereotypes of the Latinx or Mexican demographic and on their limited experience with this minoritized group in their classrooms. This deficit perceptive of Latinx students hinders the relationship-building process between educator and student and inclines educators to assume the worst (Valenzuela, 1999). Educators are limiting the success of their students by placing low expectations on them, further influencing the way Latinas view themselves and their self-esteem and academic achievement (Ferreira, 2014; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). In this restrictive environment, Latinas are conflicted with assimilation, questioning their intelligence, and wrestling with feelings of hopelessness, triggering a negotiation of their identity (Lapayese, 2013).

Influence of Schooling on Latinas' Ethnic Identity

The societal experiences of the Latinx community not only require constructing identity development in relation to their perception of self and well-being, but also in the development or deconstruction of their ethnic pride and cultural self (Ferreira, 2014; Lapayese, 2013; Rivera-Santiago, 1996). Ferreira (2014) provided the connection between personal identity and ethnic identity, explaining that if Latinx students are continuously dismissed and continue experiencing subtractive socialization in the academic setting, this can perpetuate feelings of inferiority, reconstructing their perception of self and how they identify with their culture. There are many environmental

factors at play in the shaping of ethnic or cultural identity, one of the largest influences

being the schooling system (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). As previously addressed, the

Americanization of education systems uses assimilation and acculturation to shape

students into model students and citizens. Studies have connected the assimilation pattern

in academia and the erosion of ethnic or cultural identity (Fiol-Matta, 1996; Monzó &

Rueda, 2003; Rivera- Santiago, 1996; Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

Telles and Ortiz (2008) associated the increase in education levels with a decrease

in self-identifying as a member of the Latinx community. There is a steady decline of

cultural or ethnic identity over generations from immigrant status to U.S.-born status,

with immigrants feeling a close connection to their cultural roots and the later generations

primarily identifying as Americans (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). The strength of ethnicity

dissipates rapidly as the level of education increases (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). The higher

the education, the faster the assimilation.

Latinas report feeling more separation from family and culture the more education

they experience (Fiol-Matta, 1996; Monzó & Rueda, 2003). These studies indicated that

while in school, Latinas noticed becoming more American with their behaviors, how they

dressed, what they ate, and how they spoke, pulling them away from the customs from

their homes (Fiol-Matta, 1996; Monzó & Rueda, 2003). The loss of their native language

or the hyper-awareness of speaking the "incorrect" language in an English classroom also

played a role in the disintegration of their ethnic or cultural self. Monzó and Rueda

(2003) explained that "language and culture are closely intertwined with identity, social

relationships, status, and other related factors, and can mediate school experiences in

significant ways" (p. 83). Some educators see Latinas' lack of language in the classroom

as an indication of inattentiveness or disengagement, when in reality their struggle to understand directions, unfamiliarity with terms, and lack of teacher support are what cause them to withdraw (Cooper, 2012; Parker, 2014). Some Latinas feel rejection due to their lack of the "correct" language, causing them to feel they do not belong in the academic setting (Díaz de Sabates, 2007; Monzó & Rueda, 2003).

In summary, the history of discrimination against Mexicans informed society's perception of the Latinx community. This deficit perception hindered the inclusion of this community in U.S. education systems by enacting subtractive processes, such as assimilation. Educators' deficit assumptions and drive for assimilation influence Latinx students' perceptions of self and ethnic or cultural identity. The remaining portion of this chapter addresses the models that are often used to offer a deeper analysis of the various levels and stages of cultural or ethnic development.

Relevant Cultural and Ethnic Identity Models

There are multiple ethnic identity models to consider when analyzing an individual's self-identification. Atkinson et al. (1993) established five stages of racial/cultural identity development that integrate the various perspectives of ethnic identity development and can be generalized across various ethnic groups. Conformity is when an individual holds a preference for the values of the dominant culture and society. Dissonance is when an individual begins a gradual reexamination of the attitudes and beliefs held by the dominant culture and society. This reexamination often takes place after some experience has occurred that causes the individual to question their old beliefs and ways of behaving. Resistance is the rejection of the dominant culture. Intense feelings of anger result from the knowledge that the individual is a member of a group

that has experienced oppression and discrimination, combined with a sense of pride in their own cultural and racial group. Introspection is when an individual has a deeper understanding of the racial/ethnic group to which they belong, as well as of other minority groups. Some degree of conflict is present as an individual struggles with the desire to be loyal to the group while at the same time wanting independence and autonomy. Integrative awareness is when an individual achieves a balance and a sense of security. This stage comes about after the individual can accept aspects of their culture and those of the dominant culture that are both appealing and beneficial. This new perspective brings a real appreciation for cultural differences. There is a deliberate attempt to work toward eliminating oppression.

Phinney (1989) was one of the first to elaborate on an ethnic identity model for adolescents and young adults that can also be applied across ethnic groups. Phinney's model is a three-stage model process based on the theoretical formulations proposed by Erikson and incorporates many of the concepts and ideas mentioned in previous models. In the first stage, the individual holds an unexamined ethnic identity and unquestionably accepts the values and attitudes of the dominant culture. The individual can be totally unaware of preferring these values and behaviors. The second stage, ethnic identity search, is when an adolescent begins to explore their ethnic identity after a profound and meaningful experience. This is considered an emotional stage as the individual undergoes a search to understand self and culture. In the final stage, ethnic identity achievement, there is an internalized sense of ethnic self and confidence about who one is. A sense of security is combined with positive feelings about the self and others. An individual who

achieves the final stage has stronger social and family relations and exhibits more self-confidence and control.

In Ferdman and Gallegos's (2001) model of Latino identity development, racial identity is a secondary identity in the Latino culture. In this model there are six orientations, as the developers held the belief that self-identification is a process. Integrated Latinos understand their society in terms of race and identify with the larger Latino community. Identified Latinos view Latinos as a distinct racial category across all Latino subgroups. They identify with the entire group broadly and believe race is uniquely Latino and they do not accept the either-or nature of American constructs. Some individuals within this process have strong identification with a specific subgroup within the Latino culture and believe all other subgroups are subordinate. Some Latinos in this process view themselves as other, they hold no stake in a subgroup. This is often caused by the uncertainty of their heritage. Undifferentiated Latinos claim a color-blind mentality and believe race is not important. White-identified Latinos identify as White and subscribe to the views, values, and beliefs of such an identification.

Rivera-Santiago (1996) critiqued the linear projection of these Latinx identity models and the lack of consideration of gender and class differences. Identity formation is a common phenomenon for humans, but the path is not uniform and Latinx experiences will vary significantly. Based on familial, educational, and personal experiences, Latinxs' ethnic identity may form in unique ways. These models offer insight into how the environment changes ethnic identity, though they "do not include potential forces which could also contribute to ethnic identity formation" (Rivera-Santiago, 1996, p. 20) nor do they address the possible self (Carter, 2005). Carter (2005) posited that "how one sees the

world through race and ethnicity directly affects one's definition of a possible self" (p. 4). She determined that beliefs about the self, based on interactions with family, peers, school, and the media, spur the behaviors attached to those beliefs. These experiences potentially influence who individuals see themselves becoming and how they claim their place in the world (Carter, 2005).

Closing

In conclusion, the focus of this literature review was on Latinas' identity as it is formed through their formal education. Four themes emerged within the identity focus: Latinas' personal identity, how others perceive the identity of Latinas, how Latinas define their cultural characteristics as a strength or weakness, and how support influences Latinas' identity (Cantu, 2012; Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzmán, 2012; Chang, 2017; Cooper, 2012; Daisy & José-Kampfer, 2002; Díaz de Sabates, 2007; Dyrness, 2007; Ek et al., 2010; Fiol-Matta, 1996; Lapayese, 2013; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Martinez et al., 2015; Perez Huber, 2010; Rolón-Dow, 2004). Fiol-Matta (1996) stated students do "not need to leave their selves at the door, nor do they have to leave the world to learn in order for the teaching to be effective" (p. 71). Chang (2017) questioned how schooling would change if experiential knowledge was valued over the regurgitation of facts.

I am grateful for the stories and experiences shared by the Latinas mentioned above, but I am still unable to completely identify, as my personal experience is as a Latina who has made every effort to "pass" as a White girl. I believe there needs to be a space for "coconuts" like myself to share our experiences. Although my grandmothers only spoke Spanish and were illiterate, my mother learned English in kindergarten by being punished for speaking Spanish, and my name is Araceli, I am not brown enough.

Although I went to private schools throughout my education, do not speak Spanish, do not have an accent, and have mostly White friends, I am not White enough. As a woman of color who does not speak Spanish, who was favored among most of my peers and teachers, who only recently gained Latina friends, and who only recently began to identify as a Latina, I cannot find myself in the literature and wonder if others like me feel the same.

Experiences in society, from media, and with family, peers, and educators push up against Latinas' ethnic borders, suggesting the need for conformity to a perceived identity of what it means to be a Latina. Some modify their borders with limited to no resistance and others develop their strength and voices through these experiences and connection with other Latinas' stories. However, powerful stories about Latina revolutionaries are rarely taught to our young Latinas. The deficit messages are overpowering and are drowning out the voices of the revolutionaries of our past.

While conducting the study, I walked up and down the Texas history aisle at a local bookshop. I was only allowed 30 minutes of browsing time due to COVID safety protocols. As I quickly glanced through the books about the beginnings of Texas and the *great men* who made it what it is today, there it was, one sole book about revolutionary women of Texas. To my delight, it was not only a book about women revolutionaries, but more specifically about Latina revolutionaries. Sosa et al. (2020) collected stories and histories about strong Latinas pushing against oppression and discrimination and revolutionizing ways of knowing and being during the development of Texas. At the start of the Mexican Revolution, women such as Margarita Neri and Esperanza Echevarria commanded more than 1,000 Indigenous troops. Women like Cristina Jimenez Sosa and

Leonila Barrios Ortiz left everything they had previously known and fled to start a business in Texas, with their small children in tow. "Mexican women distinguished themselves as revolutionaries who genuinely agitated for regime change. Some women continued the tax boycotts and others launched peaceful protests, while others directly carried out guerilla warfare or supported those who did" (Sosa et al., 2020, p. 12). The pieces of my identity that had been whittled away by society and education began to grow back as I discovered a different definition of being a Latina amid discrimination. Juana Belen Gutierrez founded a protest newspaper, *Vesper: Justicia Liberated*, to challenge a dictator. Despite being a single mother and having been imprisoned multiple times for protests, she never stopped speaking truth for her people.

Some women chose to travel with their partners as they fought in the war—these women were known as soldaderas. I will admit, I was most excited to learn about the soldaderas. The name alone excited me. I immediately pictured strong, yet graceful, beautiful, yet fierce, Latina women joining together like the Amazon women in the Wonder Woman stories. The reality of soldaderas punched me in the gut as I felt these women were the opposite of liberated or revolutionary. They walked all day because the horses were for the men, and they were sent ahead to collect or steal food and set up camp for the men. Along with their children, they were used as shields for the troops. These women were used for aggressive, uninvited sexual release. My image of strong, independent Latina soldiers was ripped away from me when I read that many of these soldaderas had been abducted from pillaged villages and were locked up like chickens or tied to men's horses and dragged to the next battle.

At first glance I saw oppression rather than revolution. I saw Latinas enslaved, oppressed, and subjugated to societal pressures and expectations from men. I came to understand that theirs was a different strength, a survival strength forged as a result of suffering. These suffering women would "use their rebozo to carry babies or ammunition. Whether standing or sitting, they are the image of resistance" (Sosa et al., 2020, p. 33). Although some were forced into this role, others left any comfort they had willingly, to stand by their partner, to offer support and love. Although it is not often addressed or discussed, these women were essential. If these soldaderas would not have been near, their men would have seen no reason to remain in the trenches. Without them, the soldiers would not have eaten, bedded down at night, or stayed to fight. When Mexican troops were deployed, they took their soldaderas, "who were their little stoves that provided food and warmth" (p. 34). Without soldaderas, soldiers would have "been unable to carry their homes with them into battle, [and] there would have been no armies" (Sosa et al., 2020, p. 34).

Whether these Latinas joined the fight through physical force, support, or their voice, they were each revolutionary. They revolutionized the homogeneous ways of knowing Latinas' assets. Instead of being quiet, well-mannered, and unquestioning, they joined together with other women and fought back, they used their voices and their words to push against male dictators, they abandoned the traditional sense of being a partner and followed their men into the trenches. Soldaderas did not limit their self-identity to the heteronormative ideas of what it meant to be a woman. They took control and intentionally defined revolution for themselves. Perhaps I would have taken more

ownership of all aspects of my life, personal or academic, if I would have known this revolutionary blood was flowing through my veins a little sooner.

The oppositional forces our Latina ancestors faced in the past may appear in different forms today, but they are still present. Knowing their stories might help us begin our revolution and our redefining of what it means and looks like to be Latina.

III. METHODOLOGY

Anzaldúa (2015) called on Chicanas/Latinas to reimagine their identity. History has established firm borders surrounding the Chicana/Latina identity based on deficit beliefs and perceptions surrounding our language and skin color (Brantmeier, 2006; Cooper, 2012; Fergus, 2017; Fiol-Matta, 1996; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Ortiz & Telles, 2012; Parker, 2014; Pyke, 2010; Quiros & Dawson, 2013; Telles & Ortiz; 2008). The borders surrounding Latinas' ethnic identity have been restricted, limiting their growth and variances of who they are as Latinas. Anzaldúa (2015) posited that Chicanas/Latinas "need fresh terms and open-ended tags that portray us in all our complexities and potentialities" (p. 66). As Chicanas/Latinas begin the negotiation of their ethnic identity, they should have the freedom and power to choose their defining characteristics, resulting in "mestizaje, the new hybrid" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 71). As Chicanas/Latinas reimagine their identity and potential selves, they must never negotiate their true selves (Anzaldúa, 2015).

I believe I have been living in the process of negotiating my borders, restructuring, and stretching the boundaries of my ethnic/cultural identity with the intention of blurring the lines to fit more within the boundaries of the White dominant culture. I was not acknowledging or accepting the strong defining characteristics that came from being a Latina. This negotiation was instead a forfeiting of pieces of my true self in an attempt to avoid the struggles that come with being different. This is what Anzaldúa (2015) advised against when reimagining our identity. In the past, I believed I would have been more successful in society and academics by hiding or removing my cultural/ethnic identity. However, as I have grown older and learned from the productive

struggles of the Latinas in my family and others, I have found I am successful as a result of my Latinidad that I have attempted to hide for so long. The cultural/ethnic assets and characteristics I have inherited from my ancestors have provided the determination, perseverance, and work ethic I needed to accomplish all I have in my academic career.

With this insight, I wanted to renegotiate my borders to include the parts I worked so hard to cover up but found myself at a loss when it came to where to begin. I heard the strong voice of Anzaldúa and felt the power behind being a mestizaje, but at the same time recognized I could not, and still cannot, pronounce the Spanish word mestizaje. I am currently living in a land that has been carefully zoned and marked by my family's history, my education, and society's labels. Throughout the renegotiation this study encouraged, I wanted to be careful to not suddenly replace what my ethnic identity had become, which does not have a name, by hastily accepting the identity of mestizaje. I felt that through all our complexities and experiences, Latinas, like me, should be able to determine where we are on a continuum of our ethnic identity. We may not identify as a mestizaje quite yet, but how we identify currently is valid and should be an acceptable form of being Latina.

With this context in mind, the purpose of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of the mestizaje through listening to the experiences of the Latinas in my family and to identify the influence of formal schooling on our ethnic identity development. Through this study, I created a space for the women in my family to listen and learn from each other as we each shared our formidable stories from school. We shared each other's pain as we uncovered a common feeling of not belonging and feeling out of place in school over three generations. However, we did not stop with the

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identification of our direct or indirect discrimination, we spoke against it and started

redefining ourselves by reimagining the possibilities of how Latinas could reaffirm their

identity and find strength within their struggles. This study is a celebration of who we are

becoming, extending our borders into a new hybrid of mestiza.

In this chapter, I describe the qualitative methodology I used for this research and

justify my choice to use critical micro-ethnography to answer the following questions:

1. How do Latinas' K–12 schooling experiences inform their ethnic identity
   development?

2. How did interactions with educators, and the education system, influence the
   ethnic identity development of Latinas within one family over three
   generations?

   a. How did these interactions compare given the distinctive times in history
      in which the Latinas attended school and the Latinas' expectations for the
      role educators and the education system should take in shaping their ethnic
      identities?

   b. How did the Latinas negotiate borders in their K–12 schools?

This chapter includes a discussion of the research design, an introduction to the

participants, informed consent, data collection, data analysis methods, and strategies to

attend to trustworthiness. A summary of the sections previously listed concludes the

chapter.

Critical Micro-Ethnographic Research Design

This study was a critical micro-ethnography; an "emancipatory, participatory,

transformative, and perpetual action research method that initiates and evolves" with a

personal experience and can lead to collaboration with others in "ongoing research of experiencing, problematizing, and transforming" formal schooling cultures (Green et al., 2020, p. 173). I used the critical ethnographic approach to "expose issues such as power, hegemony, and advocacy. . . and address inequities" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 94) for four Latinas in their formal education. Through this critical micro-ethnography (Pane et al., 2014), I identified and analyzed the generational differences among Latinas within one family—my family—to understand the influence of the formal education system on our cultural affiliation and ethnic identity.

