

Background Information

Latino, Hispanic, Spanish, Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicana...who am I? I grew up in Little Village Chicago, a predominant Mexican community, until I was twelve years old. Afterwards my parents moved to Cicero, a town in the outskirts of Chicago—literally a few blocks away. At that time, Cicero was rather diverse with a large influence of Polish, Italian, and Mexican and well known as a corrupt township. Regardless of my change in homes, I continued to attend Chicago Public Schools until the end of High School. Constantly being surrounded by people who looked like me, I never thought about the differences of these terms or what they even meant. I was what I was and did not need to prove it or question it. Taking the trip two hours south of Chicago, and enrolling as a student at the University of Illinois, the way I understood and saw my culture drastically changed.

Thinking back and really understanding my introduction to the university, I actually began observing signs of differences within the ‘Latino’ community as soon as my summer orientation program. The program, which I opted to attend, was a three-day program, which had an additional component for minority students to become familiarized with cultural houses, minority support services, and opportunities. This group of students became participants of a smaller, closer-knit program geared towards minority affairs. I remember that although a lot of the participants had similar features, not all of seemed to naturally and comfortably come together as a group.

Being accustomed to having friends involved with gangs, dance groups, ‘tagging’ cliques, and sports, with akin characteristics, it was rather mystifying meeting people who had a last name like mine, but seemed nothing like me. Coming from families that

do not share similar features, my mother's family has a darker-toned skin and my dad's family has blue-eyed blondes and red heads, the differences in physical features were not the distinction that drew my attention. Even if I was color-blind I could have felt there was a separation with the Latino students because of the way they interacted, if they did. The conversations, topics of discussions, glances, gave an uneasy feeling of discomfort; there were issues that some of us could relate to and others had no clue about. The reactions were even more interesting, and although some students that were 'clueless' asked more questions and seemed more interested in what others had to say, others reflected apathy and dissent in being there. Some withdrew completely from the activities and workshops, while others made comments about not wanting to be in the three-day program. Reactions on behalf of the students, such as myself, that wanted to be in the three-day program were varied. I recall hearing someone comment, "The only reason why that *güera* is here, is cause she checked off the little box on the application to get in as a minority," referring to a blond girl who not once talked to us during the entirety of the program. My own stereotypes of what a Latino person should look like were defied from that day forward.

Being home for the last summer before moving to the university all I could envision was the freedom that would unleash from inside me, and how much I would enjoy my life away from familial obligations. Within a few weeks of my freshmen year I was introduced to overt actions of racism, which was something that my previous environment had sheltered me from experiencing because most of us were minorities. My roommate and I had a Mexican flag posted on our dormitory door in celebration of Mexican Independence day. Imagine being in the third week of school, coming into your

dorm to find your flag ‘missing’ and an offensive comment written on our board. Never had I felt such a mixture of feelings and unsure of what to even to about it, my roommate and I emailed our residential advisor to inform her. Several days passed and we saw no reply, no mass mail to the floor, no discussion of why this was done and what could be done to avoid it- - nothing.

When we began to tell other students about the incident, we received different responses. The first person I told was a Junior in the ROTC program, who was quite active in the Latino community, and his response was “to get used to it” because it was just the beginning. Afterwards he mentioned a program called, which *UNFAS* was a housing group for Latino students, and directed me to one of the founders of the program. At that point, my confusion grew even larger, was I really just making a bid deal about it? To my surprise the founder of the program was an upperclassmen I had met during an event at *La Casa Cultural Latina*. What stood out to me from talking to her was that she had mentioned that the reason she, along with another student, founded *UNFAS* happened after she left the university for two years because she had trouble adjusting to the cultural environment of the university. After disclosing details of the incident, she reassured me this would be brought up to the attention of housing administrators because my residential advisor was racist.

I must admit, at that time I referred to the problems I was experiencing as a culture shock often triggered by the constant act of internally defining my ‘race.’ I often thought that the uncomfortable comments, questions, and glances when I participated in class or walked down the quad were my fault and that they would soon go away. Now, as a Senior, am here looking back and attempting to find answers to why many of my

friends dropped out, why they did not seek support or guidance, or if it was even given to them? I am here, so why aren't they? Trying to find a research project to work on, I decided to seek the answers to these questions. Students go their entire time at college not understanding that this is a journey, that some chose to do as a group and others opt to handle on their own. I thought about the benefits of working as a community to help one another complete the journey, as well as the disadvantages that groups or cliques had to deal with and whether this 'community' existed.

From the contradictory traits of the Latinos I observed during my summer orientation program, as well as the opposing perspectives when dealing with my dormitory situation my focus will be on Latino students. I want to understand the influences that drew students to exhibit and embrace their *Latinidad* in relation to others, which withdraw or reject their culture. I find it important to understand the influences in order to accept the differences and comprehend the implications the division of Latinos can cause through an empirical perspective.

Review of Literature

Latino Racial Structure

The category or group an individual is affiliated to willingly or not will be an indicator of the type of experiences they will have and can potentially determine the individual's outcome. Clara Rodriguez argues that 'race' classification can "[change] according to place or situation" (Rodriguez, 2000). The significance of this argument is that it presents the complexity individuals experience attempting to distinguish opportunities and disadvantages based on race. The larger implication is that individuals do not always have autonomy over the way or time in which they are classified.

The Latino population has drastically changed and increased over the last turn of the century, causing a tremendous uncertainty of the origin, meaning, and future of the 'Latino' in the United States. This increment has been analyzed utilizing the U.S. Census as a method of measurement, in which the Latino population is minimized to an over-generalized category (Suarez-Orozco & Paéz, 2002). Scholars consider the structure of the Census and its imposition when requiring individuals to identify based on the supplied categories and options. Suarez-Orozco and Paéz (2002) explore the "Latino population of the United States and its transnational links to the Caribbean and Latin American worlds" while being cautious of not defining Latino as a whole group, but rather a combination of heterogeneous subgroups (p. 3). The term *Latino* is to be representative of the "segment of the U.S. population that traces its descent to the Spanish-speaking, Caribbean, and Latin American worlds," a relatively "new and ambiguous invention" which "has no precise racial signification" but once exposed to the U.S., "[undergoing] a rapid regime of racialization" (p. 3).

Suarez-Orozco and Paéz (2002) discuss the central themes surrounding subgroups under the Latino category such as immigrant history, country of origin, racialization, poverty, negative stereotypes, and segregation. Recognizing the historical constructions of the subgroups while focusing on these themes is an important factor in understanding their role and influence in the United States (p. 5). Suarez-Orozco and Paéz (2002) argue that not until scholars of all ethnicities explore the Latino structure, can the group itself be able to discover their own ethnicity and how it has progressed, adapted, and transformed due to its exposure to the United States. The significance of distinguishing the ambiguous Latino identity is to theorize what traits have been historically present and

will continue to have an influence in the culture, in addition to the role Latinos will play in the United States.

It is important to point out that the term *Latino* is not widely accepted by all ethnic groups because it does not specify national origin nor “does it evoke any particular period” (p. 4). Moreover, the term does not consider the individual histories of the groups it encompasses. Scholars challenge the ‘immigrant myth’ by presenting the ‘oldest Americans’ as those who “did not come to the United States” but rather the “United States came to them” (p. 4). Suarez-Orozco and Paéz (2002) further explain Latino refers to the ‘newest Americans’ in the U.S. who are immigrants or children of immigrants, but the term has no meaning outside of the U.S.; “Latinos are made in the USA” (p. 4).

Latino Construction through Territory

Although the United States and Latin American countries share a historical relationship, it has been one characterized through imperialistic influences of a dominant power against subordinate ones (qtd. in Smith, 1996; Schoultz, 1998; Bulmer-Thomas & Dunkerley, 1999). Scholars argue the United States acquired Latin American land via “military confrontation, and a series of annexations, appropriations, and purchases” based on sentiments ‘driven’ through “pseudoscientific racism and cultural arrogance (laced with a good dose of Puritan zeal), along with a voracious appetite for Latin American land and other resources” (qtd. in Smith, 1998). Territorial expansions have been specially difficult for Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, who “without taking a step Mexicans residing north of the Rio Grande found themselves living in a different country” and “the island of Puerto Rico became U.S. possession in the aftermath of the Spanish American

War,” thus granting Puerto Ricans citizenship without the right to vote (qtd. in Silén, 1989).

Tenorio, Menchaca and Montejano (1999) explain that racialization becomes particularly imperative for Mexicans located in the land annexed by the U.S., because it was the legal process in which Mexicans were defined as non-white and discriminated. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, promised citizenship and the enjoyment of the land to Mexicans. Rather, non-white and indigenous Mexicans were completely excluded from this agreement thus becoming racialized over the privileged white Mexicans (p. 63). Regardless, Mexicans were not granted citizenship or rights over their land and continued to experience exclusionary practices through cultural, economic, labor, and territorial exploitation (Tenorio, Menchaca, & Montejano, 1999; Suarez-Orozco & Paéz, 2002).