To understand the research design, it is necessary to explain what made the study "critical," "micro," and "ethnographic" in nature. Critical researchers can be described as those who "advocate for the emancipation of groups marginalized in society" and seek to "speak out against inequality and domination" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 92–93). An ethnography is "a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 90). Ethnographers draw from cognitive science, such as theories on ethnic identity development, to understand the patterns of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors of the culture-sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Though traditional ethnographies are characterized by focusing on an entire culture-sharing group, this study can be considered micro in nature because of the focus on the "learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 90) of one group of Latinas within the same family over three generations. As such, the purpose of the micro-ethnography was to identify a pattern of beliefs and ideas

surrounding the experience of formal schooling and its influence on the ethnic identities of four Latinas within my family.

Ethnographies usually take place over an extended amount of time; however, due to the timeframes associated with completing a doctoral program and dissertation, I conducted this research as a micro-ethnography in which I collected stories and artifacts for just over 1 year beginning in October of 2021 and ending in November of 2022. I based the study's design on previous ethnographies written as narratives with a storytelling approach. I collected the stories told by my mother, my sister, myself, and my sister's daughter (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I use the storytelling approach throughout this chapter to make connections to the design and framework of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I used to guide the study included CFE, (Calderón et al., 2012), Borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 2012), and the five stages of racial cultural identity development (Atkinson et al., 1993). The use of CFE (Anzaldúa, 2015; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2020) and Borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 2012) was purposeful as these two theories complement each other and overlap in several ways. They served as the foundation for the framework, which aligned with the purpose of the study and enabled me to acknowledge how my cultural intuition and personal experiences informed the way I address oppression in a school setting and provided an environment for the participants to see their stories and individual ethnic identity as valuable. Additionally, the participants used the five stages of racial cultural identity development to identify and communicate our ethnic identification before and after the study (Atkinson et al., 1993).

Chicana Feminist Framework

I identify as a Latina education scholar, and as such I recognize my unique systems of knowing potentially disrupt hegemonic categories of knowing. Although I use the term Latina to offer one description of myself and those who engaged with the study, I can also connect with the identity of Chicana due to the term being used to refer to "U.S. born women of Mexican or Latin American descent who identify with a collective history of oppression and pride connected to a political consciousness with its origins in El Movimiento or the Mexican American civil rights movement" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, p. 7). I acknowledge the history of oppression of my culture-sharing group and willingly answer the call for reformation. I am a Latina based on my ethnicity, and I am a Chicana based on my political consciousness. Calderón et al. (2012) posited that "Chicana scholars draw on their ways of knowing to disrupt hegemonic categories of analysis, create decolonizing methodologies, and expand on our understanding of what it means to employ CFE in the field of education" (p. 514). The traditional methodological tools applied in dominant research paradigms may not provide the opportunity for the new narratives a Chicana feminist framework can produce (Calderón et al., 2012). Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's (1983) ideals of including spiritual and intellectual knowledge on the path to decolonization, and the disruption of hegemonic forms of research, Delgado Bernal (1998) privileged the life experiences and knowledge of Chicanas as she incorporated Chicana feminist systems of knowing into scholarship. Delgado Bernal acknowledged the forms of knowledge Chicanas bring to educational institutions and research and challenged us to disrupt traditionally marginalized knowledge systems as well.

We are encouraged to explore human relationships and experiences and incorporate cultural intuition, which is the unique viewpoint that many Chicanas bring to research (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Chicana feminist ways of knowing in research challenge "the Western notions of objectivity, neutrality, and the mind/body split, and it embodies the goals of advocacy scholarship, linking research to community concerns" (Delgado Bernal, 2020, p. 156). CFE allows us to decolonize the research process by changing the methodological tools, so they align with our ways of knowing (Delgado Bernal, 2020). Through this framework, we, as Latinas, can produce knowledge using methods that align with our ethnic assets, allowing us to feel like insiders through the research process. CFE "privileges the life experiences and knowledge of Chicanas" (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 515) by allowing the cultural intuition of the participants to expand beyond traditional ways of knowing.

Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) further explained that Chicana feminist scholars are uncovering new knowledge by drawing on their cultural intuition and "(re)envisioning" (p. 101) Chicana/Latina feminist methodologies that are an extension of ways of knowing and being. Using the CFE framework, I aimed to decolonize the research process by changing the methodological tools, so they aligned with our ways of knowing (Delgado Bernal, 2020). Resorting to cultural intuition allowed me, as the researcher, to draw from my "personal experience to analyze the experiences of [the] participants and to capture what previous literature . . . had not" (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 519). As I deconstructed hegemonic ways of knowing, I relied on my cultural intuition and CFE to disassemble researcher and participant boundaries (Calderón et al., 2012). Latinas' funds of knowledge/cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 2002; N. González et al.,

2005) and "Mestiza Consciousness" informed the analysis of how we navigate through and live within the cracks of societal and cultural beliefs of Latinas (Anzaldúa, 2015; Delgado Bernal, 2020). CFE offered the pathway toward understanding the various experiences of Latinas and the "contradictory identities" (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 518) they may hold. CFE allowed a space for us Latinas to reclaim our voice as it validated Chicana or Latina forms of knowledge and provided an opportunity to reclaim, or reauthor, our identity as a new hybrid of mestizaje.

Borderlands Theory

The CFE framework, coupled with Borderlands theory, enabled me to understand the importance of the cultural funds embodied by Latinas and identify the valuable assets Latinas bring, while being able to identify the various forms of colonization and oppression present throughout three generations of Latinas in my family. Anzaldúa (2012), in her Borderlands theory, proposed that oppressions are expressed differently depending on the environment or situation and Latinas have developed forms of agility and resistance due to encountering these oppressions. Borderlands theory also indicates "no one is exempt from contributing to oppression in limited contexts" so "self-reflexivity" and trying on another's perspective is "essential to gaining a deeper understanding" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 8).

As we listened to each other's stories, we learned about the various ways in which we each responded to the oppression we experienced and were able to make connections to each other's stories. We used our self-awareness and this connection to similar stories to uncover the external and internal forces that influenced our responses and constructed our identities. This deeper understanding of our own and others' experiences is the

foundation from which we rebuild and redefine ourselves. This critical micro-ethnography provided a space for me and my female family members to self-reflect and learn about each other's perspectives as we shared stories about our formal schooling experiences and Latina identity development.

Racial Cultural Identity Development Model

I drew on an ethnic identity model, the five stages of racial cultural identity development, created by Atkinson et al. (1993) to analyze the participants' and my own development as influenced by our experiences within the classroom. This analytic tool was designed to build cultural competency in the U.S. mental health field to improve the quality of service offered to ethnic minoritized groups (Sue et al., 2009). This model integrates the various perspectives of ethnic identity development and can be generalized across various ethnic minority groups. The stages of racial cultural identity are as follows: conformity, dissonance, resistance, introspection, and integrative awareness.

The first stage of conformity is when an individual holds a preference for the values of the dominant culture and society. In the second stage of dissonance, an individual begins a gradual reexamination of the attitudes and beliefs held by the dominant culture and society. This reexamination often takes place after some experience has occurred that leads to the questioning of old beliefs and ways of behaving. Resistance then follows, which is the rejection of the dominant culture. Intense feelings of anger resulting from the knowledge that one is a member of a group that has experienced oppression and discrimination combined with a sense of pride in one's own cultural and racial group emerge. In the fourth stage, introspection occurs, and an individual develops a deeper understanding of the racial/ethnic minoritized group to which they belong, as

well as of other racial/ethnic groups. Some degree of conflict is present as the individual struggles with the desire to be loyal to the racial/ethnic minority group to which they belong, while at the same time wanting independence and autonomy. Integrative awareness is the final stage in the model and occurs when an individual achieves balance and a sense of security. This stage comes about after the individual can accept aspects of their own culture and those of the dominant culture that are both appealing and beneficial. This new perspective brings a real appreciation for cultural differences. There is a deliberate attempt to work toward eliminating the oppression felt by minoritized groups.

Participants and Recruitment

Years ago, as we sat around my grandmother's kitchen table, I heard the love story of my grandparents. My father's parents grew up down the street from each other but did not form a relationship until my grandfather came home for a visit during World War II. He asked about the girl who lived down the street and learned that she moved to San Antonio, Texas. He relied on friends and family in the area to find her. He found her and asked her out on a date. They were married shortly after, and my grandfather went back to war. Their only form of communication was through written letters. However, my grandmother could not read. She relied on her mother-in-law to read the letters to her, which she admitted was often embarrassing. She told us how she would write my grandfather back using words from soup cans or recipes. My grandfather cherished the letters even though they made no sense. My grandmother learned to read and write as an adult—her determination and resourcefulness amazed me. My mother shared with me that her mother was illiterate and would sign an X on my mother's school paperwork. At

a very young age, my mom became the translator and scribe for her parents. She recalled going to kindergarten only knowing Spanish and being punished for her language. She endured so much as a small child and persevered. These stories are my family history, and I knew only a little about it. My formal education has included information and history related primarily to the United States told through a whitewashed lens that did not include my Mexican roots. For me to begin to understand how my ethnic identity was formed, I needed to learn the history of my family as it directly relates to how my family views education more holistically and how the U.S. educational system shaped their ethnic identities as individuals of Mexican ancestry.

Up to this moment in my formal education journey, I had never included my familial history in my epistemology. I felt this uncovering of how my family negotiated borders in their formal education and self-discovery was a crucial first step in having a deeper understanding of the multiple facets and the wide spectrum of what it means to be a Mestiza. I decided I would benefit from first learning about who I come from, what my funds of knowledge are, and what assets I bring into the educational setting. Therefore, I decided the focus of my dissertation research would be on the ethnic identity development of my family and the role of formal education in this process.

As such, the participations for this study included my mother, born in 1951; my sister, born in 1978; myself, born in 1985; and my niece, born in 2006. I selected these family members to demonstrate possible differences in educational experiences over generations. I explained the focus of the study to them and asked if we could discuss their experiences with education and their ethnic identity development. It is important to note that although my maternal grandmother is deceased, parts of her story are shared within

my mother's stories. Figure 1 is pictures of us in different stages within our formal education. From left to right are my mother, sister, me, and my niece. Despite being in the same family, we, as participants, had varied perspectives, experiences, and beliefs about our Latina ethnicity.
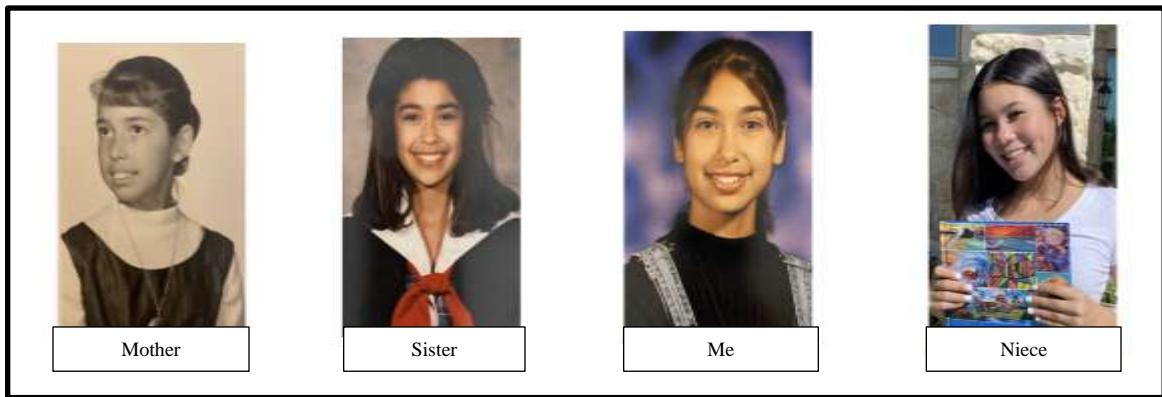
Figure 1. Intergenerational Photos of Family.

Research Site

M. Guajardo and colleagues (2016) claimed that "the spaces where ideas and conversations are shared matters" (p. 5). Safe and familiar spaces support relationship building and allow for deeper understanding and engaged listening (M. Guajardo et al., 2016). My favorite memories with my family involve laughing around a dinner table while Mom piled loads of food onto our plates and shared stories about her day. I chose my home's living room to collect data and to recreate a familiar space. This data collection site encouraged challenging conversations and allowed us to be vulnerable and foster our creative agency. As we sat on the couch with plates full of food, under our warm soft blankets, we found power in our voices as we shared our authentic selves and co-constructed knowledge. As we shared our familiar struggles and stories, asked questions, and reimagined together, we understood the power in this act (M. Guajardo et al., 2016).

Data Collection

I authentically captured the participants' experiences through individual and group *pláticas* and *testimonios*. The procedures associated with these data collection strategies are described further here.

Pláticas

Participants engaged in three group and two individual *pláticas*. I chose to use *pláticas* as a tool for data collection because they are a familiar practice among Latinos and are "an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation" (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160).This was a natural and comfortable way for our family to listen and learn from our stories. A way of communication that was natural for our family became an educational process that encouraged reflection and healing.

> Pláticas move from method to methodology when they are embedded within the rich, analytical theory of Chicana feminism, engage contributors as knowledge creators essential to the meaning making process, draw on life experiences, and provide a potential space for healing. (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 115)

Using *pláticas* as a tool for collecting data allowed for relationship building and collaboration while we explored relevant issues in our educational experiences. Furthermore, because the participants were family members who already had strong and positive relationships, this form of data collection came naturally and lent itself to exploring these topics more readily. My mom, sister, and I had conversations about our educational experiences before, but not in depth and not purposefully. My niece had not been included in these conversations about school experiences prior to this research. Through our *pláticas*, we shared memories and experiences in a familiar and authentic

way, and we learned more about each other, which led us to a deeper understanding of ourselves (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013).

The Five Principles of Pláticas

We closely followed the five principles of pláticas as a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology, explained by Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016), as we worked through this study. The first principle of pláticas states that the research being conducted is based upon Chicana/Latina feminist theory (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). This theoretical framework created a space for us to share our experiences of oppression in formal schooling and change our narratives and to heal. Another benefit was to bring awareness to the past oppression experienced by marginalized groups in schools and the continued oppression these groups experience in current classrooms. The second principle explains this methodology as "a relational principle that honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 111). Together, we defined our working definition of Latina and together we identified themes within our pláticas. We learned from each other. Each participant was a meaning maker, though collectively we navigated through this process of telling our experiences through storytelling. The third principle, "a plática methodology makes connections between everyday lived experiences and the research inquiry" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 112), highlighted the importance of our schooling stories. Through our stories we were able to uncover additional factors and influences, within our experiences, that influenced our personal and ethnic identity. The fourth principle explains that pláticas provide a space for healing (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). We shared our stories of oppression in the classroom and with educators in a vulnerable way. As we went deeper into the experience and asked

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each other questions, we began a reflecting and reshaping process. We looked back at our experiences and were able to uncover pockets of strength that we pulled from the women in our family who came before us. We started to change our narrative of oppression by identifying it as a moment of our becoming. The fifth principle states that "a plática methodology relies on relations of reciprocity and vulnerability and researcher reflexivity" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 114). Trust was established as all of us, myself included, shared moments of shame, embarrassment, humiliation, and fear in our educational settings. We examined our feelings and reactions to make meaning of our experiences and identify themes within our stories to which others may be able to relate.

In our group *pláticas*, we engaged in cooperative inquiry and dialogical epistemology. In these group *pláticas*, I facilitated and deepened the discussion based on the data gathered in previous group or individual *pláticas*. Insight was gained into the participants' life-narratives, and we learned more about each of our interactions with educators through storytelling and counter-narratives.

As previously noted, I held three group *pláticas* and two individual *pláticas* with each family member between the first and second group pláticas. During the first group *plática* we discussed the research topic and timeline. Although the *plática* provided the freedom to allow the conversation to lead itself, I did follow the protocol I created to begin and help guide the conversation (see Appendix A). We began by defining what a Latina is based on our experience with Latinas and how we perceive society to portray them. We created a continuum of who we consider "authentic/real" Latinas and on to "White passing" Latinas. The participants used adjectives to explain what they envisioned when they pictured a Latina. Figure 2 is an image of the continuum we

created. The participants also placed themselves where they felt they fell on the

continuum.
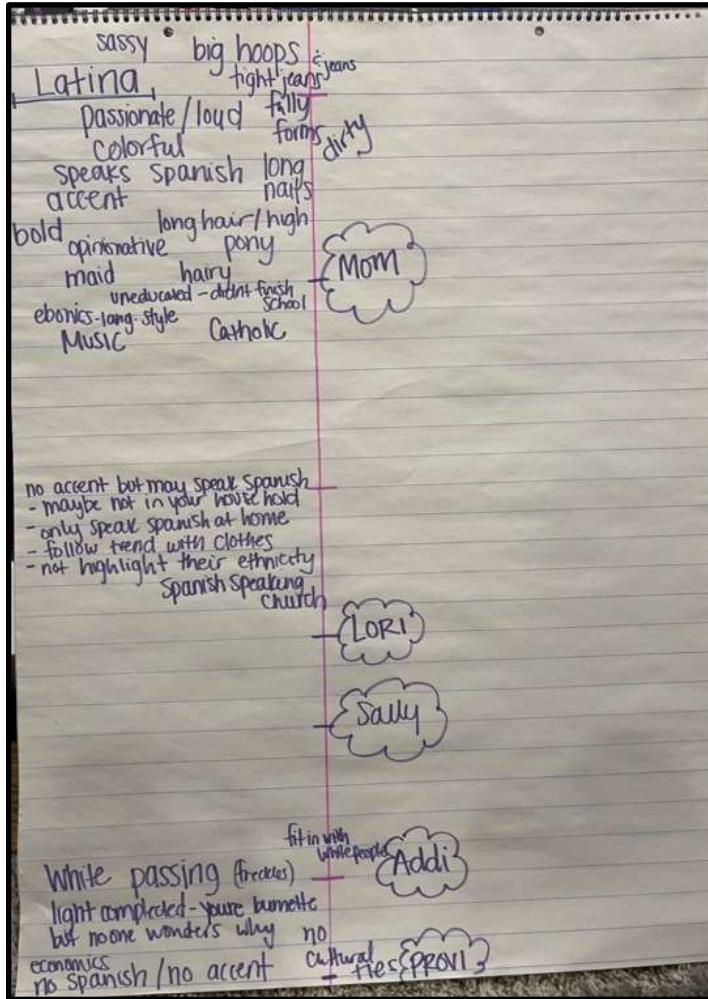
Figure 2. Continuum of How we Define Being a Latina.