Hispanic

It is important to point out that the term *Hispanic* is also commonly used to refer to Spanish-speaking people of Latin American descent. Although this term is commonly used, it is not one which many scholars and communities chose to identify with because it is term granted by the U.S. Census to categorize, label, and track Latin American ethnic groups “without racializing them as non-white” (Foley, 1998). To utilize and identify with this term is to acknowledge a connection of “one’s ethnic heritage without surrendering one’s ‘whiteness’” in addition to conforming to the government term.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is a term that is used to define “Caribbean Latinos” in terms of “economic, political, and cultural strategies articulated by diasporic peoples across national spaces” (qtd. in Basch, Schiller, & Blanc 1995; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998).

Suarez-Orozco and Paéz (2002) further explain transnationalism as term referring to Caribbean individuals that follow a split or dual life, “engaging in double consciousness cultivating dual loyalties, living serially between their islands and the mainland” (p. 6). Some transnationalists follow the path as workers in the U.S., and return to their country of origin to contribute economically and politically, while other types of transnationalists stay within the U.S. and contribute from afar (p. 6). Suarez-Orozco and Paéz explain that transnationalism has been a trend, which Mexicans have shifted away from over time because they “remit less money, have become less involved in Mexican politics, and visit there less often” (qtd. in Cornelius, 1998).

Language

Scholars believe the Spanish language to be an enduring theme within the Latino cultures that can present benefits and limitations. The Spanish language is representative of the Latino culture, providing a sense of familial tradition passed on from generation to generation. When compared to other ethnic groups, Latino families are “more likely to retain their native language than other groups” (qtd. in Kao, 1999). Language is an extremely important component of the Latino culture because it “is intrinsically involved in the process of education, including literacy development, and identity formation,” not only in relation to other languages but most importantly within the own language (qtd in Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1998). Additionally, Suarez-Orozco & Paéz (2002) clarify that the style Spanish is spoken becomes an indicator of the identity of the individual, thus specifying ‘subgroups’ and ‘subethnic’ identities that can overlap into “social constructions and conditions that shape class, racial, gender, and sexual identities” (qtd. in Zentella, 2002).

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) argues that the Spanish language has been “violently attacked by the dominant culture” and created this notion of “linguistic terrorism,” in which individuals are discouraged from using their native language because of fear of repercussions at school, work, and public spaces. Likewise, Garcia Bedolla (2005) acknowledges that there is such a stigma attached to language that it becomes a tense and sensitive issue, thus influencing shame for knowing and not knowing the language. Furthermore, the U.S. culture has emphasized the need to learn the English language but most importantly to leave renounce any other language to become ‘American’ (Garcia-Bedolla). Anzaldúa (1987) underlines the implications of “linguistic terrorism” and how the loss of a language affects the development of ethnic self-concept through the negative internalization influenced by the dominant culture.

Latino Tensions

Although there is a general idea that there are commonalities within the Latino culture, Latinos are often compared to Cubans, the “model minority,” due to their prompt assimilation and adjustment in the U.S. in relation to other groups (Garcia, 2004). It is important to highlight that the Cuban experience with the U.S. has been distinctly different. The first flight of Cubans to migrate into the U.S. were political elites and wealthy individuals, with the aid and protection of the U.S. Government they were able to successfully form an enclave and adjust (Garcia). This becomes a source of tension because it places pressure on incoming Cubans, as well as unreceptive feeling on behalf of successful Cubans that fear their ‘status’ can be damaged. Furthermore, by comparing groups to Cubans it places unequal standards and expectations and generalizes individual group history.

The historical process of racialization, along with the distinct experiences of ethnic groups, has influenced a development of tensions amongst ethnicities in the Latino culture. These cultural groups have struggled to maintain, reinforce, and validate their culture, while some have taken traits of the mainstream culture for numerous reasons. It is important to note that there have been proactive attempts from within the cultural groups to assimilate into the mainstream society and eliminate their ancestral history altogether. As Clara Rodriguez (2000) outlines, there are groups who seek a *homogenized* identity in efforts of “suppressing diversity within the group” in order to fortify the freedom of dominant white culture and to pressure and expect minorities to conform collectively and uniformly for political strength.

Identity Politics

John Garcia’s (1996) argues that self-identification is necessary in the development of a political movement. Garcia identifies these factors as solidarity through identification, grievances originating from discrimination, rising expectations, minimizing authority and effectiveness of political system, and effective political organization (p. 86). Correspondingly, Marquez (2003) argues that in order for the development of a social movement individuals must first and foremost come together as a group and negotiate their identity (p. 218). Identity becomes problematic because of the difficulty of commonality and “criteria for group membership” (Marquez). Marquez points out that groups can adjust in three reactionary methods when pressured to conform to an identity. The first method is that of *integration identity*, in which the cultural identity assimilates into the dominant culture. The second method is that of *racial identity* in which the ethnic group attempts to maintain the purity of the group through isolation and condemning

interracial marriages. The last method is that of *revolutionary identity* in which there is a focus on radically changing social structures. With identity politics in mind, it is important to present Anzaldua's (1987) *mestiza consciousness*, in which an individual's identity is found in a 'level of in-betweeness' and accepting the multiple parts of oneself without the need of conforming or rejecting one. It is important to include this 'third space' idea in order to reinforce and encourage the necessity of observing and accepting self-concept through various angles. Furthermore, it is imperative to understand that individuals who have multiple identities can take advantage of their identities for strengthening their culture. This is possible through the understanding of the theory of standpoint, this theory refers to the idea that a person in the marginal position is more likely to observe and understand concepts such as inequality and privilege in relation to someone in an advantaged position.