After this activity, I offered a scale with which we could rate how we felt about

our ethnic identity before we got into the next topic of discussion. Figure 3 depicts the

scale I provided. More details on this scale and how the participants rated themselves are

provided in the following chapter.

1	2	3	4	5
I hold preference for the values of the dominant culture and society.	I am reexamining the attitudes and beliefs held by the dominant culture and society.	I reject the dominant culture. I am angry that I am part of a group that has experienced oppression and discrimination. I feel pride in my cultural and racial group.	I have a deeper understanding of my racial and ethnic group. I am loyal to the group, but I also want independence and autonomy.	I have a sense of balance and security when it comes to my ethnic identity. I accept aspects of my culture and those of the dominant culture that are both appealing and beneficial. I have an appreciation for cultural differences. I am working towards eliminating oppression.

Figure 3. Atkinson et al.'s (1993) Five Stages of Racial/Cultural Identity Development.

We then moved on to discussing whether we felt being a Latina influenced others' interactions with us. We honed the discussion surrounding the implications of this influence on interactions within the context of an educational setting. We shared memories from our formal schooling experience. I shared some experiences from my formal schooling to initiate the discussion and then invited the other participants to share.

In the second *plática*, we continued our conversation about positive and negative experiences in the school setting. This conversation focused on uncovering the ways in which we responded to these encounters and how these interactions made us feel in the classroom. This led us to discuss how hard we worked to prove ourselves and examine our confidence levels.

In the third *plática*, we shared our *testimonios*, worked together to identify themes from our *pláticas*, and used the same scale previously addressed (see Figure 3) to rate how we felt about our ethnic identity at the end of the study. More details on the process of identifying the themes of the study are provided in the following chapter.

Following the first and second group *pláticas*, I scheduled individual *pláticas* with each family member. I used these individual *pláticas* in part to conduct a member check, where I used previously selected quotes made by that participant to facilitate the individual conversations, gather more context, and ask follow-up questions to gain more of an understanding of what they were trying to communicate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this intimate time, I gave participants the space to expand on their comments, or on their *testimonio*, to offer more insight into their experiences, which afforded me the opportunity to ensure I was interpreting their narratives with accuracy.

Each *plática* was audio recorded, with the permission of the participants, and transcribed by me after the gatherings. Group *pláticas* occurred in my home, with drinks and food to set an informal and open environment and lasted for 1 hour or longer. Individual *pláticas* took place over Zoom or in person. The data from each *plática* provided insights to inform the next, with the entire collection of *pláticas* providing a rich source from which to identify themes and patterns related to our educational experiences and ethnic identity development, which are shared in the following chapter.

Testimonios

Testimonios are both products and processes that allow us to represent one another and reclaim our authority to narrate and dismantle untruths (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Our *testimonios* expose brutality, shatter silence, and foster solidarity among women of color (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Further, *testimonios* are familiar to Latinas' ways of knowing and being as we share memories, stories, and experiences with a knowledge that is familiar to Latinas' cultural and familial history (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). Using *testimonio* as a critical, qualitative

tool answers Anzaldúa's call to "link the text and the body as it merges our communities with academia" (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 525). Furthermore, *testimonios* have proved useful in capturing the educational experiences of Latinas. Examples of this can be seen in the work of Martinez et al. (2015), who used *testimonio* as a method to connect and collaborate with Latina school administrators to voice their experience and resist "the hegemonic forces with academia that challenged [their] cultural ways of being and knowing" (p. 87).

Given the power of *testimonios*, I asked the participants of this study to write a *testimonio* to convey their experience in formal schooling. The family members included in this study have a set of skills that make them unique. My mother is a skilled storyteller. When she begins a story, most pause what they are doing to listen. My sister is a singer-songwriter who expresses herself with her lyrics and music. She often finds peace and clarity as she plays her piano. My niece is a published poet. She has a maturity beyond her years with how she groups words and ideas together to express her inner thoughts. Because I am aware of these giftings, I encouraged the participants to use any form of text, such as a poem, story, or song, they were most comfortable with to share their *testimonio*. I also wrote a *testimonio* representing my experience in the school setting.

The direction I gave the participants was to consider a particular moment in their schooling that summarized their overall feeling of their schooling experience and to create something tangible for others to experience. Individually, we analyzed each other's feelings behind the created work during our third and final *plática*. Developing and then sharing our *testimonios* in this way seemed fitting, given that *testimonios* can "define a life story; yet at the same time, it can explain the collective history and spiritual struggle

if not only one, but of many" (Ochoa, 2016, p. 52). Each of our forms of expressing our *testimonio* validated our individual experience as truth, while representing the experiences of our group as a collective of marginalized individuals, Latinas (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). This approach allowed us to go beyond just the telling of our oral histories as participants and enabled us to engage in a critical reflection of individual and shared narratives, strengthening our will to redefine our ethnic identity (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

I chose these methods to give voice to the silence Latinas often experience. These culturally congruent methodologies did not simply extract information, they allowed us to assess and theorize our own lived experiences. Our *pláticas* and *testimonios* were collaborative and honored the participants as co-constructors of knowledge. These tools acted as a bridge that "merges brown bodies in our communities with academia as we employ methodology and pedagogy in educational practices" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 364).

Table 1 provides an overview of the data collection strategies, their purpose, as well as the date, time, and location where they occurred. All data were collected in 2022.

Table 1. Organization of Pláticas.

Type of *plática*	Date	Participants	Location	Purpose
Group #1	March 29	Janie, Lori, Sally, and Provi	In my home	Explained the purpose and layout of the study. Began telling our stories. Rated ourselves using the racial/ethnic identity model (Atkinson et al., 1993).
Individual	April 4	Provi	Zoom	Continue the conversation on what comments were made in the group *plática*.
	June 9	Janie	Janie's home	
	June 10	Lori	Zoom	
Group #2	June 10	Janie, Lori, Sally, and Provi	In my home	Continued the conversation of positive and negative experiences in school and how this influenced the perception of ourselves. Offered instructions for the *testimonios*.
Individual	September 23	Provi	Zoom	Provided an opportunity for the participant to explain their creation.
	September 23	Lori	Zoom	
	September 24	Janie	Zoom	
Group #3	November 3	Janie, Lori, Sally, and Provi	In my home	Reviewed comments/quotes to identify themes. Rated ourselves using the racial/ ethnic identity model (Atkinson et al., 1993).

Data Analysis

Using the critical micro-ethnography approach, I sought to develop valid

connections among the Latinas, the educators in their lives, and the formal schooling

experiences they had to construct "theoretical understandings of what is being

interactionally, socially, discursively and situationally accomplished by participants"

(Green et al., 2020, p. 165). I gathered a description of us, the four Latinas, within our

family and over generations and our experiences in formal schooling through storytelling.

I traced the actions of us/the four Latinas in a formal school environment and analyzed

the sequence of events using Borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 2012), the racial identity

model (Atkinson et al., 1993), and CFE (Anzaldúa, 2015; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado

Bernal, 2020) to make visible what is often invisible or overlooked.

I engaged in "analytic induction" to make grounded connections between the

phenomena analyzed and to develop "theoretical understandings of what are common

experiences" within this culture group as well as collect individual and collective

knowledge within this cultural group (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Green et al., 2020, p. 165).

I relied on direct quotes from our group and individual *pláticas*, as well as our

testimonios, to identify themes and patterns and to create a narrative that accurately

depicted the experience and impact on this culture-sharing group in formal education. I

used the Data Analysis Spiral, as depicted in Figure 4, to engage "in the process of

moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach" (Creswell & Poth,

2018, p.185).
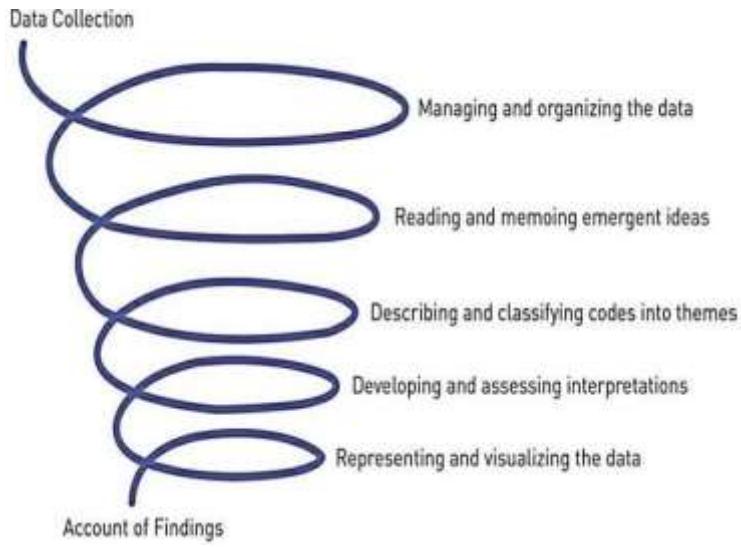
Figure 4**. Data Analysis Spiral.**

Independently, I began the Data Analysis Spiral process by transcribing the audio

recordings of the discussions and highlighting parts of stories, comments, and phrases

involving emotions, schooling, and identity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I read through the

transcriptions and took notes of what participants' comments could be expressing and

wrote questions as a follow up for our subsequent individual and group *pláticas*. I

practiced this step after the first and second group *pláticas* and after the first and second

individual *pláticas*. This first step in the spiral enabled me to manage the data to expand

on comments made and memo emergent ideas about which direction the data were

leading. In our individual *pláticas*, I used the phrases I previously highlighted to conduct

a member check and to confirm my interpretation of the participants' statements

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). I read the statements to the participants during the individual

pláticas and asked them to go deeper or add more context or clarify my interpretation of

their statements. I triangulated these data with confirmation of ideas and beliefs with the

participant and substantiated with their creativity through their *testimonio*. I completed

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the first two steps in the Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018) through the first and second group and individual *pláticas*.

I completed the final three steps in the final group *pláticas*. Independently, I typed all comments or phrases that had been made by the participants in the two group *pláticas* and from the two individual *pláticas*. There were close to 100 direct statements from the participants that related to school experiences, demographic differences between ourselves and other Latinas, teacher interactions, peer interactions at school, perceptions of self at school, and our perceptions of Latinas. After reflecting on the purpose of the study being to identify how interactions with educators and the education system influenced our ethnic identity, I made the decision to exclude comments pertaining to peer interactions, demographic differences, and our perceptions of other Latinas as I was organizing the comments. I kept the statements involving teachers, perceptions of self, and feelings in a school setting.

In our final group *plática*, we completed the third step of the Data Analysis Spiral to classify the statements into themes. I used reflexive research methods to position myself within the study and to explain how my background and experiences informed the interpretation of the study and described this to the participants to explain why certain quotations were selected and some were not included (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I placed 33 comments on the coffee table and asked each participant to select around five to seven texts at random. These texts included the name of the participant who made the comment and if we needed to ask the family member for context or more information as we reflected on their thought. I asked the participants to first independently complete step three in the spiral and organize their comments based on what they felt the statement was

representing. We took turns reading the statements we organized and if another person felt they had a comment that was related to the same topic, they would make a connection and share. As a group, we then completed the fourth step in the analysis spiral and analyzed, confirmed, and validated the interpretations. We grouped each direct quote based on the experience and interpretation of the comment. Once every comment was in a group, we then read through each comment carefully and decided on the overall theme of those comments collectively based on our interpretation of the comments.

It is important to note that there was not an abundance of stories from each of us reflective within the themes, as we tended to choose to share and reflect on one or two significant experiences in depth. We told these stories in an authentic way, and we took time crying or laughing with each of them over three *pláticas*. During these times we were not focused on the work of the study. We were focused on the work of understanding our experiences in our classrooms. The goal was not to produce themes for a final product, but to uncover the meaning of the memories we have held on to for years. The themes we identified are more like the commonalities we interpreted from our stories. The commonalities we uncovered from our collected stories included (a) fear of failure, (b) feelings of not belonging, and (c) teacher influence.

Table 2 displays direct quotes pulled from the stories we shared and presented to the group. Together, we decided on the comments that would be grouped together and then labeled the theme we felt the comments, in connection to their stories, represented. These comments were pulled from the stories and experiences we shared during our group and individual *pláticas*.

Table 2. Thematic Findings.

Theme	Comments
Theme 1: Fear of failure	I never remember the teacher being proud of me. I devoted my time to my studies. Even when I came home, I would review, review, review because I needed to be ready for the next day. (Janie)
	Anything that drew too much attention to you in the negative sense was very bad. In order to survive you needed to not draw attention to yourself. (Lori)
	I told everyone I was taking a year off after high school to work, but really, I didn't apply to college, I didn't think I would get in. I remember meeting with the counselor and telling her this, she didn't question me at all and ended the meeting early. (Sally)
	I guess I kind of always thought that if I was like, perfect, then what could go wrong. I tried to be really easy. I don't want to be difficult at all to make it easier on my teachers. (Provi)
Theme 2: Feelings of not belonging	My teacher never smiled at me. The only time she would smile at me was when I brought her an apple. I brought her an apple every day to get one smile. (Janie)
	It's like you just felt that you were tolerated, but you weren't really accepted. (Lori)
	I was already questioning if I belonged in this academic space and my professor confirmed for me that I didn't. (Sally)
	You're automatically putting yourself in a place to be below everyone else when walking into a space, it's not good for you. Like I'm not saying you have walk in and be top dog, but to go to a space and to be constantly questioning you place means that you're not going to have a stable place. (Provi)
Theme 3: Teacher influence	They are not teachers, I know they are teaching, but they are not teachers. It goes beyond teaching. It goes into your personality, how you are going to invite yourself into that child's life. (Janie)
	It's about knowing the students and it's about how you make them feel. That is the beginning of education. You are learning who you are. If learning does not include finding out who you are, then no math formula in the world is going to help you. (Lori)
	She made me feel so stupid as I just stood at the whiteboard crying in front of the whole class. She offered no help, just waited for me to show what she already knew about me, that I wasn't smart enough. (Sally)
	It was more like I thought I was always doing worse that I actually was. And the teachers were like, "Actually, you're doing good." And I was like "okay." (Provi)

These overarching themes and their corresponding stories are discussed, and additional context is included for the direct quotes in the following chapter.

Trustworthiness

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, "Agendas must question their underlying moral assumptions, their political and ethical implications, and the equitable treatment of diverse voices" (p. 257). Qualitative data cannot be interpreted without understanding the underlying behaviors and assumptions. The challenge is to be cognizant of our positionality, our own experiences, and the values we bring to the table. Maxwell (2013) suggested we are "part of the world" we study and are a "powerful and inescapable influence" (p. 125).

To ensure I accurately presented the data and honored the voices and stories of all participants, I used a researcher's journal to support reflexivity and be politically and ethically self-aware. This journal allowed me to engage in self-understanding and be a part of my own inquiry. Interpretations or conclusions were member checked, audited, and reviewed by coresearchers, professional peers, and professors (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As an insider, I had the advantage of knowing the participants in an intimate way, having shared familial experiences, similar cultural and social identities, and a sense of closeness that allowed for personal and authentic experiences. Additionally, as an insider and family member, I could detect nonverbal gestures and hidden behaviors, and had insight into the linguistic, cognitive, and emotional principles of the participants (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

Ethical Considerations

I closely followed Texas State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures to guarantee the ethical responsibility of this study. After receiving approval from my dissertation chair and committee, I submitted a completed application to begin the IRB review process. After a full review took place to ensure the safety of the minor involved in this study, the study was approved by the IRB on March 14, 2022. Data collection and analysis began after this approval.

Each participant viewed and signed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B), which explained the purpose, benefits, risks, and relevant details associated with the study. Although the participants were family members, they were aware of their right to articulate questions or concerns regarding the study before participating and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time with no negative repercussions. Each participant was aware and comfortable with their names being used for the study. However, the names of the schools we attended and teachers' names were excluded to protect their privacy. Data were securely stored on the university's secure sever, digitally protected by password, and only accessible by the primary researcher.

Challenges

Although this study could represent or resemble the experiences and feelings of other Latinas, results are limited to the experiences of a small sample size, my family. There were moments during the *pláticas* that became mildly uncomfortable due to the emotional nature of the stories we shared of our schooling experiences. During these times, each participant was empathetic and appreciative of the space provided to be vulnerable and heard. Navigating everyone's schedules when trying to determine when

our *pláticas* would take place proved to be very challenging. I do believe each family member saw the time spent on this study as valuable, though it may have been possible that family members felt more comfortable cancelling or stating they were busy when dates were proposed. This spread out our meeting dates, which prolonged the research.

Summary

Critical micro-ethnography served as the research approach to identify and analyze the generational differences among Latinas within one family—my family—to understand the influence of the formal education system on our cultural affiliation and ethnic identity (Pane et al., 2014). I used CFE (Anzaldúa, 2015; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2020), Borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 2012), and the racial/ethnic identity model (Atkinson et al., 1993) as guiding tools to make sense of our individual and shared schooling experiences.