Given these dichotomous relationships, complex histories and theories, regarding cultural identification, the purpose of my research is to understand why there exists a conflict amongst Latino students at the University of Illinois. Taking into consideration the historical construction of these identities and examining their formation will help to understand the tensions that persist to this day. Once there is a distinction made amongst prominent Latino groups, understanding the background of the student will be important. Overall, the goal is to identify whether the students' self-identification is altered through their background, upbringing, place of origin, cultural exposure, education, family, friendships, and language and how this influences the students' experience at the University of Illinois.

Research Questions

In defining the challenges of self-identification of Latino students there are three questions that must be addressed. First, what makes a student Latino? Second, what is the Latino student experience? Lastly, how is self-identification achieved? Although I observed several areas of the Latino experience, focus will be placed on three dominant themes: definition of ethnicity, language, and discriminatory experiences.

Methodology

Given the traditional constructions of different ethnic groups by dominant cultures, I wanted to get a grasp of how students utilized their current involvements to reinforce, validate, and challenge their identity within or in opposition to the Latino community; allowing me to do an wholistic interpretation of their self-identification. It is imperative I clarify that there are general conceptions I have constructed and learned to define the Latino student, as well as selecting to use the label Latino over any other terminology. In order to gain an understanding of the Latino experience, I interviewed eight undergraduate Latino students, which I believed to fit the Latino category based on my own judgments of their attempts to reinforce or contradict the traditional constructions of a Latino. Although I set out to observe both sides of the spectrum, it is important to point out that my own constructions and experiences influenced my selection of interviewees.

Before I approached my interviewees I came up with a set of questions focusing on background, family, immigrant history, language, education, friendships, university experience, involvement and lastly ethnic identification (see appendix A). Once these questions were finalized, I decided to seek out individuals who fit my Latino definition.

Besides the interview questions, there was no consistent location or structure for the interviews.

Subjects

My first interview occurred randomly while at the library, I ran into Pablo who I had briefly met during a summer program. I asked him if he was interested in helping me with my research and he gladly cooperated. We located ourselves by some couches in the noisy level of the library to have a comfortable atmosphere. Pablo, a Junior in Computer Science, is a first-generation Mexican student who grew up in a suburb south of Chicago. His family migrated to the US in the early 1980's and have lived and that suburb his entire life, with a minimal community involvement. Nonetheless, Pablo has continuously been focused on his academics, and has been a strong factor in his university experience.

The second interview occurred during a study session at *La Casa Cultural Latina*, during one of our conversations Jose kept bringing up issues that I was interested in looking into for my research, so I asked him if he could step into the other room and answer some questions. Jose and I first met during our three-day orientation program, and continued to be acquaintances, so I knew he felt comfortable remained honest when answering questions. His body language also gave me the message that he was not holding back any information; he had his legs up on the table and kept direct eye contact. Pablo, a fifth-year Latino Studies major, grew up in a predominantly Mexican working-class community in the city of Chicago and had a unique educational experience going from a Chicago Public School to a Catholic Boarding School as a first-generation male figure. Although that interview was very informative and beneficial, I wanted to look for

someone who I had never met in order to remove any discomfort when answering questions and to have an objective perspective.

I approached two students which I presumed to be of Latino background because they had friends who were Mexican and I had heard them talking in Spanish several times, as well as having heard them making references to their familial background. Even though I had been previously introduced to both Omar and Esteban before, there was no connection or awareness of my Latino affiliations on campus. Omar and I met at La Casa late one night, he walked into the room where I was located and seemed a bit nervous and weary of what the purpose of our meeting was. I reassured him his any information would be for research purposes and that his name would not be disclosed. Omar, being an out-of-state sophomore in Accounting of mixed background, and a middle-class educated family had a quite different perspective to the terms, questions, and references I made during my interview. It was difficult to maintain objective when asking for clarification of his answers because there were some issues that I disagreed with.

Esteban is a freshmen student in General Curriculum, from a working-class Mexican community in city of Chicago. Esteban and I walked to the library after *Latino Studies* class one afternoon to conduct the interview. He seemed quite apprehensive and reluctant to freely express his opinion and provide me with a thorough answer, and this could be interpreted because he often looked around the room, spoke softly, and gave short answers. As the interview developed, his reservations diminished when I began to comment on some of the issues he was bringing up. Through one of the questions, he realized we had previously met and the ambient seemed a little more relaxed he then

provided more insight for his answers and allowed me to get a glimpse of his personal life and opinions.

Granted Omar and Esteban had allowed me to interview them, I confidently approached two freshmen women of interracial parents and asked them if they were willing to help me with my research. At first, they both agreed and once it came to actually setting a time to meet it seemed they were trying to avoid me. Later, I received a text from one of them telling me she was not interested in participating. The other young lady kept asking questions about my research, and I continued to provide a general outline without giving too much information that could sway her opinion. Even though the gentlemen were more willing to cooperate, I felt that my gender might have been an influence in their willingness. I believe the women were concerned if there were any hidden motives in me approaching them. At the same time, I also believe that it might have been a matter of avoiding being questioned about their identity. I had heard them speak of their experience in class, having to deal with a rejection from both sides of their families and the constant questioning of their identity and behaviors throughout high school. Nonetheless, these are assumptions based on my own perceptions of the difficulty of talking about ethnic and gender dynamics.

I attempted once again to approach young ladies that I had not met and continued to experience a lack of cooperation. I re-evaluated the purpose of my research and questioned whether it would be more beneficial if I interviewed individuals who I already knew. I decided to approach young ladies who I knew trusted me, would not hold back any information, and would answer my questions in a genuine manner. The first young lady I interviewed was Naomi, a sophomore in Nursing from a working-class Mexican

community in Chicago and had attended a Catholic school. I invited her over to my apartment and my assumption proved to be favorable, I was able to get thorough answers for my questions and did not doubt the sincerity of the individual. The following young lady I invited was Beatriz, a junior in Human and Family Development Studies from the North side of Chicago. I had worked with Beatriz in an organization for some time and had met for lunch when I decided to ask her if she was able to cooperate with my research. Although we knew each other quite well, it was somewhat difficult to get a comfortable mood because we were in a public place that was open to distractions and constant interruptions.

The following interviewee was Paola, a middle-class, foreign-born sophomore in Sociology who attended a Catholic high school. I had met Paola through one of my friends and began socially interacting earlier in the semester. When the opportunity arose during a conversation about her experience at the university, I asked her if she was able to participate in my research. She readily agreed and I invited her to my apartment to provide a more personal atmosphere and welcomed her with snacks when she arrived. She seemed somewhat nervous and distant, and I was unsure why. It was not after I decided to relate to her and tell her a little about my own experiences that she became more comfortable in sharing the challenges she experienced growing up as the minority in her classes. The last interviewee was Elizabeth a fifth year senior from a working-class family who had a distinct background. Her early childhood she grew up in a South Chicago African-American and Latino community, then moved to Mexico and moved back to Chicago, throughout these changes she struggled to gather the cultural traits that would allow her to negotiate her identity depending on the surrounding atmosphere.

Analysis & Discussion

There are three central themes surrounding the ethnic affiliation the interviewees reflected as necessary when attempting to identify with a culture. To place emphasis on the numerous ideologies of ethnicity and culture I will first provide an overview of how the individuals defined ethnicity in general and how they identified themselves. Then I will introduce the importance of language as a signifier of ethnicity. Lastly, I will incorporate individuals' discriminatory experiences to highlight the importance of understanding ethnicity and its implications on the Latino student.

Definition of Ethnicity

Pablo and Paola identify as Mexican because that is the nationality of their parents and support the identification by stating that the culture is a part of them because they have been brought up with traditions, food, and holidays. Interesting to note Pablo believes that to identify with the culture you also need to know it but when questioned about his own knowledge, he recognize that they do not know much. Rather, Pablo has acquired his knowledge through a Spanish class. On the other hand, Paola believes that ethnicity to be a learned trait that comes from your family and does not change with your location. Similarly, Omar believed ethnicity to be derivative of one's parents place or origin and see himself as Puerto Rican and Cuban because his grand-parents and parents migrated from those places. In addition, Omar believes to be Latino one must be "from Spanish descent, colonized, or speak common language," yet later on he reveals that he does not speak Spanish thus contradicting his definition.

Jose on the other hand, believes ethnicity to be more than just a label, after he identifies himself he explains how he came up with that 'self-identification.' He describes the division of cultures, believing to be one yet not being accepted by the Mexican or

American cultures. Although he describes this as a self-identification, in reality it is not. Due to the perception and unwelcoming of the other groups he is pushed to find a category that best fits him and his welcomed into. The category he identifies as is Latino, and notes that it's the most comfortable one. (Pablo would not have agreed with the identification, because he feels offended people label themselves as Latinos; he feels Latino term should be used when referring to things and groups at a large scale but not individuals). Jose also defines a Latino according to origin, specifically Latin America, Portugal, and any Spanish country, in addition to their behavior.