Data analysis involved the use of the Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which complemented the authentic flow of gathering and organizing the data from *pláticas*, reflecting on the comments and stories told, uncovering themes, assessing interpretations of the comments made and themes identified, and representing the data through a table. I described the research design, participants, data collection, data analysis procedures, and the trustworthiness of data in this chapter. Last, this chapter included ethical considerations to maintain the integrity of this study.

IV. FINDINGS

The women in my family each hold education in the highest regard. This is not because of pressure placed on us from family members, but an internal drive for knowledge. Or rather, maybe it is a drive to better our livelihood, and we feel education is our ticket to a better life. After all, that is what society sells us—a better education means a better life. But for minoritized communities, at what cost? What do we have to sacrifice?

My maternal grandmother, despite having no education and being illiterate, recognized the importance of formal schooling and sought out strangers in her community to support her daughter's academic progress. She found other Mexican families in markets, or on the farm, and traded goods for tutoring. These Mexican families welcomed my mother and grandmother into their homes; my grandmother and these friendly strangers conversing while the older children taught my mother how to read. My mother remembered third graders reviewing sight words with her. My mother made it to her junior year at the University of Texas when she began working as a preschool teacher at a small Christian school. My mother traded the bulk of her salary for our education. My sister also became an educator, developing a love for teaching music to elementary age students and I am currently an assistant principal. My sister's daughter is now a junior in high school and is excelling in her honors classes. Despite each of us having very different experiences within our own education, all of us devote our time and energy in this field. This is something we have in common. Throughout multiple generations we have held on to the belief that education matters; however, through this journey I have noticed there is something we have let go of. We have gradually lost bits

and pieces of our ethnic identity as we strive to achieve a quality education in a subtracting schooling system (Valenzuela, 1999). We start with my mother feeling proud to be a Latina and end with my niece not identifying as a Latina.

I started to question how this regression took place and what factors influenced this loss of identity. Because education is such a large part of who we are, I decided to take a closer look into our formal schooling experiences to determine whether, in our quest for academic knowledge, we lost our ethnic knowledge. I started to wonder how we moved from my mother, who experienced discrimination from her teachers because my mother spoke Spanish and took pride in her culture, to my niece, who has not experienced direct discrimination from her teachers but feels uncomfortable identifying with her cultural roots. I questioned formal schooling's influence in this adaptation of ourselves. In the PhD program at Texas State University, learning about philosophers and trailblazers such as Freire, Delgado Bernal, and Gloria Anzaldúa helped me realize that to have a deep understanding of the struggles Latinas have faced in the schooling system and how and when they were empowered to rise above deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997) and proclaim and share their gifts in the academic setting, I first needed to know myself and examine my journey. This journey begins with the strong women of my family. This study became about discovering my own and my family members' ethnic identity and validating the process of becoming (Martínez-Roldán, 2021).

This chapter is purposefully organized in the following manner. It begins with profiles of the participants offering basic demographic information and some details from their personal narratives about their school experiences. The thematic findings of this research study then follow. Thematic findings are based on the data obtained from group

and individual *pláticas*, our *testimonios*, and our personal reflections on our ethnic

identity development guided by Atkinson et al.'s (1993) five stages of racial/cultural

identity development that were completed before the study began and at the end of the

study.

Participant Profiles

All participants identified and recognized their Latina heritage, but each

connected this heritage with their ethnic identities to varying degrees. Through

storytelling and the creation of *testimonios*, participant narratives and voices were given a

platform. These personal experiences broadly represent Latinas' formal schooling

experiences and how these experiences influenced their perceptions of themselves.

San Juanita/Janie, Born 1951

My mother's legal name is Janie Saint Avalos, even though the name my

grandmother verbally gave to the nurses was San Juanita Avalos (see Figure 5). The

nurses took it upon themselves to document the translation and wrote Janie Saint Avalos

on my mother's birth certificate. This set the tone for my mother's life as a Mexican

American.

Figure 5. Photos of San Juanita/Janie.

My mother began her first-grade year in Manor, Texas. There was no

kindergarten at the time, she only spoke Spanish, and she was physically punished when

she used her native language. She learned English as quickly as possible and became a

translator for her parents at a very young age. She tells stories of learning English from the field workers who knew just a little more English than she did. Despite her struggles and poor experiences in the schooling system, she completed elementary school, middle school, and high school, and attended some college at the University of Texas where she was learning to be an educator. Her mother was illiterate, and her father received up to a junior high education.

My mother was 72 years old at the time when this study took place. She continues to live in the Central Texas area today. She has been married to Enrique, Henry, for 51 years. They have two daughters, Lorenza (Lori) and Araceli (Sally). She was an educator from 1988 to 2008. She started working as a teacher's aide in public education, worked as a preschool and as a second-grade teacher in a private Christian school in Austin, and then opened her own preschool in 1997. Henry, Lori, and Sally also worked at the preschool.

Lorenza/Lori, Born 1978

My sister, Lorenza Garcia before marriage, goes by Lori due to it being easier to pronounce (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Photos of Lorenza/Lori.

Despite our parents not having the desirable financial means, Lori went to private schools from kindergarten to college. After high school she spent a year in a Texas bible

college. When she returned to Austin, Texas, after that year, she resumed her studies at Austin Community College and then transferred to a Christian college in Tennessee. She stayed at the college in Tennessee until her sophomore year. She learned some Spanish from our parents and was always able to hold a conversation with our grandparents while they were alive.

Lori was 42 years old at the time of this study and had been married to Leon for 17 years at that point. They have four children, one of whom is Providence (Provi), who participated in this study. Lori worked as a preschool teacher at our mother's preschool for 10 years, was a stay-at-home mother for 5 years, and then rejoined education at a private school in Leander as a music teacher for 3 years. At the time of this study, she was a stay-at-home mother, navigating the busy schedules of her four children. I looked forward to learning more about my sister's experiences in school and how they informed her ethnic identity. Until now, this topic had not been discussed between us.

Araceli/Sally, Born 1985

My legal name is Araceli Garcia before marriage, but I have always gone by Sally (see Figure 7). My mother has always called me Sally, and I did not truly realize my legal name was Araceli until signing for a driver's license.

Figure 7. Photos of Araceli/Sally.

I do not speak Spanish and was never able to hold a conversation with my grandparents. I included myself in this study because although my sister and I are within

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the same generation after my mother, I am 7 years younger than my sister. This difference in time affected the way my parents interacted with me and the way I experienced school. I also attended private schools from preschool to high school, where I experienced subtle and blatant forms of discrimination.

I was 37 years old, divorced, and had recently reconnected with the great love of my life, Mike, at the time of this study. I have one daughter, who is almost 6 years old, from my previous marriage. I started working in education at my mother's preschool after I graduated high school. All 4 years of college I worked as a teacher's assistant in the child development center on campus. After I graduated with my bachelor's degree, I worked toward an alternative certification for teaching. During this time, I worked as a teacher's aide in a special education classroom for Houston Independent School District (HISD). The principal was aware I was completing my certification program and offered me the third-grade math teaching position that would be opening the following Fall. I worked for HISD for 3 years and then moved back to Austin and became a preschool teacher at a local Christian academy and then worked as a third-grade teacher at a private classical school in Leander, Texas. During this time, I received my master's in literacy instruction, became the Director of the Early Childhood Center of the Classical school, and had my daughter. I took a year off education to care for my daughter.

During my time not teaching in an elementary setting, I became an adjunct professor at a private university and started my PhD journey at Texas State University. By the time my daughter, Maggie, was 2 years old, I had become an assistant principal for the Leander Independent School District (LISD). While working on my final chapters for my dissertation in Spring of 2023, I was also in the Prospective Principal Program

with LISD. I am excited to apply for principal positions as they open. My daughter is currently enrolled in a dual language program in LISD. Only recently, within my doctoral courses, have I begun to identify and tap into my cultural assets, but I find myself still struggling with my ethnic identity and am questioning if perhaps my ethnic identity warrants its own definition and I do not need to conform to established definitions of what it is to be a Latina.

Providence/Provi, Born 2005

My sister's daughter is Providence (Provi) Arelle Steward (see Figure 8). No Spanish name given.

Figure 8. Photos of Providence.

Provi was homeschooled by my sister until late elementary when she began attending a private classical school that I worked at and then her mother worked at. She began attending public schools in middle school. Provi was 17 years old at the time of this study and in her junior year in Leander, Texas. She was enrolled in AP Biology, AP U.S. History, AP Research, AP Language, and AP Composition and was the captain of the debate club at her school.

Thematic Findings

Martínez-Roldán (2021) posited that in our process of becoming, sharing our memories through storytelling and the act of retelling, and not solely the experiences, is what reshapes our identities. Our *pláticas* created a safe space for us to recall some of our memories from our schooling experiences. We embraced this process as a restructuring of our identity and became vulnerable together as we shared moments in the classroom when we felt embarrassed or unwelcome and times when we felt seen and celebrated. We each recalled specific events that reinforced our feelings surrounding school and our ethnic identity. These captured moments offered a glimpse into our overall formal schooling experience. We revisited and rediscussed some of these moments in our *pláticas* due to the major impact they had on our school experience, laying the foundation for how we would expect our future teachers to interact with us and what we would expect from ourselves. My mother's first-grade experience, for example, was revisited often and is found within each of the themes we identified. This was a significant event in my mother's life that needed to be thoroughly expressed for my mother's healing process to begin. So, we listened, and we took in her memories. We allowed her an opportunity to use the space to share the pain she had been holding onto for years. We learned from her pain; however, we did not dwell in the pain, rather we celebrated the strength and beautiful elements of her community that were a result of her struggle.

We also found that the creation and sharing of our *testimonios* allowed us to share our experiences in such a way that we felt comfortable and confident. After identifying our themes, we discussed how we could see parts of our findings within our *testimonios*, and thus they are integrated within the thematic findings. The overarching themes we

identified from the data collected included the following: (a) fear of failure, (b) feelings of not belonging, and (c) teacher influence. These themes were present throughout each generation in specific stories or memories shared by the participants. Additionally, creative liberty was taken in how the findings within each theme are presented to more authentically reflect the rich, emotive details shared through our collective and individual narratives.

Fear of Failure

We sat in my living room reflecting on our stories and statements and identified the commonality in our schooling experiences. Each of us, no matter the era, felt we did not have the understanding necessary to be successful and this lack of the correct academic knowledge presented to us by our teachers would lead to intentional and nonintentional embarrassment caused by the responses of our teachers, humiliation, or disappointment in ourselves, reinforcing the idea that we should not have tried in the first place. We felt this way as a response to our previous experiences with authority figures in education.

This resembles the findings from Cooper's (2012) study in which Latinas said they felt the competencies they brought to school were irrelevant to "scholastic success" or did not feel their characteristics were of value in the academic setting, resulting in their feeling ill-equipped for academic achievement or lacking in the ability to reach their educational goals. Cooper found this experience often caused Latinas to respond by "rejecting schooling, through non-participation or acts of rebellion, thus leaving their intellectual potential undiscovered" (p. 494). This was not the case in our group of Latinas, as we eventually discovered our potential as we tamed our fear of failure.

It is interesting to consider how a person who is terrified to make a mistake can also be a risk taker. Each one of us have made decisions that had the potential to lead to failure, yet we did it anyway. The important factor in this is our age. In our younger years, elementary and junior high age, fear of failure caused us to hold back, to not ask questions, or to withhold our answers. However, as we got older, we recognized the fear of failure loomed over us, but we did not allow it to hold us back from at least trying. My mother opened her own preschool with no money and no formal education as evidence of her qualifications. There was not a year when she did not have a waiting list. My sister would take the stage as a self-taught musician and captivate the audience. I mustered up any confidence I could gather and applied for higher education or employment promotions, feeling complete shock and wonder when I was accepted. My niece enrolled in several AP classes despite the intense challenges they presented, and she is the captain of the debate team despite having crippling anxiety when speaking in front of large crowds.

Lori's Testimonio. During the study, I received a random text from my sister of a blurry image of her house and car through a shattered windshield (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Lori's Testimonio.

My immediate response was, "Are you ok?!" She texted back, "This is exactly what it feels like." The panic in my heart calmed knowing she was safe, but then sadness settled in as I realized she was connecting this image to our conversations about her experience in school. Shattered glass is not typically associated with something positive. I asked her to tell me more. She said:

> Being a minority feels like this. It's never within grasp for you. This is what you get, and it's always skewed, and it kind of even keeps you from trying to do bigger things or being scared to because you already knew you weren't expected to. Or, that you weren't going to ever really become anything, you know, because you don't really need to. Like, you would never make it that far or whatever that feeling is. Maybe it's not said to you directly or maybe it was. But this was my experience with education.

Even now with a beautiful house and nice car, society would say my sister is successful, but she still feels as though she is looking at her success through a shattered glass of painful experiences from the spaces in which she received an education, whether formal or informal.

Lori's *testimonio* offered a visual for the impact the fear of failure can have on our outlook on life. Our past experiences of humiliation and the fear of not meeting the hegemonic, rigid criteria for intelligence can influence how we perceive ourselves and even how we perceive our successes. Even when we accomplish great things, we question whether we deserve such success.

The following collected and shared experiences from my family display how we developed our fear of failure or how this feeling was reinforced in an educational setting. The stories are presented linearly beginning with my mom and ending with my niece. This allows for an easy comparison of the experiences among generations.

My Mom in her First-Grade Classroom. As the lonely days passed, my mother learned to watch the other students and copy what they were doing. She told the story of how one day the teacher passed out a coloring page and gave directions in English. "I remember the smell of this little sheet; I loved that smell," Mom shared. "There was a big, beautiful balloon and it had a word inside the balloon . . . I colored it blue, I loved blue, and I colored all of it." Then she noticed everyone around her was coloring the balloon red. At that, she described how she "freaked out and the teacher got upset at me." She explained she was terrified of not understanding and making mistakes. She felt the teacher was never proud or impressed by any attempts she made. She told us she would go home and study for as long as she could and would study on the drive to school and all the way walking to her classroom, hoping the information would stay in her memory, hoping the teacher would call on her first so she could quickly give the memorized answers she knew. When we asked her what her motivation was for all this hard work,

she said it was fear of the direct embarrassment she would endure at the hands of her teacher.

My Sister at her Private School. Lori learned that "in some places you had to be careful." She did not know school to be a safe place for her to learn and to make mistakes because she felt the teachers and the principals did not like her. If she did something wrong, whether academically or behaviorally, she felt it would somehow be worse for her than for the other students because she had already been labelled a problem. Consequently, she admitted: "I just dealt with it. I learned to figure everything out on my own." She felt this way from fourth grade to her senior year at a small private Christian school in South Austin. Rather than ask her teachers for help, she would study any resources she could find on her own and would find pockets of opportunities to receive help from someone outside of the school setting, like her boyfriend's father. Every day she would go over to her boyfriend's house and his father would ask about what she was working on. They would sit around the table, and he would break down complicated math problems and help her feel she was capable. This was not a feeling she ever felt from her teachers.

Lori specifically remembers a time in her fifth-grade classroom when the students would play "around the world" with division and multiplication flash cards. She stated, "I wasn't very fast, and I would get anxious, which would make me slower and then would get embarrassed, so then I would cry." She remembered that her teacher was kind and forgiving of her inability to produce answers rapidly, but that the embarrassment among the other classmates was humiliating. The teacher was not directly the cause of this embarrassment, nor was she specifically singling out my sister, but this was a continued

practice in her classroom that reinforced my sister's perception of herself. My sister also did not recall the teacher offering support or interventions to help my sister succeed with the rapid game. The expectations were set, and my sister could not perform accordingly. Instead of learning her math facts, the lesson Lori learned was that the classroom was not a safe place to make mistakes.

Myself at a "Better" Private School. I recalled my junior year at a prestigious private school, one different from the one my sister attended, when the time had come for applications to be submitted to universities for college admissions. My peers were applying to Harvard, Princeton, the University of Texas, Vanderbilt, and several other colleges I had never heard of. Our school had a counselor assigned to our class of 45 students with the sole purpose of helping us apply and get accepted into a college or university. She met with each of us individually, some more than once, to plan and help us execute our plans with success, the success being accepted into the college or university of their choice. She met with me once and very briefly. It was so uneventful I cannot even remember where we met. She asked me what my plans were for after high school. I told her I was considering taking a year off to work at my parents' local preschool. She nodded. She said, "You could always look into Austin Community College." I nodded. Meeting over. At the time, I left grateful that she did not press me any further. I had no understanding of how applying to colleges worked or even an idea of where I would apply. I also felt I would not be accepted to any college so why even try. Why even hope when I knew it would end in disappointment. The counselor knew it, too.

Provi at a "Classical" Private School. Provi recalled her sixth-grade math class at a classical private school in Austin, different from where her mom and aunt attended. She remembered making a 103 on one of her tests and felt that was a huge success, as she had failed the three tests before that one. The classroom was dark, and the teacher was scary. She remembered feeling uncomfortable in the environment. She explained how this teacher fostered a spirit of competition among the students in an attempt to make them try harder, which immediately made her "check out." "I cried in that class a lot 'cause [*sic*] I literally did not understand anything," she admitted. The teacher would see her crying and graded her assessments, identifying that she was not mastering the content, but would not offer any help. She remembered, "I wouldn't ask any questions; I would figure it out by myself." She was uncertain of how the teacher would react if she asked for help because of the expectations he set for the class. She would sit next to other students who understood and would watch as they worked, and she would keep working at it until she got the same answers as the other students. Provi overwhelmingly feared being singled out for her lack of understanding. She explained, "I would get nervous speaking in front of everyone, and there was also a high chance they explained it before, and I just didn't remember." The fear of embarrassment, or of making a mistake, was greater than her fear of not understanding a concept in her math class. When borrowing from the other students' understanding was not enough, she gathered the courage to talk with her mom, my sister, about how she was feeling in math class and together they sought out tutoring.

How we Healed From our Fear of Failure. Our fear of failure was calmed through interactions with friends or family. Our family members encouraged us to keep trying and reminded us of their unconditional love. There was no pressure to do better because of high standards set by our parents, rather there was support by finding tutors. Provi remembered a specific interaction with the mom of one of her friends who helped change her perspective on what she considered failing. This mom had gone to the same school as Provi and had taken a lot of the same courses. She even had some of the same teachers and shared her yearbook with Provi. Provi considered this woman's life and it helped her redefine what success meant for her. This woman was not academically ranked as high as Provi when she was in school, and she did not go to a top college. How well she did in school was not the end goal for her and Provi saw that her life was beautiful, not ruined. This helped Provi "feel calm about failure, or what a meaningful life can look like." Provi stated, "I was reminded that even though I would feel a failure for settling down [with academics] or not having an immense education, it doesn't mean there isn't joy in regular life." This gave Provi the confidence to take risks in the classroom because she recognized there could be joy in her future no matter how well she did in school.

Relation Between Fear of Failure in School and Identity. These stories took place in different schools and classrooms across three generations and yet the crippling fear of embarrassment from the risk of not meeting expectations, not being good or smart enough, and of making a mistake touched us all. We felt the similar struggle. We recognized the fear my mother felt was directly related to the teacher's deficit thinking about the Brown students in her class. In the 1950s, my mother was afraid to make a

mistake because it was indicated to her that she was not welcome in a direct and hostile manner by one of her teachers. In the 1980s and 1990s, when my sister and I attended school, this fear of failure was cultivated based on the perceptions our teachers, or educational authority figures, held about us being Latinas. In the 2000s, Provi's lack of understanding of the content material and lack of support in a competitive educational environment, coupled with her understanding of being different than the other students, racially and economically, gave rise to her fear of failure. This was indirectly done by the environment established by the teacher. We found that in these stories, direct interactions with educational authority figures or the environment they created played a key role in producing these fears and were in some way related to our ethnic identity.

Familial influences on this fear of failure were not brought up in the *pláticas*. This could be due to there not being a strong connection to this fear, or it could be that because mothers and daughters were participating together this aspect of the conversation was avoided. I can only address my personal experience and the observations I have of my sister and parents. In our household, we were rarely asked if we had homework and we did not discuss higher education. Although we valued the education we were receiving at the time, we did not feel the pressure to be a student who achieved all As. My parents have never been disappointed in my efforts and have always celebrated and valued my academic achievements.

Feelings of not Belonging

In our *pláticas*, Provi communicated that not seeing other Latinas in her advanced courses made her question if she belonged in that space. She described walking into a classroom feeling as though she had to prove she deserved to be in the course. She felt

she did not belong before she interacted with the teacher. After analyzing our stories, we discovered we all felt that way at some point, or continuously, in our academic settings or with peers. We questioned if we were welcome in the space, how hard we would have to work to become a welcomed member of the group, and how long would we feel like an outsider of the group. Instruction was happening around us, but not with us. We felt there was nothing we could contribute as guests in a space that was not made for us. Through our stories of direct and indirect interactions with instructors and the perception we had of our academic abilities, we uncovered our feelings of not belonging in an academic space. It was also interesting to discuss similar feelings of not belonging with other Latinas.

Provi's *testimonio* is a beautiful representation of these feelings. She spoke of a Latina who seemed out of place in the classroom and spoke to her own feelings of not being able to connect with this Latina despite sharing the same culture or ethnicity. There were similarities between them that she identified, but the differences were too great for her to connect with this Latina. She ended with questioning why she would want to connect with this Latina in particular, and the Latina identity in general, when there are so many negative stereotypes attached to this ethnicity that reinforce the idea that they do not belong. Evidence of these negative stereotypes of Latinas was found by Daisy and José-Kampfer (2002) who asked young Latinas to draw an image of a Latina at work. The majority of the students drew Brown women doing domestic or clerical work. A couple drew teachers and only one drew a Latina as a principal. Daisy and José-Kampfer posited that these illustrations could be the result of perpetual low expectations and the perception of a successful Latina being an exception, not the norm. The low expectations

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of Latinas by their educators restrict Latinas' perceptions of themselves as intelligent, limit their access to higher level courses, and could limit their goals and aspirations (Chang, 2017; Daisy & José-Kampfer, 2002). We are having to prove we can be the exception, which does not encourage the feelings of belonging in an academic space.

Some Latinas, however, have bonded together over these feelings of rejection and not belonging and found empowerment, confianza (confidence), belonging, acceptance, community, and strength in their language and culture (Cantu, 2012; Cooper, 2012; Dyrness, 2007; Ek et al., 2010; Lapayese, 2013; Martinez et al., 2015; Monzó & Rueda, 2003). Reading about how these Latinas found strength through their collective struggles is beautiful, though there are some Latinas who cannot identify with struggles involving language barriers or stereotypes placed on them based on their ethnic physical appearance. Provi and I have not experienced the discrimination that comes with language barriers or negative connotations surrounding our ethnic physical appearance so we often to do not feel a sense of belonging with those Latinas who have. Not finding ourselves within the literature connects with our lack of *belongingness* discussed in Chapter I and with the idea of being an outsider with the White community and an outsider with the Latina community.

Provi's Testimonio. Provi's *testimonio* reflects the disconnect with other Latinas who feel they do not belong, but for different reasons.

Sometimes I look to the back of the class

And I'll see a girl

If she was a few skin shades lighter

Or if my hair was a bit darker

I could look like her

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She could look like me

But she sits in the back of the classroom

Somehow, I sit in the front

I wonder if she doesn't ask questions because she doesn't want to

Or maybe a teacher never cared

Maybe she sat in the back in first grade

Maybe she got used to it by fourth grade

Maybe she assumed that's just how it was by seventh grade

Maybe she chose this class in eleventh grade

And maybe it didn't choose her

While I sit in the front

And someone makes a joke about how I look especially Asian that day

I tell them I'm actually Latina

But I'm afraid I can't pronounce it properly

So, I say Hispanic

And then I say that I'm only half

"I always just assumed you were white or something"

I laugh a little

It's rehearsed

This conversation feels like constant deja vu by now

I wonder if the girl hears our talk

I wonder if she's shocked too

I wonder if she would reject me as a part of her culture as quickly as everyone else does

She probably can't even hear us

She's so far away

So far away from where the teacher lectures

Too far to be noticed if she raises her hand

Now that I think about it have, I ever seen her raise her hand?

Have I ever heard her talk?

I can't recall a single time

If I turn my head to look at her

She is Latina

She can't hide it like me

And now she reminds me of every Hispanic classmate of mine

Is Hispanic the right word?

I'm not really sure

But they stayed in the back too

I don't think I could say her name

Or any of their names

I'm too afraid to mispronounce it

Too afraid that if I speak a Hispanic name

Or learn Spanish

It'll feel foreign on my tongue

The language my mother can speak

And her mother

And her mother's mother

And I have their blood

But they probably sat in the back of the class too

That is foreign to me too

So, what do I really have?

The blood of a powerful culture

And nothing to show for it

Because sitting in the front

Almost feels like a betrayal

Like I had to leave that girl behind

So, I could be where I am

And I start to feel guilty

When I'm grateful I'm a few shades lighter

When I'm grateful "I'm only half"

Because I learned early on

That distinction meant something

White passing is a privilege I was gifted

and it's painfully sad that this is the advantage I get

it's even more sad that this advantage works

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I wasn't just half

Rewind and then spin back forward

Just to see where I sit in the class

Would I finally get to hear that girl speak?

Provi explained how over the course of her young life she had been witness to the

numerous stigmas surrounding being a Latina. She was grateful she was not easily placed

into this category. She explained that

> never seeing them [Hispanics] in any of my advanced classes, I kind of associated
> them with being lower academically, and I never wanted that, that was the worst
> possible thing I could think of at the time. I wanted to excel.

If others viewed that group in a negative light, then she was happy to not be associated

with it. As she reflected on our discussions, she recognized that she never really felt she

was missing out on being Latina because she did not know what that meant to her. She always saw herself as separate from it. She stated:

> First of all, I don't know what that culture means to me, Secondly, I don't know how to go about reclaiming it, and third of all I don't feel like I lost it to begin with. Why does it have to look a certain way? Why can't we be Latino and still be the way we are? Why does it have to be a full-blown scale to be valid? In order to reclaim something, you have to act the way others view it to be, then that is just confirming their idea of what it means to be Latina. And since their idea of being Latina includes things like uneducated and poor, why would I want to reclaim that? It doesn't seem enticing. I say that reclaiming it means you get to redefine it, it's yours to define, reclaiming means to accept it under their stereotypes.

Not Belonging in Academics. The following stories display situations in which we did not feel we belonged in the academic setting we were in and moments we felt we did not belong with Latinas.

My Mother in First Grade. A 6-year-old Latina, who only spoke Spanish, walked into her first classroom greeted by stares and a directive in English from her teacher to find her seat. She understood this instruction because she observed some other students sitting. She felt hopeful this would be an easy task because her father, a ranch hand with an elementary education, practiced with her all summer writing her name, San Juanita. She was anxious to find her seat and find comfort in not being in the spotlight. She walked down the desk aisles looking at each name plate, not finding her own. Panic struck. She went through the rows again, not recognizing her name on any desk. She walked back to the teacher, knowing all eyes were on her, and showed her teacher her name, "San Juanita." The teacher gave a dismissive wave and walked over to a desk in the back of the room and pointed to a name plate, "Janie." The girl had practiced all summer learning to recognize and write her given name, San Juanita, only to have it changed to a word she could not read.

My mom, who is now 76 years old, told this story of her very first day of school, in tears. She could still feel the helplessness, fear, and anxiety of being in an unwelcoming and hostile environment. She was punished for "copying" the other kids when she was only observing what the other students were doing because every instruction was in English. She was punished for speaking Spanish when it was her only way to communicate. My mom would go home and tell her parents about these horrible experiences in her classroom. Because her parents felt unwelcome and unwanted, and because of the language barrier, they never stepped into the classroom or asked for a conference with her teacher, but supported their daughter in her distress the only way they knew how. My mom explained how she worked so hard at this because she was fearful the teacher would embarrass her or punish her. Throughout my mother's education, she never felt like she belonged there, she never felt completely confident in her abilities. She studied hard every day to avoid the feeling of embarrassment and humiliation at the hand of her teacher and peers.

My Sister in Fifth Grade. Her world just got bigger. She was homeschooled until the second grade. She knew what to expect at home with her mom as her teacher. She did not know what to expect as she entered a small private school in South Austin where her mom had been hired as a Pre-K teacher. She was able to attend this small private school due to her mom taking a salary cut to pay for her and her sister's tuition. Even this made her feel like an imposter. She started in her fifth-grade classroom, with a total of eight students, with Mrs. Fox. She loved it. Mrs. Fox was all about relationships and connections with her students. She would host pizza parties to celebrate class milestones and throw candy at the students who answered questions correctly. My sister and the

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other seven students were happy. Unfortunately, leaders at the school felt my sister was not keeping up with the other students. They would do speed math fact drills and she would cry. The school's solution was to take her out of her fifth-grade classroom, during the school year, and place her in a fourth-grade classroom. Her world shrank back a little. She was humiliated. She felt the teachers "did not dislike me but expected me to fail because I am a Mexican." Although she was placed in a lower grade level, she still found herself struggling, but received little to no support from her new teacher. She learned to stay quiet and not draw attention to the fact that she did not belong. She felt she "was tolerated, but never really accepted." She gave an example of times when the staff would provide donuts in the morning for everyone, but she felt that unless they specifically offered it to you do not take it, because it did not really mean the donuts were for everyone. "They were for teachers and their kids, but maybe not you, because you were Hispanic, or you were different, or you were poor." She learned quickly as a child to never assume she was included and never draw attention to herself. This is how she felt in class every day. She wanted to learn but never felt there was anyone to support her. "I wasn't stupid, but you're only as smart as the education you have available to you," she explained.

Me in 11th and 12th Grade. In Chapter I, I shared a memory from my third-grade year. I was intentionally humiliated by my teacher. This was the most significant memory from this year, but certainly not the only time I felt that way in her classroom. I was not a member of the classroom; I was a tolerated guest. If I had positive experiences before, they were overshadowed by third grade. This formidable year made me feel dumb and worthless and I carried that feeling with me into the following school years. In the

following years, when my teachers overlooked my potential, I did not question it, I rather accepted it as truth. I believed I was not someone who would stand out academically, so I would stay quiet and blend into their world. In high school, I somehow made it into Chemistry Pre-AP. I did well. The teacher was kind and spoke to me, not at me. She got to know me. I remember her face so clearly, which is odd for me as I cannot remember some of my other teachers' names. She had a soft speech impediment. Maybe this made her empathetic to my difference of being Brown in an all-White school. That might have been the most confident I felt in a classroom. She recognized my interest and motivated me to enroll in Biology AP. At this time, I became interested in the medical field so I started to consider being a nurse, of course not a doctor, not me. So, I started Biology AP. I maintained an A or B average and at the end of the year people in my class started talking about an AP exam. I had no idea what this was or what it meant. I gathered the nerve to ask my teacher questions about it. Here is what she told me, it is seared in my brain: "It would be pointless for you. Do you think you're going to be a doctor? It is also a lot of money. I wouldn't waste my time with it if I were you." The confidence I gained in Chemistry Pre-AP shrunk a little. I remembered my place. Someone like me did not belong in advanced academics. How quickly one teacher can build you up, and how quickly another can knock you down. She may have been right, maybe it would have been a waste of time and money for me, but what she did not recognize is that she was reinforcing my feelings of not belonging.

Provi in Math Class. Provi explained that in many of her math classes she felt underprepared or inadequate, even when she received passing grades. This sentiment was reflected in Chang's (2017) work, which provided insight on how Latinas identify with

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intelligence. Chang provided a space for Latinas to discuss what it is to be smart. These

middle school Latinas would not use smart as a primary trait to describe themselves,

despite making good grades. Chang identified the hesitance among Latina youth to assign

smartness to their identity. Similarly, Parker (2014) found that Latinas' experiences with

low expectations and educators placing them in lower tracked classes restricted their

access to enrolling in higher-level courses, causing lower numbers of Latinas in

mathematics and science. This practice was reminiscent of Provi's feeling of not

belonging in a math setting. Provi did not associate feeling inadequate with any specific

teacher making her feel this way, rather she explained how she carried an internalized

insecurity that stemmed from a lack of confidence in the subject. She felt she did not fit

in, or belong, in a mathematical setting but did feel she had a place in an English

language arts setting. She stated,

> I had this idea that I was good in English and writing based classes because I had
> always received compliments and positive feedback within those courses.
> Successes in math courses were maybe not as recognized because there weren't as
> many.

Her perceived inadequacies in math, coupled with the lack of teacher praise in this area,

made her feel there were some academic spaces she belonged in and some she did not.

Not Belonging With Latinas. Fiol-Matta (1996) found that as she adapted to

become "suitable" (i.e., no accent and speaking "academic" language) with her academic

environment, the further away she felt from her Puerto Rican identity and other Latinas.

Through our discussions we learned that my mother had always felt she belonged within

her Latinx culture. She felt more comfortable around other Latinas, but as we moved into

later generations with my sister, myself, and Provi, we no longer felt comfortable with

other Latinas. Our differences were too great. Our lack of belonging was twofold, in

academics and with other Latinas. Lori felt this the most with the churches she would

visit with the family. She stated there was "a huge language barrier and how American I

was raised didn't help." She felt she did not fit in with other Latinas, that the food, music,

and life experiences were just too different.

Provi's Interactions With Latinas. Provi and a White dance friend of hers walked

through the courtyard during their lunch period. Her friend noticed some people she knew

and walked over to sit with them. Provi and her White friend joined a group of Latina

girls sitting at a lunch table. She noticed the Latina girls were going back and forth

between English and Spanish as they were talking with each other: "I remember sitting

on the outside of the group and kind of watching, and I realized I could technically be

part of this group, but I don't feel like I fit in here at all." She looked around the

courtyard and noticed this group of Latinas was sitting away from everyone else. Like

they had found each other and made a pack. She noticed a community had formed and

she did not belong. There was more than just a physical distance from the other groups at

lunch. As she sat at the edge of her seat, she recognized there was literally and

metaphorically no space for her at this table as a half Latina who did not speak Spanish

and was often mistaken for Asian.

My Interactions With Latinas. In my first qualitative research methods class,

after I just experienced doubt from my professor, we were placed into groups to discuss

our research topics. I was in a group with a strong Latina who said her study was going to

involve "Chingonas" and asked if I would consider myself a "Chingona." I was

speechless. I was pretty sure she just said a curse word in class. I told her I did not know

what that meant, and she kindly rolled her eyes and went into more detail of her study. I

knew immediately I did not belong in the category of Latina with which she identified. This was yet another way I felt as though I did not have a place with White people, and I did not have a place with Brown people. Rather than lean into listening and learning from this strong Latina woman, I shut down and got defensive. I questioned why ethnicity and academics needed to be connected. Even though we are Latinas, we have thoughts about other things. I decided I would not be like the other Latinas and my study would be about play-based learning in early childhood. Something formal and academic that would certainly not have a Spanish word in the title.