Esteban & Elizabeth are two individuals who ethnically identify as Mexican-American because they say to be a part of an ethnic group, one must have a pride for that culture. They believe ethnicity to be a trait one is born with, which cannot change over time or according to surroundings. Esteban notes, "I am proud to be Mexican and born in America" to validate his identification with both cultures. When questioned about how much he knew about his ethnicity, he comments, "I know a good amount, what we went through to get freedom and independence and what the U.S. did to them and looked down on them," yet I found it difficult to sense that he felt a part of both cultures. When questioned later about problems facing Latinos he said, "They see us, relate us to gangs bangers and stuff, they see us all alike," and when asked who was '*they*' he hesitated and then answered "I dunno other groups, races-- mainly white." The interchange of pronouns, such as 'we' and 'they,' serve as signifiers of whether the individual identifies as part of the group.

Interestingly enough, Beatriz and Naomi's definition of ethnicity had to do more with the individual's surroundings, including others' perceptions of them and the

categories they were able to use to identify. Beatriz believes ethnicity to be dependant on an individual's environment "Being born in a country does not always mean person will identify with culture." Beatriz goes on to explain that one may be born in a county, but others' stereotype of that ethnic group can be contradicted by the individual's behavior, "If you don't do certain things like dress a certain way or follow soccer people don't see you as Mexican." When asked what ethnicity she was Beatriz answers, "Usually they have circles and I have to put Hispanic or Other Hispanic, sometimes I write in Latina or Honduran, I think I write a different thing every time." Naomi's uncertainty with her ethnicity is revealed when she comments, "I do not know if I should consider myself Latina or Hispanic, is that an ethnicity? Is it my background and what others may view me as? I do not know my past history just where parents are from or what they've taught me." Then when questioned what Latino constitutes she answers, "Knowing your background, culture, where you come from, your history, struggles, what is going on in your country, knowing your rights, they way people speak, accent, even their skin, body shape, food, dress, and last name," thus contradicting her own identification. Beatriz and Naomi's definition of identity include external influences and appear to be factors in determining their own ethnic identities.

Language

Language was a constant theme, which was utilized often as a tool to preserve the individuals' ethnicity because it was associated with many areas in their lives. Pablo, Jose, Noemi, Esteban and Paola relate that Spanish was the language spoken with their parents and that they continued to use it even after they learned English. It is important to highlight that once they began speaking English, it was difficult to keep their Spanish fluency because as English became a language in which they learned, they began

introducing it in their homes. Some had older siblings who were fluent in English, and Spanish became the form of communication with parents and relatives.

Language is a strong identifier for individuals and when ridiculed by their relatives for the low fluency of their Spanish, their accent, or inability to communicate, it was internalized as a personal criticism. Spanish was the first language to Jose, Noemi, Esteban, and Paola, and to be mocked by their individuals in their own family and ethnic group posed a challenge on their identity. Pablo, for example commented on the difficulty of having to communicate in Spanish when in Mexico; people made fun of him and quickly assumed he was 'Anglo' because of his accent. It was interesting that to deal with the situation, he chose to instead speak English and limited his contact with Spanish speakers. This becomes extremely important in a Spanish-speaking ethnic group because if there are others who deal with the situation in a likely manner, this may suggest that native Spanish speakers are discontinuing to speak the language to prevent criticism and being challenged. Anzaldúa's idea of "linguistic terrorism" and 'shame' becomes especially important because "individuals are discouraged from using their native language because of fear of repercussions at school, work, and public spaces" which can be detrimental to the individual's cultural identity.

On the other hand, Spanish was used as a defensive mechanism when non-Spanish speakers were around to criticize others or simply express their true sentiments about an issue or person. For those who did not communicate in Spanish at home as Omar, Beatriz, and Elizabeth, it became a tool relatives would use against them. Omar comments that the only time his parents spoke Spanish was to exclude him from the conversation. Often they were referred to as 'white-washed' and stuck-up because they

did not speak Spanish. Even if the individuals identify as a part of the culture, not speaking the language prominent in the culture stands as a barrier in being accepted by others in that culture.