I had never heard the word Chingona in my life, and to be honest I looked it up again online for this paper. Gonzalez (2016) explained that the term Chingona was

> previously used to shame women who might have come off as hard-headed or difficult, but now the term is breaking stereotypes. It's a way to tackle aspects of feminism within Latina culture, by turning this once-derogatory term into a positive word of empowerment. (para. 4)

After a couple of years learning from the works of Biesta, Rancier, Martinez, Guajardo, Fiere, Dewey, Guerra, Anzaldúa, Delgado Bernal, and so many more, my reality began to shift. I started to identify the oppression woven throughout our educational systems. I realized that me being in the PhD program was going against numerous stereotypes and statistics. I started questioning how I got there, beyond the usual feeling I had of not being worthy, but more into wanting to learn my family history that played a part in my development as a Latina in academia (see Figure 10). I started asking my mom questions about what school was like for her. She told me about her first day in first grade and I cried. She is the reason I am writing this dissertation. There are pockets of strength and determination in our history of oppression. I wanted to listen and

learn from the stories of my family. I may not be a Chingona, but I am a Latina working toward redefining what that means to me.

> Me first year of PhD:
> "I refuse to do a study about anything having to do with race. I am so much more than just a Hispanic."
>
> Me after 2 years of PhD:
> "If I am going to create anything of meaning I have to know my history. I have to understand my mom's story to have a better picture of mine. I am so much more than I give myself credit for because I am a Latina."

Figure 10. Sally's Testimonio.

How we Found a Sense of Belonging. My mother found belonging with her community. My grandmother sought out other Latino families in local stores to help my mother with her academics. If they had children a little older than my mom, my grandmother would ask if maybe their children could tutor her daughter. They agreed, not because my grandmother could pay them, but because they understood the pain and fear she felt for her daughter. Three to four times a week, my grandmother would take my mom to other Latino families' houses where the children would get together and practice the English alphabet and English site words. My mother would continue practicing at home and on the drive to school. Early in the morning she would find the other ranch workers and ask them to read the site words to her, so they were fresh in her mind as she studied them, repeating them in her best English accent, all the way to school. Because of the community outside of the classroom, my mom was able to memorize the letters and words and was able to read in the classroom.

Lori explained how she forced her way into belonging. She would push herself, by practicing hard or studying harder, to be successful in sports and with her classes. She recognized the doubt her school authorities had about her athletic or academic abilities,

and she would say, "Watch me!" She felt her teachers were not there to support her so she would get tutoring from her high school boyfriend's dad, she would study on her own after school, or she would practice basketball into the night to improve. She also explained that her friends helped her feel belonging even when she was not the smartest and despite being ridiculed by teachers.

I also found belonging with peers. Because of my association with the "popular" girls in our grade, I was not as concerned with my feelings of not belonging in an academic setting, I found my belonging with my friends because they saw value in me. It was not until my PhD program that I felt a sense of belonging with other Latinas. Until then I was not able to connect with the struggles with direct racism other Latinas went through. The group of Latinas I connected with in my program bonded over the hard reality that only 1% of Latinxs graduate from a doctoral program (J. González, 2007). We made a pact that we would help each other finish.

Similar to Lori taking it upon herself, Provi discovered ways to help address her feelings of not belonging. Provi watched how one of her White friends, who closely resembled Provi in physical appearance, interacted with teachers or peers. She would note how this friend would ask questions and how she would walk into a classroom with confidence and then she would mimic those same behaviors. She stated:

> In a way I think of it almost as a White person mindset, what I mean by that is, often in discussion of White privilege there is discourse about how it can be observed that White people feel entitlement in the social spaces they occupy, and that often other cultures have to fight for their places in those same social contexts. The people I have learned from are the people who share in that entitled mindset even if they aren't White. In my mind there was a clear choice between being the person who walks into a classroom like they belong there, or the one who hides in the back. Maybe I have not fully overcome the fear of not belonging, but I understand that expressing that unbelonging is detrimental to my future. I have to act like I belong where I am even if I don't feel like I truly do belong.

Essentially, we all learned ways to fake our sense of belonging. We practiced more, studied more, mimicked others' "acceptable" behaviors, and adapted ourselves to fit the mold we were expected to fit.

Our Similar Feelings of Not Belonging Through the Generations. Our *pláticas* revealed similar struggles with how we felt out of place, or like we did not belong, in our school setting. These feelings were uncovered throughout each generation in different forms. In the 1950s, direct racist interactions with a teacher caused my mom to feel she was not welcome in the hostile environment, where she was punished for speaking Spanish and punished for not understanding English. Interactions between my mother and her first-grade teacher were rarely positive. My mom told us about how she would go home after school and tell her mother how hard school was and how much the teacher did not like her. Her mother suggested taking the teacher something as a present, as maybe this act of kindness would change things. They did not have much to offer, but they did have produce from their garden. Every day my mother would take her teacher an apple and this was the only time the teacher would smile at her. Because this interaction was one of the only ways she made her teacher happy, she never forgot an apple. In the 1990s, my sister's experience with teachers was that there were plenty of niceties, but rarely authentic attempts at getting to know her or build a relationship. She was tolerated and overlooked. When my sister did not meet teachers' expectations, they set the tone of not belonging by removing her from her classroom. This had a great impact on how my sister perceived herself and her place at the school. More recently, the interaction I had with my professor reinforced the imposter syndrome I subscribed to. She reinforced the idea I had that somehow Texas State University accidentally accepted me into the program and

course by course they would reveal my lack of ability and intelligence and would eventually retract my acceptance. I did not truly belong in academia with my mispronunciation of "hegemony" and my inexperience with academic language. Provi often felt out of place in her advanced courses and this self-doubt influenced how she interacted with her peers and teachers. She assumed the other students in her class had more information than her, or the correct information. If she asked questions, she worried they might figure out that she was placed in the wrong class.

We identified the same theme of feeling as though we did not belong in the academic setting throughout the generations. My mother's feelings of not belonging were caused by direct racism through deficit thinking and stereotypes. My sister and I felt as if we did not belong based on the interactions we had with educators and how we believed they perceived us as Latinas. My niece's feeling of not belonging in advanced courses she was enrolled in was self-imposed.

Teacher Influence

There is power in the words and actions of educators. The assumptions and biases a teacher carries with them influence the way the teacher interacts with their students, affecting their students' experiences (Monzó & Rueda, 2003). Our *pláticas* uncovered the power and influence teachers had on us. From our experience, authority figures in education influenced the questioning of our worth, how we perceived our intelligence, and what we were interested in. This influence can be used to promote growth or reinforce deficit thinking.

Janie's Testimonio. While listening to my mother's story, the pain she was communicating was almost tangible. I could feel her pain as though she was still a Spanish speaker in an English classroom at that moment. Although I had not experienced these feelings of isolation and hopelessness in the explicit way my mother had, I could immediately connect with her feelings of not belonging in a space we are required to be in. A flood of emotions came over me that included anger toward the teacher and the education system, respect for my mother who mustered every ounce of courage in her 6-year-old heart to show up and try every day despite the continuous oppressive behaviors displayed by her teacher, and a need for resolve. I asked my mother what she would say to this teacher if she was given a chance. She almost looked stunned at the thought of using her voice for resolution. She said she did not know and that she would have to think about it. I encouraged her to write a letter to this teacher in the hope that she would find some release and regain and reclaim some of her power that was diminished. She agreed and Figure 11 is what she produced. When she offered it to me, she apologized for handwriting it and apologized for her handwriting. She was embarrassed at the thought of this letter not being fancy or eloquent enough. Even now, with all she has accomplished in life, she doubted what she created. I told her that her words were perfect because through this sharing of her pain, she was gaining strength.

Figure 11. My Mother's Letter to Her Teacher.

At my mom's high school graduation, she knew some of her classmates were inviting their first teacher, and she could not understand why they liked that cruel person so much. She said that when she saw her again, after all those years, her thought was,

"Why was I so scared of that tiny woman?" She wanted to tell her teacher about the lasting effects of insecurity and anxiety the interactions between them had conjured but my mother could not gather up the nerve to approach her.

Lori's Second-Grade Teacher's Influence. Lori's second-grade teacher influenced her confidence in reading. Lori recalled how this teacher had a short temper and seemed to specifically have a problem with how my sister decoded words as she was reading. My sister was taught to read in a more traditional manner, with phonics. She practiced sounding out a word she came across that she did not know by memory. Lori recalled the experience more readily:

> She hated when I would sound out words and during reading circle would ridicule me and scold me for sounding out. She would tell me to just stop and skip me when she was frustrated. She'd interrupt my reading and tell me to read faster, I didn't think of it at the time, but it was likely because I was Hispanic.

Lori remembered how this teacher recommended Lori be retained. However, Lori's grades did not support that decision. Because of this experience with this teacher, Lori was scared to read out loud to anyone. She would not read out loud even in the comfort of her own home despite encouragement and praise from her mom, and instead she would read to herself. She would not offer to read out loud in class and would refuse to participate in oral reading in her classroom. This experience caused her to develop insecurities and withdraw from participating in activities that involved reading. This insecurity persisted for the entirety of that school year, causing her to feel like an outsider. Lori shared when her feelings about reading out loud were not so painful. In fifth grade, her teacher had a reward point system. When students would read a paragraph without any mistakes, they would receive points from their teacher. With their points they could "buy" a toy from the teacher's collection. Lori recalled she was aware of what they

were going to be reading the next day, although she did not remember if this was information her teacher gave her. She would practice at home reading the paragraph out loud, by herself, and felt more confident as she read the expected text in front of her class. She explained that not a lot of out loud reading took place in middle school as the format of her schooling experience was based on independent work and progress. In high school, Lori acted as a teacher's assistant in a kindergarten classroom. She would read to the students, using expressive voices, and they genially appreciated and valued their time with her. For the first time she did not feel intimidated, rather she felt successful, as she read out loud. She explained this was a healing experience; however, even to this day she is nervous when an opportunity to read aloud presents itself. Recently, when asked to read at my grandmother's funeral, she respectfully declined. I read for our family instead.

A Story From Myself. Mini puddles were forming in my palms as I sat in the narrow hallway waiting to meet with my professor. It was my first semester in the PhD program at Texas State University. As a full-time student, my first semester included courses focused on education: Philosophy in a Social Context, Beginning Qualitative Design, and Team Development in Education. I felt as though I was drowning in ideologies and vocabulary words that were hard to pronounce and even harder to understand. My professor scheduled a meeting to discuss my selected qualitative research topic and the current studies surrounding the topic. At this point I had no practice expressing my ideas related to research and no experience with forming a study of this caliber, not to mention I was completely nervous and intimidated. I fumbled over my words when discussing my research focus and my purpose. The confident, White professor asked me why I was pursuing my PhD. My nervousness was replaced with

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panic. Why? I had no idea why. I had no idea what I was even doing sitting in this office.

I had no idea how I even got in the program. I had zero expectations and was just

surviving moment by moment. My stronger self now would say, "why not?" or "because

I can" or "because I have ideas and thoughts that are valuable and need to be shared."

Instead, I was silent.

In this meeting, I was told my academic language was poor, an experience

expounded upon in Brantmeier's (2006) study that demonstrated the way language is

used to reinforce the out-group status. I was told to question whether this program was

something I needed to pursue. Believe me, these were things I asked myself constantly.

There was never a moment when I did not question my abilities—that started in

elementary school. I felt this professor reinforced the idea that I had previously settled

into, that I did not belong in academia. Instantly I forgot I was the first in my family to

graduate from college, and that I did so with honors. I forgot that I pursued my master's

in literacy to improve my reading instruction as an educator. I forgot that not only was I

accepted into the PhD program at Texas State, but that I was also awarded the Merrick

Doctoral Merit Fellowship, "intended for use in recruiting doctoral students of the highest

quality" (Texas State University, n.d., para. 1). My professor took me right back to the

feelings I had as a third-grade student crying at the whiteboard, humiliated because I

could not meet the teacher's expectation. My achievements were whitewashed over with

doubt and deficit thinking. My hour drive home was met with a continuum of emotions. I

ended with determination. I recognized the professor did not know me. She may have

known statistics about Brown women like me, but she did not know my story. I would

show her, and I did. At the end of the semester, she asked to use my study as exemplary

work for her next group of students. I made myself belong. I defined my position in academia.

Provi's Positive Teacher Influence. The demographics at the middle school Provi attended were predominantly Hispanic. She found this especially interesting as she considered who took the same classes as she did. The majority of her classes were advanced, and she took note that hardly any Hispanics were in class with her. She found herself wondering, "Where did they all go, there were so many [Hispanics] walking the halls, but none of them were in my classes?" In her advanced classes she always questioned her abilities. She would not ask questions or draw attention to herself for fear of failure. She did not feel as though the teachers held low expectations of her, she felt she continually questioned her place in the class, possibly due to her noticing the low enrollment of other Latinas.

She explained further, "It was more like I thought I was doing worse than it was and the teachers were like, 'Actually, you're doing good.'" The teachers influenced her sense of belonging by reaffirming her achievements. Provi also divulged how her love for art and psychology was being diminished by her experiences with her teachers. These teachers focused more on the number grade and less about the passion for the content, which made Provi felt less interested in these topics. Provi considered majoring in psychology in college due to her strong interest in the subject, but her interactions with her teacher who was harping on grade point averages and providing instruction that was less centered around meaningful conversation on the content was causing her to question this idea.

How we Changed our Narratives of Teacher Influence. My mother's teacher was cold, unwelcoming, unfriendly, and harsh. Their interactions made my mother feel small, worthless, out of place, ashamed of her ethnicity, and scared to take risks or draw attention to herself. These feelings remained with her throughout her education. As my mother compared her experience with her teacher and how she interacted with her students when she was a teacher, she opened our conversation and deepened our understanding of what it means to be an educator and to consider what is being taught beyond academics. My mother began her career in education as an instructional aide when she was in her 20s. After teaching Pre-K in a private school for over 10 years, she opened her own Pre-K school in South Austin. As she displayed authentic caring and created relationships with her students, she went beyond teaching academics and taught her students to value themselves and what gifts and assets they brought into the classroom (Anzaldúa, 2015; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2020; Valenzuela, 1999). She stated, "I would find the student who did not have the best clothes, or maybe wasn't the smartest, and would build them up. I found things to celebrate, and then other students would celebrate them as well." She found the underdog in her classroom, revealing she felt like the underdog in her class, and did everything she could to have her students leave her classroom feeling accomplished and confident. The opposite of how she felt throughout her school experience.

My sister, who was also an educator for over 10 years, felt unseen and tolerated rather than accepted by the teachers and administrators at her campus. Lori explained, "There was no one I felt that could help me or wanted to." Year after year she felt isolated and that she constantly needed to prove herself. She brought to our discussion the

idea that education begins with knowing yourself and having people in your life to help you unpack who you are and see value in what you bring. She believed learning from home and learning from school are intertwined in developing your identity and these cannot be easily separated: "Your identity and how you perceive yourself starts at home, your teachers have the power to reinforce the positives or highlight and reinforce the negatives." As a teacher, my sister focused on the emotional and personal development of her students, unlike her teachers who mostly avoided her and made her question her value and worth.

When asked why I wanted to be a teacher, I would say to make children feel good about themselves even when the work gets hard. My first teaching job was as a third-grade math teacher. How perfect. I was getting an opportunity to change the outcome of my story. If I could pinpoint an exact moment in time that catapulted my insecurities and self-doubt, it would be standing in front of my third-grade class crying, with my teacher looking at me annoyed and my peers looking at me in frustration because I did not know the answer to a math word problem. My teacher's perception of me as an unintelligent Brown girl placed me on the path of low self-worth, insecurities, questioning my abilities, and questioning if I belong. I only felt this way in an academic setting. I was confident with my peers but second-guessed everything I worked on due to my experience with this teacher. As a third-grade math teacher, I could make sure my students never felt dumb or embarrassed. Now as an assistant principal I collaborate with the teachers on my campus to develop an environment in which students are comfortable failing forward in space that recognizes learning involves making mistakes and problem solving is better done with people who are different and think in different ways.

Provi described how she never was directly embarrassed by a teacher and never made to feel small or invaluable, rather she projected that on herself. For reasons unknown to her, she did not feel confident asking questions or speaking what was on her mind until recently in her journey through education. When she would finish a poem or a paper, she was certain it would not meet expectations or astonish anyone. Provi experienced her teachers consistently providing evidence to Provi that she was gifted as a writer. She could then borrow their confidence in her to develop confidence within herself. She began taking risks, such as submitting her poem to be published in the district's collection of exemplary works created by students. Her poem was selected. She began to allow herself to believe what her teachers believed about her, that she was gifted and had a lot to offer in an academic setting.

Our Similar Experiences of Teacher Influences Through the Generations.
Through our *pláticas* we identified our teachers' influence over what we felt we were capable of, over our confidence levels, and over our interests. In the 1950s, my mother's teacher influenced the perception my mother had of herself. Through direct racist interactions, my mother's teacher made her feel small and worthless. In the 1990s, Lori's teacher influenced her confidence in reading. My sister became scared of being ridiculed for how she practiced her reading. My professor made me reconsider my academic journey when she questioned why I was in the PhD program and criticized my "academic language." More recently, one of Provi's teachers positively influenced her perception of herself when she was internalizing self-doubt, while other teachers' focus on matters outside of content influenced her passion over art and psychology.

Within this theme of teacher influence we can see the shift from the direct

oppression my mother experienced from her teacher and how this teacher influenced my

mother's perception of herself and consequently how my mother's ethnic identity

developed, to indirect deficit perspectives placed on my sister and I, which influenced our

identity development as insecure and always doubting whether we deserved what we had

accomplished.

Figure 12 is a sequence of pictures of my mom, my sister, myself, and my niece

around the same age ranges to display the differences in generations.

Figure 12. Family at Various Ages.