Discrimination

When asked about being treated differently based ethnicity, Paola commented “I had not thought about it before, I didn’t see it, or was used to it, I didn’t realize I had the right to say something not only because it was right but because I had to, I realized not to let stuff go because that’s why things don’t change.” Nostalgic about her life in Mexico yet her nervous to expose how different her life had been in the U.S. after she moved at the age of four, Paola’s transition from high school to college served as a time to recapture her ethnicity outside of the home. Even though she continued to follow the cultural traditions and spoke Spanish at home, her culture was not something she immediately identified while attending Catholic schools where she was the minority. Looking over my notes, I realized the difference in her answers when I asked that anytime I asked her something about maintaining her ethnicity outside of the home. Her comments reflected a sense of sheltering her culture outside of the home to avoid being seen and treated differently. Once she arrived to the university, by surrounding herself around people of similar backgrounds and cultures, she began noticing the injustices people similar to her experience.

It is not accurate to assume that by solely surrounding an individual with people similar to them, they will be more likely to more likely to observe structural differences and patterns of discrimination amongst or within ethnicities. Jose, Noemi, Omar, Beatriz and Elizabeth have remained active in the Latino community through organizations. After

being at the university for five years Jose comments on being treated differently, “because of my race, it’s not negative, just the feeling I get on campus, not really wanted here...it’s not too comfortable.” Noemi comments, “People assume I don’t speak Spanish when at public places, don’t get the same opportunities and treatment.” When questioned if treated differently Omar comments, “Don’t really thinks so, other than sometimes joking about my differences- - being from Cuba, immigrant rights given.” Beatriz notes, “In Chicago never really felt different, here I may exaggerate because I am the only brown person, don’t know if its just thinking too much...I try not to put much into it.” When asked if treated differently Pablo says “No, not aware, haven’t experienced it.” I have yet to find a connection amongst Esteban, Omar, Beatriz, and Pablo to understand what factors in their development have been related to their lack of exposure to inequalities based on ethnicity.

To understand whether an individual has experienced discrimination is a significant factor in relating to the individuals’ perception of ethnicity. It is my own assumption that unless an individual has ever been challenged, felt oppressed, or treated differently based solely on their ethnicity or culture, they have not completely analyzed their position in relation to others. When discrimination does occur, there is no apparent negative or positive effect on the individual. Their environment, education, and self-concept will serve as factors that will influence their reaction to discrimination.

Conclusion

Latino students face the daily struggle to find an identity, which not only fits their background and experience, but also feel the most comfortable. The individual alone cannot achieve self-identification, there are external factors shaping the individuals’

belief of what his/her identity is and should be like. Depending on what interests or goals the student has, they are placed under a 'limbo' in which they must prove their identity in order to better fit and be welcomed. Due to the varieties of backgrounds and demographics of Latino students, it is not an easy task to clearly fit the criteria for a Latino.

Students are creating stigmas and pressures on their fellow peers in order to meet constructions of Latinidad---that are not distinguishable. Although 'race' provides a group with a sense of identification, recognition, and pride, it can also be an institutional disadvantage. Some students may be more cognizant of these systematic structures and that may influence them to attempt to assimilate or acculturate themselves so they fit with the 'traditional students.' Others, less aware may not realize that to shift away from one's culture causes animosity and weakens the group in regards to representation.

Given the *Standpoint Theory*, as long as disadvantaged people continue to be at bottom, the changes that need to be made from those with privilege are unlikely to occur because they are not in the position to observe the inequalities, let alone advocate for improvements. This is significant for the Latino culture because when individuals of ethnic minorities are in positions of power, the individuals' cultural experience, upbringing, self-concept, and connection with the culture (experience) will serve as a motive for working for or against one's own culture.

Furthermore, Garcia argues that self-identification is necessary in the development of a political movement. Garcia identifies these factors as solidarity through identification, grievances originating from discrimination, rising expectations, minimizing authority and effectiveness of political system, and effective political

organization (p. 86). It is important to also note that the term Latino can cause conflict within the Latino students because they do not feel they have individuality and uniqueness of own cultural group. At the same time that self-identification emits a motivation for solidarity, a sense of nationalism can hinder the movement. Focusing on problems with a culture-specific mindset can cause forces to pull in different directions when the ultimate goal may be similar. In addition, the division of groups can limit their overall outreach and power. In regards to the Latino students, unless they share a similar understanding and experience about the discriminatory practices, they will be less likely to come together with Latino students. It is here where a student's upbringing, education, and origin play an important role.

Thus, for Latino students to come together to challenge the status quo then the students must first and foremost, identify with the culture. One of the components he points to is the form of communication- - that being Spanish. Language is not only a way of communication but becomes a form of symbolism and a commodity. It helps to reinforce the cultural position and can be a defensive form of empowerment and protection of what it represents for the culture. The inability of Latino students to speak Spanish is seen as a detachment from the culture. There is an environment full of hostility between those who do not speak it and those who do. Students define ethnicity by placing criteria, when those are not met they perceive each other on different levels and this tension can really affect the identity development and the experience of a Latino student.