Reflecting on the Findings

As we listened to each other's classroom stories across three generations, we were

able to identify explicit and implicit external oppressors of the Americanized schooling

system and our transformation into becoming our own oppressors (Freire, 2015;

Valenzuela, 1999). Our learning began with hearing stories from my mother, whose

teacher openly expressed discrimination, followed by my sister and I feeling indirect

discrimination from our authority figures, and culminating with my niece, unaware of

discrimination from her teachers but quickly able to identify her self-imposed feelings of

not belonging or inadequacy in the classroom. In this study, we found that over time there

was a change in how our schooling experiences influenced how we perceived ourselves,

as well as our intelligence and place in the classroom. In my mother's experience, the

influence was coming directly from the authorities in the schools and morphed into the

influence being the extreme expectations we placed on ourselves. We recognized that

over time we persisted and refused to accept the idea that we had nothing to offer;

however, we also recognized we were carrying intergenerational anxiety, brokenness, and

trauma and found ourselves holding on to the general sense of not belonging inside and

outside of the classroom.

Figure 13 is a collection of pictures from the women in my family that depict the

similarities in our experiences throughout the generations.
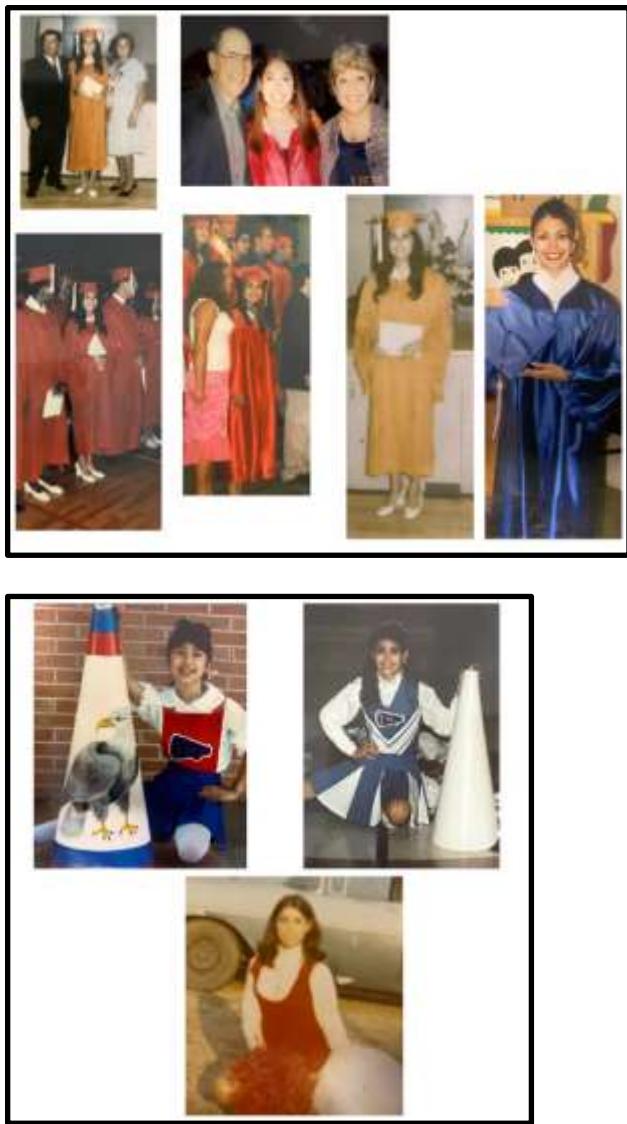
Figure 13. Similarities in Family.

Additional pictures provide a visual of just how much the four of us Latinas within our family resemble each other and engaged in similar extracurricular activities while in school.

V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> Mestizas don't fit with the norm. Depending on the degree of cultural hybridization, we are caught between cultures and can simultaneously be insiders, outsiders, and other-siders . . . You may be a blond, light-skinned Latina; a red-haired Jew; a blue-eyed Asian; a gringa who grew up in Mexico and speaks perfect Spanish; a Chicana dyke who's lost her tongue and ethnicity but doesn't feel she belongs in the white lesbian community. Some may be vulnerable to social inequities, while others can "pass" as members of Euro-American cultures. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 71)

Members of the Latinx community encounter societal experiences, both positive and negative, that shape and contribute to their identity development, affecting parts of their "self-esteem, depression, ethnic pride, and academic achievement" (Ferreira, 2014, p. 14). We are feeling the hegemonic pressures from the media, family, authority figures, educators, and peers as we navigate where we fall on the continuum of "too ethnic" or "not ethnic enough." As women in the Latinx community, we find ourselves surrounded by varying beliefs, expectations, and perspectives on what it means to be Latina. These pressures are affecting how we perceive ourselves, both personally and ethnically. Through this study, the women in my family found that our educational experiences also influenced our perceptions of our personal and academic selves and influenced our progression toward or digression from our Latina ethnic identity.

The purpose of this micro-ethnography study was to examine the differences in the formal schooling experiences across three generations of family members and how these schooling experiences influenced our negotiation of our ethnic identity borders as we lived through societal and cultural expectations. The focus was on the lived schooling experiences of my mother, my sister, myself, and my niece. In our *pláticas*, we told both heartbreaking and heartwarming stories as we considered our interactions with teachers and peers. This learning experience began with a brief historical introduction to the

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relation between Mexico and the United States, included a review of literature pertaining to Latinas' experience in the education system, and moved into a consideration of the personal impact of our schooling experience on myself and my female family members.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this research study within the context of the theoretical framework, which included CFE, Borderlands theory, and the five stages of racial/cultural identity development to answer the primary research questions:

1. How do Latinas' K-12 schooling experiences inform their ethnic identity development?

2. How did interactions with educators, and the education system, influence the ethnic identity of Latinas within one family over three generations?

Additional and secondary research questions that guided the study were as follows:

a. How did these interactions compare given the distinctive times in history in which the Latinas attended school and the Latinas' expectations for the role educators and the education system should take in shaping their ethnic identities?

b. How did the Latinas negotiate borders in their K–12 schools?

Findings from this study add to the body of research centering the voices of Latinas regarding their experiences in formal schooling and to the discussion of how these experiences affect their identity, which can shape how they feel about themselves and how they react and respond to discrimination over time. This study offered an opportunity for the participants to embrace our vulnerability as we shared moments in our educational journeys that jolted us toward how we defined ourselves. We could then

examine similarities and differences in our stories while making connections to our self-identification. We employed Atkinson et al.'s (1993) racial identity model to assist us in self-reflecting on our progress of self-discovery and redefining who we are as Latinas.

Discussion of Findings

Through discussions and examinations of our experiences in formal schooling, the participants and I uncovered three themes: fear of failure, feelings of not belonging, and teacher influence. A discussion of the findings as they connect to the literature and research questions is presented below.

Fear of Failure

We are in my living room, reading the comments pulled from our *pláticas*, shocked and heartbroken at the cycle that has persisted over three or more generations. Despite all our successes—my mother owning her own preschool, my sister with her beautiful musical capabilities, myself with my own educational accomplishments as a school leader and doctoral student, and my niece with academic achievements—we struggle with our double consciousness and internalized racial oppression as we doubt ourselves and our abilities (Du Bois, 1903; Pyke, 2010). We have been conditioned, through oppressive messages, to question our abilities, to belittle and degrade ourselves, and to continuously disregard how far we have come, and the strength pocketed in our souls from our grandmothers and their mothers. We traced our self-doubt and self-depreciation back to our elementary school interactions with educators. My mother was terrified to take risks or speak up in her classroom because she knew it would be met with harsh critique from her teacher. My sister and I felt our teachers viewed our ethnicity as a negative factor that contributed to our inability to achieve anything so we silenced

ourselves and avoided interactions with teachers that would highlight our inabilities. My niece, despite her teachers' validation, quietly cried in class and never contributed to classroom discussions for fear of saying the wrong thing. We also all found we met this fear of failure with determination to improve ourselves. We studied or practiced harder. This fear was our motivation.

Our findings relate to Patthey-Chavez's (1993) study of Latinx high school students who felt their teachers "consistently underestimated their competence, and that this was a reflection of their racist ideas about Latino intelligence" (p. 47). In response, the students kept to themselves. Although they had the desire to do well in school, they did not feel they had welcome access to information or support to identify their potential. My sister felt failure was expected from her because she was a minority, and I did not recognize that my counselor also was projecting low expectations on me, reinforcing the idea that I would fail. When we get to Provi and her experience, she did not feel her teacher thought differently of her based on her ethnicity, rather she connected her fear of failure to her social anxiety, but it could also be an outcome on internal racism as she has internalized the stereotypes, values, and images perpetuated by the dominant society toward Latinas (Pyke, 2010).

Feelings of not Belonging

My mother's teacher acted intentionally to show my mother she did not belong in her classroom, as she used exclusionary and subtractive practices and punishment for any glimmerings of her ethnicity (Martínez-Roldán, 2021; Valenzuela, 1999). This was specifically done with the intentional and harmful devaluing of my mother's native language, Spanish. My mother was physically punished for speaking Spanish because it

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was seen as a "lowly" language by her teacher. My sister and I felt tolerated and overlooked. The deficit perceptions of Latinas, stemming from the Americanization of schools, influenced how our teachers interacted with us, making us feel unwelcome. My niece, who doubted her academic abilities, felt she did not belong in an intelligent space. My mother knew she did not belong in a White setting, and my sister, niece, and myself found ourselves not completely belonging in a White or Brown space. All these feelings we felt, each distinct as Latinas, align with Anzaldúa's (2015) understanding of the in-between, inside, and outside spaces that Latinas can and do inhabit within schools and society. We had no relatedness as Latina students, feeling insecure with teachers and not fully accepted, valued, or included (Lapayese, 2013).

This is similar to research that showed Latinas in education feel as though they do not belong in the academic setting due to their perceived low intelligence, peer teasing, labels and stereotypes, their language or accent, their social or economic standing, or their physical appearance in being too light or too dark (Carter, 2005; Chang, 2017; Fergus, 2017; Huber, 2010; Lapayese, 2013; Monzó & Rueda, 2003). In the formal education system, young Latinas often feel invisible or that they do not belong and some Latinas, like me, do not identify with their Latinidad until they are provided a Latina education or become educadas (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006), and connection begins (Cooper, 2012; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Parker, 2014).

My mother had never felt a time when she did not belong with other Latinas; however, my sister, myself, and my niece have experienced a disconnect. This sense of disconnect is reminiscent of Fiol-Matta's (1996) experience of getting further away from her family the more American she became.

Teacher Influence

During our time together we identified the power educators had over our confidence, self-esteem, and self-image. As projected by Du Bois (1903), we measured ourselves against how educators viewed and interacted with us. The environment they established, whether it was warm and welcoming or cold and rigid, directed our sense of belonging. Their pedagogy, and whether they valued different gifts and knowledges (Delgado Bernal, 1998), determined our willingness to take risks. Teachers could potentially build our confidence or reinforce the deficit beliefs placed on us by our environment.

We identified similarities with studies that showed Latinas are subjected to the perceptions others create of them due to their personal experiences and judgements of them (Chang, 2017; Cooper, 2012; Daisy & José-Kampfer, 2002; Huber, 2010; Lapayese, 2013; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Rolón-Dow, 2004). The experiences my mother had with direct racism and oppression caused her to feel worthless and insignificant. The lack of empathy and the harsh judgement from my sister's teacher influenced her fear and anxiety surrounding her reading abilities. My professor's lack of cultural awareness or responsiveness prompted her to question my pursuit of my PhD and criticize my academic language. This experience triggered my double consciousness as I reacted by questioning my abilities and degrading myself (Du Bois, 1903). My niece, Provi, was experiencing internalized oppression as she was harboring her knowledge of the stereotypes and deficit beliefs attached to Latinas, which influenced her self-doubt. Fortunately, she had educators who worked against this oppression and encouraged and promoted her skill set.

Discussion of the Impact to our Ethnic Identity

> Identity is relational. Who and what we are depends on those surrounding us, a mix of our interactions with our alrededores/environments, with new and old narratives. Identity is multilayered, stretching in all directions, from past to present, vertically and horizontally, chronologically, and spatially. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 69)

As we experience homogeneous systems and mainstream education in the United States as Latinas, the borders of our identity and ethnic identity stretch or shrink. Through interactions with our teachers and schools, we found ourselves negotiating the boundaries of who we were, or completely forfeiting parts of ourselves in order to survive or be successful in our academic space. Rivera-Santiago (1996) postulated that people develop their ethnic identity through experiencing a crisis or exploring their role in their determined settings. To survive in her classroom, my mother had to quickly conform to the dominant culture. Corporal punishment was inflicted upon her if she spoke Spanish. The teacher would say she was more than likely saying curse words, so she needed to be punished. English was the only acceptable language, so my mother learned to speak, read, and write in English. Although she valued her family's culture and ethnicity, she had to turn off that part of herself to make it through each day in class. She had always identified as a Latina and was proud to be a Latina but recognized she had to make some changes to fit into mainstream education. The interactions with her teachers influenced conformity during school hours, but she held on to her family's language and values when she was at home. This second self-conflict, involving the turning off and on of her ethnicity, made her feel her culture had no place in education (Du Bois, 1903). This defined what success meant to her, and that definition did not include the cultural assets and gifts she possessed. Those had to be left at the door as she entered her classes. My mother did not want my sister and I to experience the same discrimination.

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Consequently, my sister and I learned English as our first language to ensure we would not have an accent. My mother enrolled us in Christian schools to hopefully defer some hostility from teachers. She had the belief that Christians would be more accepting of us. With more exposure to White culture and the underlying deficit thinking projected from my sister's teachers, the natural progression of removing Latina culture and replacing it with the dominant culture took place. My parents and sister took notice that the private school I attended for junior high had a high number of Latinos. The Latinas who attended my school wore baggie khakis, braids in their hair, dark lipliner, large amounts of hairspray, and big hoop earrings. My parents identified them as "ghetto" and did not want me associating with them or being influenced by them any further. Because my parents had more money available to them because of owning a daycare, they enrolled me in a prestigious Baptist school where I was one of two Latinas on the entire campus. After a short amount of time, I started to dress differently, wore my hair differently, and started to speak differently. At the time, I did not see this change as a means of erasing my culture, as I was just a teenage girl trying to fit into her surroundings. The interactions I had with teachers are what influenced my low perception of my abilities. These interactions were associated with their beliefs about who Latinas are and what they are good for.

My niece did not feel she experienced these same deficit perceptions from her teachers. She explained this may have been due to her looking more Asian and having an English first and last name. Teachers never assumed she was associated with the Latina culture so there were never any negative connotations attached to her in a classroom setting. She felt she never identified as a Latina because it was never something

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addressed in her home. Although her grandmother, my mother, spoke Spanish words and phrases to her when she was young, she viewed this as her grandmother's language. She did not see her mother practicing Spanish or including any Latinx customs, so she felt removed from the culture. It belonged to her grandmother, not to herself. She did not feel as though she connected with the other Latinas she encountered in schools as she did not look or sound like them. She observed that they were treated differently by their teachers, they were not in advanced classes, and they did not look like her, so she avoided the association and was grateful to not be recognized as someone classified as a Latina. Ferreira (2014) found that over time, the "dominant values and ideas of Americanization shift the perceptions of the self," in effect causing "changes to the level of cultural affiliation" (p. 14). We found this to be true in our study as well.

We identified that over three generations the connection to or association with being a Latina diminished. We believe this began with my mom's direct experience with discrimination from her teachers and led my sister and I to actively work toward blending into the mainstream. It seemed our teachers already expected that we would be nuisances, so we did everything we could to not draw attention to ourselves and to blend in as much as possible. This ended with the current generation not associating with our Latina roots at all.

Fiol-Matta (1996) noted "education more often than not, erases the student and attempts to replace them with the proper consumer, the proper worker, the proper cog in the wheel" (p. 71). As the women in my family shared our stories, we found that many of our encounters in education ranged from directly intending to modify us into something "better," something that better pleases the gatekeepers of knowledge, to discreetly

influencing our self-induced ethnic modification with their behaviors toward us due to

their predisposition toward Latinas. The stereotypes our teachers held of us were

perpetuated by the media, society, and previous experiences with Latinas, whether they

were aware of this exchange or not. We slowly deemphasized the cultural assets and

characteristics we were born with to fit the mold of mainstream education. The more we

assimilated to hegemonic norms and customs, the more we blended in or passed as

White, the greater chance we felt we had to avoid explicit discrimination.

We used Atkinson et al.'s (1993) five stages of racial/cultural identity

development to identify where we believed we fell at the beginning of our study (see

Figure 14). At the end of our research, we took some time to see if there were any

changes in how we identified (see Figure 15).

1	2	3	4	5
Lori, Sally	**Provi**	**Janie**		
I hold preference for the values of the dominant culture and society.	I am reexamining the attitudes and beliefs held by the dominant culture and society.	I reject the dominant culture. I am angry that I am part of a group that has experienced oppression and discrimination. I feel pride in my cultural and racial group.	I have a deeper understanding of my racial and ethnic group. I am loyal to the group, but I also want independence and autonomy.	I have a sense of balance and security when it comes to my ethnic identity. I accept aspects of my culture and those of the dominant culture that are both appealing and beneficial. I have an appreciation for cultural differences. I am working towards eliminating oppression.

Figure 14. Stages of Racial/Cultural Identity Development During School/Before Study.

Before the study, Janie identified as a 3. While she was at school, she rejected the

dominant culture. She was angry at White people for hurting her for speaking Spanish.