In cases like these, the role of the university is to provide a comfortable atmosphere in which students are encouraged to exhibit the individuality and value cultures. First, there needs to be a stronger emphasis towards investing more on the

services that are already provided for minority students. Cultural Houses, offices, academic departments, tutoring services, and research programs need to be expanded by providing more financial support. In turn, departments can invest more into staff and materials and have greater resources and autonomy to direct programs and focus on solving issues. Thus, providing the conditions for the departments to flourish and provide efficient and quality services for minority students. Financial support alone is not sufficient, university administration needs to validate and support these programs by promoting them for all student body not only minority groups.

Secondly, university needs to develop a bi-monthly program in which students are provided with the historical development and transition of ethnic groups. Once there is an understanding of the historical events such as the colonization of indigenous groups by European settlers, the takeover of their land, and the continuous attempts to assimilate their cultures, there may be a greater appreciation and respect towards the ethnic groups. In hopes that groups are validated as original inhabitants and citizens of the land, people can be encouraged to change their attitude towards groups such as Native Americans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, to name a few. Presenters can be taken from professors from the ethnic departments and the curriculum can be derived from courses already structured.

Thirdly, individual ethnic departments, such as Latino studies and La Casa Cultural Latina, need to provide a well-structured mentoring program. For the success of the program, there needs to be support from the upper-classmen, in addition to graduate students, staff, and faculty in those departments. It is important to connect students their experiences through under the guidance of those who had similar experiences. This can also serve as a method of encouraging undergraduate students to continue their graduate

education. Budget allocation, staffing, and involvement can be barriers but in the end the results benefit not only the self-concept of the student but also the distinction of the program. Initiatives for the support and recognition of ethnic groups needs not to be centered solely on monetary allocations for facilities but most importantly validate the culture by encouraging the campus to become involved in the community and engage through services and programs that promote cultural differences, understanding, and appreciation.

Appendix A

Questions for Interviews:

Background:

- When & where were you born?
- Did you grow up at this location?
- Where have you lived? What section?
- What was the most common group in the area?
- What year are you?
- What is your major?

Immigrant History

- How far back can you trace your ancestors?
- Do you know if your parents, grand-parents, great-grandparents, etc. were the ones to migrate to the US?
- Where did they come from?
- Did they come with families or did they begin family in the US?

Family

- What was a typical weekend like growing up?
- Were you or your family members involved in the community?
- What kind of things?
- What are your parents' occupations?
- What was the highest educational attainment of your parents?
- What role did your parents play in your education?
- How supportive were they about you going away to college?

Language

- What language do your parents speak at home?
- Do you speak Spanish?
- Did you grow up speaking Spanish?
- When did you learn it?
- Has it ever been an issue?

Education

- In general, how was your educational experience from K-12?
- What schools did you attend? Where located?
- Did the schools offer bi-lingual education?
- Where you a part of it?
- Compare you junior high to high school involvement?
- What kind of activities or organizations were you a part of?

Friendships

- Your friends growing up, what background were they?

University Experience:

- You said you were living __, how did you get here? Why UIUC?
- How was it when you arrived?
- Did you find people like you?

- Did you get along with your roommate? Why, why not?
- Where have you lived and with who?
- What is your major?
- Why did you go into that major?

Involvement

- Give me the initials of five of your closest friends.
- Tell me briefly how you met.
- What ethnicity are they?
- Do you feel more comfortable around some groups than others?
- Do you think ethnicity has an influence around preferences?

Organizations

- What organizations or activities are you a part of?
- Would you consider joining a culturally based organization? Why?
- Do you have friends in culturally based organizations?
- Have you ever attended an event hosted by a culturally based organization? What kind?

Cultural Houses

- What do you think of when I say 'La Casa'?
- Have you ever attended the Latino cultural house?
- Why or why not? For what?
- How did you feel being there?
- Would you consider working for a culturally-based office, department, or house?
- Why or why not?
- Do you have friends who work for cultural houses?

Latino Studies

- Have you taken a Latino studies class?
- Why or why not?
- What do you know about the Office of Minority Student Affairs?
- How do you know this information?
- Have you ever used any of their services?
- What is their purpose on campus?

Ethnic identification

- Have you ever been treated differently?
- Explain, what did you do?
- What ethnicity do you consider yourself? Why?
- How much do you know about your ethnicity?
- What is your opinion of the terminology: Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino?
- Do you think there are subgroups under ethnic groups?
- Why or why not?
- Is it a benefit or disadvantage to be a part of subgroup?
- What are some of the problems you see in the university?
- What are some of the problems facing the Latino community as a nation?
- What makes a Latino?

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