She could not understand how her teacher could hate her so much when she tried so hard

to please her. This is interesting because although she internally rejected the dominant

culture, she found herself modifying herself to the dominant expectations to survive in

her environment. Lori and I both identified as a 1. We readily accepted the dominant

culture. We only spoke English and did everything we could to blend into the

environment around us. We recognized the difference between being a Latina versus

being White and we actively selected White culture. Provi is currently in school and feels

she has more questions about her ethnic identity and her experience in school, so she

identified as a 2. She explained that she is always noting how darker Latinas are being

treated differently or how they are not present in her advanced courses and wondered

why. She also questions why the definition of Latina usually includes negative

stereotypes. She is pushing back on what it means to be a Latina as she embraces her

cultural side.

1	2	3	4	5
	Lori		**Provi (4.5)**	**Janie, Sally**
I hold preference for the values of the dominant culture and society.	I am reexamining the attitudes and beliefs held by the dominant culture and society.	I reject the dominant culture. I am angry that I am part of a group that has experienced oppression and discrimination. I feel pride in my cultural and racial group.	I have a deeper understanding of my racial and ethnic group. I am loyal to the group, but I also want independence and autonomy.	I have a sense of balance and security when it comes to my ethnic identity. I accept aspects of my culture and those of the dominant culture that are both appealing and beneficial. I have an appreciation for cultural differences. I am working towards eliminating oppression.

Figure 15. Stages of Racial/Cultural Identity Development After the Study.

After the study, Janie and I selected the number 5. We are comfortable with our ethnic

identities as we navigate through the dominant culture. We can appreciate our Latina

identification and we can use Latina ways of knowing, as well as dominant ways of

knowing, in various settings. My mother stated she can fit in with the Latinx community and within the White community. She acknowledged she may not fit in with every aspect of the White culture but does feel accepted. Lori identified as a 2. This study brought up more questions about her schooling experience. As she reflected on her interactions with teachers and peers, she did not consider the racial influence of those interactions. She feels she now has on a different lens when considering her experiences and wants to reevaluate them to determine the racial significance. Provi identified as a 4.5. She found herself in between having an appreciation and deeper understanding of her ethnic familial history and feeling balanced with how she perceives herself within the Latina community. She found the stories of her family members to be enlightening and empowering, yet she does not fully associate herself as a Latina due to the standing definitions placed on Latinas by society.

Study's Significance

There are essential and notable bodies of research that offer a voice to the marginalized Latina community. These studies uncovered the discrimination we have suffered throughout our history. Latinas from generations before us have shared their stories and worked toward healing the wounds inflicted by the dominant negative narrative of Latinas in education. Their stories offered critical background knowledge on what it was like to be a Latina in U.S. schools. Traditional and common forms of discrimination were identified within the literature, such as low expectations, hyper-sexualization, negative stereotypes, deficit thinking, and an outsider mentality based on language or social status (Cantu, 2012; Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzmán, 2012; Chang, 2017; Cooper, 2012; Daisy & José-Kampfer, 2002; Díaz de Sabates, 2007;

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Dyrness, 2007; Ek et al., 2010; Fiol-Matta, 1996; Huber, 2010; Lapayese, 2013; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Martinez et al., 2015; Rolón-Dow, 2004).

Latinas of previous generations might easily see their experiences in the existing literature as they can relate to the stories of direct racism, whereas Latinas of new generations might not be able to make personal connections to these forms of discrimination. Nevertheless, Latinas of new generations, who do not have Spanish accents and who have been "White passing" for their entire lives, are experiencing a lack of belongingness. They have a hard time relating to the explicit discrimination their family may have felt, thus recognizing they do not completely belong within that culture-sharing group. They also recognize they do not belong completely within the White community. This new hybrid Latina continues to feel marginalized as she cannot relate to studies discussing direct acts of intolerance and racism in the classroom.

This study reinforces the need to deepen our understanding of how Latinas of past generations and Latinas of new generations have experienced various forms of discrimination in the formal schooling system. We must remind ourselves there are many different types of Latinas with varying attachment levels to their ethnic identity. Latinas from all parts of the continuum need to be able to see themselves within the literature. However, we decide to express our Latina identity needs to be seen as valid. Lapayese (2013) stated Latinas are "constituted by a complex mosaic of cultural fragments" (p. 495) constantly choosing which parts of our identity to show and which ones to hide. This study revealed that over time, the cultural fragments we have chosen to hide become further and further removed from our identity, creating a Latina who does not have a connection to her ethnic roots. Despite this lack of connection, the impact of a long

history of discrimination continues to manipulate our perceptions of ourselves. My niece, who has not felt direct discrimination from her teachers, is haunted by our family's history of pain as she also experiences a fear of failure and a lack of belonging. It is my hope that this study will encourage Latinas, like my niece, to feel encouraged by their family history, to feel empowered to redefine their Latina identity, to see themselves as a subject in progress, and to embrace the process of becoming (Lapayese, 2013).

Recommendations for Practice

Educators are expected to impart their wisdom and guide students in building their knowledge but are often not thoroughly trained to identify the barriers to their students' learning (Valenzuela, 1999). One potential barrier is a cultural mismatch between home and school (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Educators should be better trained in maintaining their students' cultural integrity while helping them be successful within mainstream schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This culturally responsive method of teaching would increase educators' awareness of the influence they have over the personal, academic, and ethnic identity development of their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As educators, we should continuously reflect on our interactions to identify ways in which we may have altered how students perceive themselves academically and ethnically. Are we using our influence to highlight and encourage the use of cultural gifts in the classroom or are we mindlessly reinforcing the dominant ways of knowing as primary? Are we being intentional with our words and body language to ensure our students feel welcome and confident or are we reinforcing deficit beliefs in the minds of our students? Educational leaders, such as administrators and area superintendents,

should engage in reflecting on their cultural responsiveness and set the vision and mission to align with protecting the cultural assets of our students.

Students should be supported in identifying social inequities and offered a safe environment to critically think about the inequalities they are working against (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Border pedagogy (Romo & Chavez, 2006) teaches the skills necessary to address social inequities and decolonize learning, such as critical thinking, tolerance, effective debate, and socio-cultural negotiation. When educators have border pedagogy knowledge they begin to "understand their own and students' racial and cultural identity frameworks and cognitive background" (Romo & Chavez, 2006, p. 151) and adapt the curriculum to meet their students' cultural backgrounds. Training on border pedagogy should be provided within schooling systems.

Those of us in education must also remember that Latinas are rarely exposed to teachers who share their cultural or linguistic backgrounds. When such teachers are missing, Latinas experience increased absence rates and tend to be less involved in school activities (Lapayese, 2013). Consideration of how we can expose our Latina students to other powerful Latinas in the educational setting is crucial in promoting a sense of belonging in academia, which may in turn raise graduation rates and the enrollment numbers of Latinas in higher education.

Along the same lines, Latinas who are currently in education must acknowledge their role in the ethnic identity development of their Latina students. Lapayese (2013) referred to this as "Morena pedagogy" (p. 493), recognizing that learning is social, and students learn and grow through their relationships and interactions with educators and

peers. Morenas are working with students to strengthen their academic identity as they support their ethnic identity through intentional interactions.

Finally, there must be an educational aim of identifying and understanding the cultural fragments of our students (Lapayese, 2013). Educators should consider what pieces of themselves students are having to hide to be successful in the classroom and consider what learning experiences are being missed because of this constraint. There is strength in providing an avenue for Latinas to share their cultural assets and funds of knowledge, though educators need more support and training on how to authentically tap into that strength (Anzaldúa, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2002; N. González et al., 2005). It is important to acknowledge students in classrooms today are still experiencing this oppression as they navigate the borders of their cultural identity.

Recommendations for Future Research

Results of this study of how interactions with educators, and the education system, influence the identities of Latinas can be used to develop future research centered around Latinas. Future research should consider internalized racism (Pyke, 2010), the impact a history of discrimination can have on the personal and ethnic identity of Latinas in the current generation, and the psychological outcomes of this impact. Future studies should also provide a space for this new hybrid of Latinas to feel seen and validated as they offer a voice to those who do not feel as if they belong within the Latina community or within the White community. Studies of this nature will continue to deepen our understanding of ethnic identity development and inform our pedagogy.

Rivera-Santiago (1996) reinforced the importance of studies on ethnic identity, explaining that the "experiences of oppression and prejudice can affect an individual's

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sense of self sometimes leading to alienation and isolation and can lead to maladaptive behaviors" (p. 21). Further research needs to be done on these maladaptive behaviors and how they are passed on through generations.

Further examination of how Latinas feel their cultural competencies were not of value and excluded in the academic setting, as presented in Cooper's (2012) study, would add beneficial knowledge to the research on Latinas' experience in formal education. A deeper understanding of what cultural competencies are developed through the lived experience of Latinas would allow educators to begin the conversation around the advantages of this knowledge base. Monzó and Rueda (2003) discussed the hidden knowledge, or cultural competencies, of students being "uncovered by dialogue and reflection" (p. 75). It would be interesting to see what this discussion surrounding cultural competencies would look like in a formal educational setting and what preparation teachers would need to facilitate the discussion.

Additionally, it is my hope that this study will encourage the continuation of research on the affirmation of otherness within ourselves as we negotiate our ethnic borders (Anzaldúa, 2015). We are embedded in a society that is shaping our understanding of ourselves. We need to continue uncovering the ways in which our education system is inundating students of color with practices formulated for the dominant society. This does not mean otherness within ourselves is always a negative, as the new identities of our current generation Latinas should be celebrated. However, we should be aware of our double consciousness, as the narratives and perspectives of others are influencing our own perspectives of ourselves (Du Bois, 1903).

Researcher's Reflection

My intention when developing this research was to uncover a deeper understanding of the continuum of metizaje. Anzaldúa (2015) reclaimed the term metizaje to describe a Latina of mixed heritages and cultures who finds herself within the "cracks . . . [of the] fixed cement of disciplines and cultural beliefs, eventually overturning the cement slabs" (p. 73). We have felt stuck within the boundaries of society's definition of a Latina for too long. The influence of teachers has been the cement binding us to a shape of Latina that we do not fit into. My mother was "too Latina," fitting in with her culture but not with her school's hegemonic culture. My sister and I were teetering on the fence of being and looking Latina, but able to pass as White enough to blend in. We did not belong, and we felt it. We did not have belonging, or relatedness, or what I termed as *belongingness*. Belongingness is the feeling of being a welcome part of the space you are in and feeling secure with the people in that space. We did not have belongingness with the White community or with the Latina community. My niece, Provi, felt belongingness with her White teachers and peers, but not with the other Latinas in her school. But there was still a lack of belongingness specifically in her academic settings due to her self-doubt. Border negotiations defining our ethnic identity have restricted, limiting our growth and variances of who we are as Latinas. Anzaldúa (2015) called us to reimagine our identity and posited that we "need fresh terms and open-ended tags that portray us in all our complexities and potentialities" (p. 66). This study opened the conversation to identify the definitions of Latina placed on us and allowed us a space to vocalize how history and education have influenced our decisions, behaviors, and self-identification. We gave a voice to our desire to not reclaim the Latina

that hegemonic forces have created, but to choose our defining characteristics, resulting

in the process of establishing us as a "metizaje, the new hybrid" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 71).

March Group Plática Protocol

1st step: *Researcher will discuss the research topic and timeline.*

2nd step: R*esearcher and participant will define what it is to be a Latina and rate themselves on how Latina they perceive themselves to be and provide their rationale in the discussion.*

- Questions:

    o *What does it mean to be Latina?*

    o *What do you envision when you think of a Latina?*

    o *Do you consider yourself a Latina?*

    o *Do you feel that being a Latina influences other's interactions with you?*

3rd step: *What memories do these Latinas have of their formal education?*

- Participants and researcher will recall specific interactions with their classroom teachers. They will be asked to give as much detail as possible, including quotes, setting, grade level, public or private, etc.

    o Questions:

    ▪ *How do you feel your Educators identified your ethnicity? Did they respond in ways that you felt were related to their perception of your ethnic identity?*

- ▪ *What was your experience with educators in the school setting?*

- ▪ *How did educators make you feel in the educational space?*

- ▪ *How do you think your identity development would be different had you attended a predominantly Latino/a institution?*

3rd step: *What messages are identified through the memories that were shared?*

- • The researcher will recall excerpts from the participant's memories

- • All will deconstruct the memory. Different viewpoints are shared and discussed to determine the message presented by the educator.

April Individual Plática Questions

Additional questions will derive from the conversation

1st step*: Focus on Latina's responses during the group plática and offer time for the participant to expand and provide more context.*

- • During the following individual plática, the participant and researcher will discuss the emotions they felt during their interactions with their educators and their past reaction. We will then discuss if they would feel or act differently now. If so, why?

June Group Plática Protocol

1st step: *Participants and researcher will continue the conversation of positive and negative experiences in school and how this influenced the perception of ourselves. Instructions for the testimonios will also be shared.*

September Individual Plática Protocol

1st step: *Researcher and participant will continue the discussion on the participant's testimonio. This will be an opportunity to communicate other ideas or feelings that arose after our group pláticas.*

2nd Step: *The participant will be encouraged to share the process of creating their testimonio and to offer more insight and background on their representation of their schooling experience.*

November Group Plática Protocol

1st step: *The final group plática will be to deepen conversation from the individual plática in September and allow a safe space to discuss their feelings on the research and the findings and to reflect on the process.*

2nd step: *As a group, we will confirm and validate the interpretations. I will use the themes and interpretation to create a visual of the data (in the form of direct quotes pulled from the participant's stories) and will share this information with the group for verification of meaning. This collaboration and information will determine the findings from the research.*

Data analysis

- Following the data analysis spiral, the data from interviews, plática, and reflections will be organized, notes and memos will be made on emerging ideas, and themes will be identified and interpreted and presented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data will allow me to create story, "showing different perspectives through the views of participants" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 205). Substantive validation of this information

will be formed through the understanding of the experiences of the

participants by interacting with the subject matter and reflection to co-

create the interpretation derived (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Credibility will

be established through accurate interpretations of the participant's

meaning and authenticity will be provided through different voices being

heard on the personal experiences of schooling (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Strategies such as member checking and gathering participant's feedback

on the interpretations of data and collaboration with the participants will

be used for establishing validation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Confianza/Trust

- Revisiting past experiences can uncover unaddressed hurt or painful memories.

  Within this tension there is a chance for healing (Garcia & Delgado Bernal,

  2020). I recognize memories surrounding education and emotion might be

  challenging for my mother, sister, niece, and myself to discuss, so creating a safe

  space is crucial. Each member of this research should feel comfortable in the

  vulnerable space that this discussion might bring. Through retelling our stories in

  formal schooling, we have an opportunity to identify similarities and draw

  strength from each other's stories, build up our voices, and recover our dignity

  (Dyrness, 2007). The trust and confidence, or confianza, we have in each other

  will allow us to overcome our embarrassment and feel safe to take the risk of

  telling our story (Dyrness, 2007).

INFORMED CONSENT

TEXAS ★ STATE ®

INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Latinas Negotiating Borders in Formal Education: A Deeper Spectrum Understanding of the Mestiza

Principal Investigator: Araceli Sosa

Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor: Dr. Melissa Martinez

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 Phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

 Phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

You are invited to participate in a research study to understand how your formal educational experiences influenced the development of your ethnic identity as a Latina. The information gathered will be used to gain a deeper understanding of how your individual experiences compare with those of other Latinas in our family from different generations; this includes my mother, sister, me and niece). You are being asked to participate because you are a member of my immediate family.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in or provide the following:

- Two Individual Pláticas - Each individual plática will last approximately one hour. One will take place in March and the other in June of 2022. During the pláticas, you will be asked about your experiences with educators. The plática will be audio-recorded, and I may take notes as well. These pláticas will be held in my home, with COVID safety procedures in place where we wear masks and social distance, or held via video conference call.

- Three Group Pláticas- All four participant family members will meet three times to discuss our experiences with educators and schooling. We will meet once in February, then in May and finally in July of 2022. The discussion topics will include positive or negative interactions with educators or peers. I will help guide the discussion. The group pláticas will last between 2-3 hours and I will audiotape the discussion to make sure that it is recorded accurately. These pláticas will be held in my home, with COVID safety procedures in place where we wear masks and social distance, or held via video conference call.

- One testimonio, that you will be asked to create in the month of April 2022. You will be asked to reflect on your school experience and create a poem, write a song, or record your story, through an audio recording, or through written text. You can select the outlet you are most comfortable with. You will be given an opportunity to explain your creation during our individual and group pláticas.

- Artifacts, such as report cards and other items that trigger a school memory, will be collected, and stored online to offer evidence and support of your experience.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There is little to no risk identified for participating in this study. In discussing your experiences, you may become uncomfortable with sharing such experiences. In the event of this occurring, you may elect not to answer any of the questions that cause discomfort. You will still be allowed to engage in the study. You will also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Should you feel discomfort after participating suggestions for counseling services will be provided.

BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES

There are some benefits for you if you decide to participate. You will be given opportunities to reflect on your interactions with educators, peers, and families in a safe and validating space. Your voice will be heard and can potentially be beneficial to others in our culture sharing group. There might also be opportunities for healing as we address harmful experiences within the education system.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Due to the nature of this study being about the educational experiences of the women in our family and the inclusion of participant photographs and other personal artifacts as sources of data to document our lived experiences as students, the anonymity of your identity cannot be guaranteed.

However, you have the option to have your face blurred/blacked out in photos included in the study and the option to utilize a pseudonym to protect your identity. Pseudonyms will also be used for other individuals and locations (such as schools attended) identified by you in the telling of your experiences.

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may

access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants. Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research, unless you have granted permission to do so. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Melissa Martinez: or mm224@txstate.edu.

This project was approved by the Texas State IRB on [date]. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert 512-245-8351 – (dgobert@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

_____   _____

Printed Name of Study Participant   **Signature** of Study Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

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